AUTISM NEW JERSEY

Employment Guide for Adults with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASDs)

January 2009

Autism New Jersey
(formerly COSAC)
1.800.4.AUTISM • www.autismnj.org
1450 Parkside Avenue
Suite 22
Ewing, NJ 08638

This guide was prepared by the
John J. Heldrich Center for Workforce Development
Edward J. Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy
Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey
in response to a request by Autism New Jersey
under Grant Award #08GROIC
Adult Resource Initiative (ARI).

Dear Friends:

Autism New Jersey is proud to present an Employment Guide for Adults with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASDs) as part of our ongoing efforts to stimulate job development for individuals on the autism spectrum in New Jersey. Our staff has enjoyed numerous collaborative discussions with the human services and business communities, as well as with people affected by ASDs. During these conversations, it became very clear that the New Jersey economy is dramatically changing. Therefore, we realized that the autism community could benefit from a resource guide reflecting the current and future workforce in our state. Topics included are right-to-work legislation, employment opportunities, and where to find assistance in securing a job.

It should be noted that this guide is not intended to teach an individual the prerequisite skills necessary for specific jobs, but rather is an overview of workforce issues relevant to anyone seeking a job or helping others to find employment. There are a number of tools available to assist a job developer in understanding ASDs (please see below for these resources), but there have been none that specifically pertain to the current New Jersey job market. It is our hope that individuals, family members, and job coaches will find this particular guide to be a valuable resource in helping individuals on the autism spectrum to begin the job search process and have continued employment success.

Sincerely,

Leslie Long
Director of Public Policy and Systems Advocacy

ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDED PUBLICATIONS

Alpine Learning Group. (2008). *Working in the Community: A Guide for Employers of Individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders: (Supported Employment and Supported Volunteerism Training Manual)*. Paramus, NJ: Author.

Smith, M.D., Belcher, R.G., and Juhrs, P.D. (1995). *A Guide to Successful Employment for Individuals with Autism.* Baltimore, MD: Brookes Publishing.

AUTISM AWARENESS EDUCATION

Autism awareness education is recommended for interested companies wishing to advance employers' knowledge of an expanding demographic. For a list of qualified speakers, contact Autism New Jersey.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Autism, Asperger's Disorder and Pervasive Developmental Disorder Not Otherwise Specified (PDDNOS) are related disorders. They are commonly referred to as autism spectrum disorders (ASDs) and are the focus of this publication. ASDs affect approximately 1 in 150 individuals nationwide and 1 in 94 New Jersey residents, in families of all racial, ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds. While research into the causes of these disorders advances our understanding of ASDs as genetically based disorders, as of this writing, no consistent biological markers have been identified.

ASDs are behaviorally defined and diagnosed. The three hallmark impairments in autism are social interaction, communication and behavior. Individuals with autism often have great difficulty interacting with others, even in everyday situations. Also, they typically have a limited ability to communicate verbally and, as a result, may use pictures or sign language to communicate. Most individuals with autism engage in repetitive behavior and routines. Many times, these seemingly odd behaviors are a means of communicating their needs and wants. Many individuals with autism require active supervision to ensure their health and safety and have significant difficulty living independently and maintaining employment.

Both Asperger's Disorder and PDDNOS are similar to and different from autism. The common element among the three disorders is impaired social skills. The differences between the disorders relate to communication and adaptive behavior. In Asperger's Disorder, social communication is affected, but typically there is no delay in the development of communication skills. PDDNOS involves a combination of characteristics that are similar to autism and Asperger's Disorder, but do not meet the full criteria. While Asperger's Disorder and PDDNOS are considered milder forms of autism, individuals with these disorders still require significant educational and vocational supports to be successful. Finally, the symptoms and abilities of individuals with ASDs can be quite variable and are part of what makes each individual unique.

Despite their disabilities, and because of their abilities, adults with ASDs have more opportunities in today's labor market than ever before. Awareness and education about autism are at an all-time high, the willingness of employers to diversify their workforce to include people with disabilities is broadening and the nature of work and workforce trends creates an environment in which people with ASDs can be productive and contributing members of a high-performing labor force.

