

Tips for Interviewing Persons with Autism and/or Developmental Disabilities (DD)

While interviews are nerve wracking for all us, this feeling is exemplified in people with autism and Asperger's syndrome. They know they don't come across well at interviews. Those on the Autism Spectrum have difficulty with social communication and these challenges are usually exacerbated during stressful times.

There are **many** things you can do to help put a person with autism/dd at ease. By doing so, the interview process will be more successful and productive for both parties.

1) Prepare the applicant

People on the Autism Spectrum/DD have an urgent need to know what lies ahead. They do not take well to surprises. Knowing what to expect helps them to feel more secure and less anxious. It will be very helpful to let the applicant know how the interview will run. As an example you might inform the person "I'm going to ask you a few questions about how things are going at school. Then I'm going to ask you some questions about how things are family. If you don't have an answer to a question, we can come back to it at the end. After the questions, you'll have a chance to add anything about your experience or knowledge that you find relevant to this position. You'll also be able to ask any questions we didn't cover. Then we'll end the interview and you _____." **Even more helpful is if prior to the interview, you can send your list of questions to the applicant.** This will allow the applicant to come up with answers while not under stress. Typically, people on the autism spectrum do not exaggerate. You will get a completely accurate portrayal and give them the advantage of being allowed to think it through.

2)Keep your language to the point

Try and be direct as possible. Keep your questions to the point. Asking a question such as "What are you good at?" is a very open ended question that one on the spectrum might find very difficult to answer. It's far more effective to stick to the point and ask questions like "What are your best or favorite subjects at school? Typical people use small talk to become at ease with each other. This is not effective for those on the Autism Spectrum. **They are completely stymied by small talk and would appreciate it far more if you cut straight to the chase.** It's also important to note that people on the autism spectrum/dd are unable to read between the lines. If you want to know something, simply ask them directly and you will get an honest and forthright answer.

3)Body language

People on the Spectrum/DD have difficulty with social communication which often affects their body language. While typical people orient towards each other during conversation, this might not be present in a person with autism or Asperger's. Many on the spectrum also have difficulty with maintaining eye contact. Because many people think that lack of eye contact represents "a shifty type of character" it's important that this does not apply to those on the spectrum. While concentrating