PURPOSE OF THE GUIDE

This guide is intended to introduce adults with ASDs to the world of work, a "Workforce 101" for adults who want to work, but do not know how to begin a job search. This guide provides a roadmap to some important information about entering the world of work. This guide will provide an **overview of some important legal protections people with disabilities are entitled to** and a basic course of action if their rights have been violated. Next, this guide provides **current New Jersey labor market information** about industries and employer skill demands. This guide will help individuals with ASDs think about their strengths and abilities and where to direct them in their job search. Finally, this guide will give readers **a basic introduction to the numerous public agencies that help individuals with ASDs** and the services they provide.

Nearly all people seeking employment will find information in this guide to be a helpful first step on their path to employment. This guide is specifically designed for adults with ASDs who are on their journey from dependence on social programs and the education system to self-sufficiency and independence through gainful employment.

CHAPTER 2: UNDERSTANDING YOUR RIGHT TO WORK

During the next 10 years, people with disabilities, including ASDs, will have more opportunities to work than ever before. Why is that?

First, the American workforce is aging. As working "Baby Boomers" near retirement, many new job openings will be created. There will not be enough young workers to fill all of the important positions that these retirees will vacate. While some older employees will continue to work, some may need new accommodations on the job as they develop their own disabilities. It is possible that the workplace will become a friendlier place for people with disabilities.

A second trend is that corporations are realizing that a diverse workforce enhances their competitiveness and strengthens corporate policy. Specifically, more employers now see that developing workers with disabilities helps them understand and more efficiently serve their customers. Creating job opportunities for people with disabilities attracts the buying power of customers within that group and demonstrates that a firm supports all members of its community.

Individuals seeking employment should understand that their skills are valued in today's job market when they begin their job search. It also is important that they know their legal rights and how to take action if they feel their rights have been violated.

WHAT IS THE AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT (ADA) OF 1990, TITLE I?

A civil rights law that prohibits private employers, state and local governments, employment agencies and labor unions from discriminating against qualified individuals with disabilities in job application procedures, hiring, firing, advancement, compensation, job training and other terms, conditions and privileges of employment.[1]

WHO IS PROTECTED UNDER THE ADA?

Any individual with a disability who: 1) has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more life activities, 2) has a record of such impairment, or 3) is regarded as having such an impairment. In addition, the person must be qualified to perform the job he or she is seeking.[2]

DURING WHICH ACTIVITIES IS IT ILLEGAL FOR AN EMPLOYER TO DISCRIMINATE?

The ADA prohibits employers from discriminating on the basis of disability in their job application procedures, hiring, firing, advancement, compensation, training, recruitment, tenure, layoff, leave, fringe benefits and all other employment-related activities.[3]

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[1] Facts about the Americans with Disabilities Act. The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. Retrieved from http://www.eeoc.gov/facts/fs-ada.html on January 16, 2008.

[2] A Comparison of ADA, IDEA, and Section 504. Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund. Retrieved from http://www.dredf.org/advocacy/comparison on March 11, 2008.

[3] ADA Questions and Answers. Job Accommodation Network. Retrieved from http://www. jan.wvu.edu/links/ADAq&a.html on January 16, 2008.

WHO IS A QUALIFIED INDIVIDUAL WITH A DISABILITY?

Qualified individuals are those who are able to perform all of the essential functions of a job and meet the educational and experience requirements set forth by the employer. An employer does not have to give special preference to a qualified individual with a disability. Each business can select the most qualified employee available.

If a qualified individual can perform most of the essential job functions, with minor exceptions due to limitations, as a result of his or her disability, an employer must consider providing a "reasonable accommodation"—a modification or adjustment to a job or work environment that will enable the applicant to do the job. Such accommodations might include modifying work schedules, modifying equipment or making facilities used by employees readily accessible to individuals with a disability.[4]

WHAT IS SECTION 504 OF THE REHABILITATION ACT OF 1973?

Like the ADA, Section 504 is a civil rights law that prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability. It applies to programs and activities, both public and private, that receive federal financial assistance.

WHAT CAN INDIVIDUALS DO IF THEY THINK THEIR RIGHTS HAVE BEEN VIOLATED?

They can file a complaint of a violation of the ADA with the New Jersey Department of Law and Public Safety, Division on Civil Rights. There are five regional offices throughout New Jersey:

Atlantic City Satellite Office
26 Pennsylvania Avenue
Atlantic City, New Jersey 08401
Phone: 609.441.3100
Fax: 609.441.3578

Camden Regional Office
One Port Center, 4th Floor, Suite 402
2 Riverside Drive
Camden, New Jersey 08103
Phone: 856.614.2550
Fax: 856.614.2568
TDD#: 609.757.2958

Newark Regional Office
31 Clinton Street
Newark, New Jersey 07102
Phone: 973.648.2700
Fax: 973.648.4405 / 973.648.7582
TDD#: 973.648.4678

Paterson Regional Office
100 Hamilton Plaza
Paterson, New Jersey 07507
Phone: 973.977.4500
Fax: 973.977.4511
TDD#: 973.977.1955

Trenton Regional Office
140 East Front Street
P.O. Box 090
Trenton, New Jersey 08625-0090
Phone: 609.292.4605
Fax: 609.984.3812
TDD#: 609.292.1785

They also can file a complaint with a U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) field office. There are 50 EEOC offices across the country. To find an EEOC field office in your local area, contact:

800.669.4000 (voice)
800.669.6820 (TTY)
www.eeoc.gov

[4] ADA Questions and Answers. Job Accommodation Network. Retrieved from http://www.jan.wvu.edu/links/ADAq&a.html on January 16, 2008.

WILL GOING TO WORK DISQUALIFY A PERSON FROM IMPORTANT MEDICAID HEALTH CARE BENEFITS?

The federal Ticket to Work and Work Incentives Improvement Act of 1999 allows individuals with disabilities to be competitively employed and earn an income, while still maintaining their health care benefits through Medicaid.[5] Ordinarily, individuals with disabilities must choose between owning assets and earning an income — or being eligible for Medicaid. Through the Medicaid Buy-In programs, individuals with disabilities who earn income can still collect Social Security Disability Income, according to individually set state requirements.[6]

In New Jersey, people with disabilities can work and still maintain their health benefits under the New Jersey WorkAbility program. To be eligible for the WorkAbility program, an individual must:

- be between 16 and 64 years of age;
- be self-employed, employed part-time or full-time and have proof of employment;
- be determined to have a disability as defined by the Social Security Administration;
- have an annual earned income of no more than $52,788 per individual;
- have an unearned income of no more than $867 per month per individual; and
- have less than $20,000 in liquid assets per individual.[7]

For more information on the New Jersey WorkAbility program, visit: www.state.nj.us/humanservices/dds/njworkability.html.

[5] Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Retrieved from http://www.cms.hhs.gov/TWWIIA/01_Overview.asp on January 22, 2008.

[6] Andrews, Kristin, Bob Weathers, and Su Liu. *How Do Medicaid Buy-In Participants Who Collect Social Security Disability Insurance Benefits Use SSA Work Incentive Programs?* Mathematica Policy Research Inc. Number 7, December 2007.

[7] New Jersey Department of Human Services. Retrieved from http://www.state.nj.us/humanservices/dds/njworkability.html on May 30, 2008.

CHAPTER 3: OPPORTUNITIES FOR WORK IN NEW JERSEY

WHERE TO FIND WORK IN NEW JERSEY'S LABOR MARKET

According to the New Jersey Department of Labor and Workforce Development, the top 10 high-growth industry sectors in New Jersey in 2008 are:

- Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources
- Arts, A/V Technology and Communications
- Business Management and Administration
- Finance
- Health Science
- Hospitality and Tourism
- Information Technology
- Advanced Manufacturing
- Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics
- Transportation, Distribution and Logistics

"High-growth" industries have significant job growth, are critical to the state's economic viability and development and/or often are being transformed by technology that requires their workers to acquire an entirely new skill set.

While some jobs in these sectors require high levels of education and training, there also are important positions available for job seekers looking for entry-level opportunities.[8]

A GLOBAL WORKFORCE REQUIRES FLEXIBILITY AND SKILLS

In today's highly competitive world market, the specific skill needs of New Jersey employers can rapidly change. Demand for workers in a specific job or industry can be high one year and dramatically lower the next. New Jersey employers, however, are continually looking for workers who have the right skills and abilities to do the jobs that they have available.

Therefore, individuals should learn about the range of jobs, in different industries, that have skill requirements that match their strengths. An excellent resource is the federal O*NET website at www.online.onetcenter.org, which provides in-depth descriptions for hundreds of jobs, including detailed skill requirements. In addition to O*NET, you can find detailed descriptions of emerging careers in New Jersey at www.njnextstop.org.

Clues to where new workers will next be needed can be found by following several important workplace trends:

1. New Jersey employers are looking for workers who can advance the company's capacity for knowledge and innovation as a way to maintain and improve their competitive advantage. In other words, employers need workers who not only have the **technical ability** to develop and deliver new products or services, but the **business sense** to understand the needs of the market and business processes.

2. Firms are "decentralizing" their business operations and management; they limit their own business to special areas of expertise and let outside companies handle all other activities that support production. In addition, they are doing away with traditional top-down management structures in exchange for different ways of managing employees.

[8] Massonova, Robert A., and Yustina Saleh, *High Growth, High Demand Occupations: Connecting Today's Students with Tomorrow's Jobs* (presentation).

3. Employers are expanding their reliance on technology in the workplace. Therefore, workers must keep pace with the newest technologies employers use to continually improve the quality of their products and services. Workers also are relying on technology for their own advancement, including job training.

4. New Jersey's workforce is increasingly diverse. The number of older workers, especially those over age 64, is expected to increase much faster than younger workers between 2004 and 2014. At the same time, growth in workers with minority backgrounds will vastly outpace the growth of workers with White, non-minority backgrounds in New Jersey.

5. Employers are increasingly focused on privacy, security and ethics concerns due to events such as the September 11th terrorist attacks, the Enron scandal and the loss of vast databases of customer information by some large firms. As a result, employers are changing their processes to respond to new government mandates and altering their priorities in response to new and perceived threats.

6. Business processes also change in response to shifts in regulations. Doing business in other countries, and other regulatory environments, means managers and employees must adjust their business processes accordingly.[9]

WHAT THIS ALL MEANS FOR WORKERS WITH ASDS

These trends mean that the basic skills individuals will need to be successful in all jobs, even entry-level jobs, will be increasingly complex. As a result, individuals are going to have to understand many areas of their employer's business, not just one narrow specialty.

All job seekers and employers have a common goal: a good match between the employee's abilities and the job requirements. It is important to all job seekers, especially individuals with ASDs, to emphasize their strengths and interests in order to increase the chances of a good match.

Global trends are giving individual workers more personal responsibilities than ever before. At the same time, workers will be expected to interact with teams of co-workers beyond the traditional workplace. For workers with ASDs, this could lead to opportunities for them to conduct work from home, outside the confines of a communal workspace. They also may be able to use different technologies to communicate more effectively with managers than in the past.

Increasing diversity and the expansion of the disability workforce will compel frontline workers and managers to find non-traditional ways to communicate. Workers with ASDs will increasingly find employers open to finding alternative communications in order to maximize production of more technically capable workers.

[9] Cleary, Jennifer, and Aaron Fichtner, *A Rapidly Changing, Innovation-Driven Economy*. John J. Heldrich Center for Workforce Development, Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey. Summer 2007.

CHAPTER 4: WHERE TO GO FOR HELP IN FINDING A JOB

Searching for work is a challenge for any job seeker. The first step is to find sources of current job information and employment services. The next step is to identify specific job-seeking strategies to guide a job search.

I. PUBLIC AGENCIES OFFERING EMPLOYMENT SERVICES

One-Stop Career Centers operated by the New Jersey Department of Labor and Workforce Development are in 44 statewide locations. They provide free employment-related services to all New Jersey residents. Services include job training, job search assistance, resume and interviewing training and job-related financial assistance. Many One-Stop services are available online. For direct counseling, however, individuals must register with the One-Stop.

Most One-Stop Career Centers share office space with Department of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (DVRS) staff. Individuals should explore One-Stop Career Center employment services after they have completed DVRS vocational rehabilitation services and are ready for an actual job placement.

Disability Program Navigators (DPN) also are located at the One-Stop Career Centers. Jointly funded by the U.S. Department of Labor's Employment and Training Administration and the Social Security Administration, DPNs help individuals navigate the confusing maze of services, requirements and restrictions.

DPNs can provide individuals with available information on work supports so they do not have to worry about losing any important health or cash benefits. In addition, they conduct extensive outreach to agencies and programs in areas that assist people with disabilities. Individuals should be aware of this important resource. For more information on Disability Program Navigators, visit www.doleta.gov/disability/new_dpn_grants.cfm.

For more information on One-Stop Career Center services or to find a local One-Stop Career Center office, visit lwd.dol.state.nj.us/labor/wnjpin/findjob/findjobindex.html.

The **Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services** (DVRS) in the New Jersey Department of Labor and Workforce Development provides a variety of employment and rehabilitation services to working-age individuals with disabilities. Services are delivered through 18 local DVRS offices statewide and part of the One-Stop Career Center system. Locations and contact information on these offices can be found at:

New Jersey Division of Vocational Rehabilitation
1 John Fitch Plaza
P.O. Box 110
Trenton, New Jersey 08625
lwd.dol.state.nj.us/labor/dvrs/DVRIndex.html

THE TYPICAL DVRS PROCESS[10]

1. Assessment
   - In-take generally is conducted in the form of a conversation with the individual. A DVRS counselor will discuss an individual's abilities and interests and will verify his or her identity and legal status to work.

[10] Information about the typical DVRS process was collected through an interview with a DVRS counselor at a One-Stop Center in Middlesex County, New Jersey. The process may vary slightly depending on the needs of the individual.

- The assessment process takes roughly 45 minutes to complete. **It is best to schedule an appointment** with a counselor for an assessment.
- If individuals are seeking DVRS services, they should bring diagnostic documentation to expedite the assessment and eligibility process. Failure to present diagnostic documentation at the assessment will slow down access to services.
- Parents may participate in the assessment process, but it is not necessary.

2. Eligibility

- Individuals will be considered eligible for DVRS services when they have a physical, mental or emotional impairment that results in a considerable impediment to employment that can be improved by vocational rehabilitation services.
- A determination of eligibility is sent to the individual through the mail. Eligibility determination can take anywhere from 2 weeks to 2 months, depending on the presence of the proper documentation.
- If the individual's case gets closed, he or she can always re-apply for services. There is not a one-time restriction on DVRS services.

3. Individual Plan for Employment (IPE)

- If an individual has a strong idea of what he or she wants to do from the beginning, services can immediately begin. Examples of such services might be job sampling or evaluation to determine the right mix of services.
- If the individual does not know what he or she wants to do for employment, the DVRS counselor will work with the individual to develop an IPE. An IPE lays out employment goals and activities toward meeting those goals. Generally, a DVRS counselor will send the individual to a contractor for a vocational evaluation, which takes approximately 3 to 5 days.
- Most DVRS services are at no cost to the individual. In some instances, however, the individual may be asked to contribute toward the cost of his or her services.

4. "Putting the Pieces Together"

- Once the individual has identified a goal and outlined a plan of action for achieving it, the next step is to start receiving the services he or she needs.
- The individual can expect to check in with his or her DVRS counselor about once per month while he or she is receiving services.
- If the individual is interested in vocational training, the training must match his or her goals and interests and it must be pre-approved by the DVRS counselor. In order to obtain financial aid for training, the individual must visit three different training schools and demonstrate a high level of commitment toward the training. The maximum allowable amount of financial aid available for training is $4,000.
- When feasible, the individual will be asked to financially participate in his or her services.

5. Closing the Case

- The DVRS file is considered closed when the individual is successfully employed for three months with no intensive services (any services for which DVRS has paid).
- Once the individual has completed his or her IPE and is ready for job placement, a DVRS counselor will either refer him or her to a private vendor or to the local One-Stop Career Center for assistance. In some instances, the DVRS counselor has information about specific jobs for his/her clients and will share those job announcements with the individual, as appropriate.

6. Important Tips for Individuals with Disabilities and Their Families When Seeking DVRS Assistance or Programs

- ✔ Ask a lot of questions. If you think of a question before your interview, write it down and bring it with you. Unless you have written it down, you may not remember it when you are sitting in front of your DVRS counselor.
- ✔ Request new resources. Chances are you may ask for something that DVRS can provide through partner agencies or other sources.

- ✔ Have patience. DVRS counselors want to assist you with questions or problems, but sometimes the process can be time-consuming and detailed.
- ✔ Establish ongoing communication with your DVRS counselor; he or she is there to help you.
- ✔ Look at your passions, interests and abilities and think of how they could be part of an interesting job or career option.
- ✔ If you have a resume, any kind of work history documentation, writing samples, art work, etc., bring it to your assessment. Everything helps the DVRS counselor to decide what is a realistic and worthwhile employment goal.
- ✔ Prepare yourself for a different set of roles, responsibilities and expectations if you are entering the transition phase from the world of **being helped by others** to the world of work where **you help others** instead.

The Division of Developmental Disabilities (DDD), part of the New Jersey Department of Human Services, offers services for individuals with developmental disabilities to help them live independently and self-sufficiently. Such services include residential services, family support services and supported employment assistance. For more information, contact:

New Jersey Division of Developmental Disabilities
P.O. Box 726
Trenton, New Jersey 08625
609.631.2200
1.800.832.9173
www.state.nj.us/humanservices/ddd

Before you begin your job search, know yourself. Think about who you are, what you like to do and what your strengths are. For help, visit www.rileyguide.com/assess.html.

Employment Digest, available at www.employment digest.net, is a free online source of useful job tips. Here are a few examples from its extensive archives.

Where to Search for Jobs[11]

1. **Internet**—The easiest and most powerful way to search for a job is by searching Internet job boards, often referred to as niche websites, for industry-specific job listings, professional association sites and company and government postings. Niche websites often cater to your specific skill sets and, in some cases, may have less competition with them. You can find listings of niche job boards at www.nicheboards.com or by using Google or Yahoo and entering your industry + jobs. For example, try entering "Marketing Jobs" or "Science Jobs." Examples of other types of niche websites include: The Black Perspective Online, www.blackperspective.com, a website dedicated to connecting job seekers with employers who have a track record of hiring African Americans; the Visiting Nurse Association of Central New Jersey, www.vnacj.org/careers/jobOpportunities.html, specific nursing-related job openings in New Jersey; and Merck and Co., Inc., www.merck.com/careers, an international pharmaceutical company located in New Jersey.

   This method is by far the quickest and most affordable way to find and apply for jobs. The disadvantage to the Internet job search is that hundreds, if not thousands, of people are searching and finding these jobs along with you, so the competition is significant. Also, in order to use many of these online applications, you often must have a resume that is properly formatted for the web.

2. **Personal Contacts**—Asking friends and colleagues to refer you to employers and job openings can be very successful. Some experts believe this is the most effective way to find a job. The problem with this method is that most people's circles are limited. When looking for a job, broaden what you consider to be your circle and reach out to everyone.

3. **Direct Mailing**—Mailing massive numbers of resumes and cover letters is not the most effective way to reach an employer. Most employers prefer everything to be done electronically. Unless there is a direct call for resumes, you run the risk of an employer mistaking your e-mail for junk mail or a virus threat. Follow up with a phone call to ensure the employer received your resume.

[11] *"Five Ways to Find a Job,"* Employment Digest. September 6, 2006.

4. Newspaper Ads—Widely accessible and easy to sort through because positions are listed by category and location. Most jobs are in the low- to middle-skill and salary range. If you are looking for an upper-level management job, the newspaper is not the best place to search.

5. Diversify Your Strategy—The most effective way to find a job is to use a combination of all of these methods and communicate with employers through multiple avenues.

Interviewing Tips

Before the Interview

1. Do Your Homework

   Check out the company's website for the most useful information. Know the products and/or services the company offers. You should know the name of the company leader and how the company is organized. For example, how many departments are there and what are their major functions? Once the interviewer learns you have researched the company, he or she will know that you have invested your time and that will serve you both well if you are hired.

2. Consider What It Will Be Like to Work for This Company

   Now that you have learned more about the company, consider how working there might change your life. Consider the time you will be spending commuting to and from the job site. How will you get there? What type of work environment and schedule would be a good match for you? Do you want to work part-time or full-time?

3. Be Prepared

   An interview is an opportunity to make a good impression. Pay attention to details such as looking your best and arriving on time. Your personal appearance should be formal and neat. When planning your arrival, leave extra time for potential travel and transportation problems. Also, arriving fifteen minutes early is a good idea to ensure that you will be on time. Bring a nice notebook and extra copies of your resume. Resources for writing your resume can be found by visiting your local library or http://lwd.dol.state.nj.us/labor/wnjpin/wnjpin_index.html.

   Prepare answers for the following common questions:

   - Why do you want to work here? (Try to link the needs of the company to your skills.)
   - What interests you about the position?
   - What makes you a good candidate for this job?
   - What would you like to be doing in five years?

   Practice your answers ahead of time with someone familiar with the interview process. You may find it helpful to have someone videotape your practice interview for your review.

During the Interview

4. Timing

   You may be asked to wait until the interviewer is ready. The interview can be on time or may be late for your appointment. If you have difficulty staying calm during these situations, practice ahead of time.

5. Be Aware of Your Communication Style

   From the time you walk into the building, you will be expected to have professional behavior. For example, keep your voice volume moderate and speak clearly. You also may be expected to shake hands with one or more people. The conversation in the beginning may be what is called "small talk" about the weather and current events. While this is a more informal time of the interview, do not tell jokes.

   In addition to what you say, your facial expressions and body language send messages to your interviewer. For example, making eye contact, sitting up straight and posturing your body to face the interviewer are critical to giving a good impression. Also, match your facial expression with the tone of the conversation.

6. Offer Compliments

   Offer some compliments about the company's accomplishments.

7. Be Honest About Your Abilities

   When asked, talk about what you have learned and can do as a result of other job experiences. Provide a copy of your resume. If many aspects of this job are new to you, say so. Also, talk about your interests that match the job requirements and your ability to learn new things. Taking this approach tells the interviewer that you are honest and willing to learn new things.

8. Answer Questions

   Answer the questions the interviewer asks. You can begin your answer by rephrasing the question. For example, if the interviewer asks why you would like to work at this company, you could say "I would like to work at this company because I am interested in…" (and state some aspect of the business). Do not provide additional information unrelated to the questions at this time.

9. Ask Questions

   When it seems that the interviewer is done asking his or her questions, ask if you may ask a few questions. Usually, there is enough time for a few questions. This will show the interviewer that you are prepared and want to learn about the company if you decide to work there.

After the Interview

10. Follow up with a thank you note to the interviewer. State your appreciation for his or her time and how you are still interested in the position. Refer them to your contact information on your resume.

Additional Resource

Dew, D.W., and Alan, G.M. (Eds). (2007). *Rehabilitation of Individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders* (Institute on Rehabilitation Issues Monograph No. 32). Washington, DC: The George Washington University, Center for Rehabilitation Counseling Research and Education.

This guide was prepared for Autism New Jersey by the John J. Heldrich Center for Workforce Development at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey. It contains some of the latest workforce trends and skill data that currently exist in New Jersey. For more information about the material contained in this report and about important issues in today's labor market, please contact the Heldrich Center at www.heldrich.rutgers.edu.

For more helpful tips on interviewing, go to www.nextsteps.org/interview/index.html.

Autism New Jersey (formerly COSAC)
1.800.4.AUTISM • www.autismnj.org
1450 Parkside Avenue, Suite 22
Ewing, NJ 08638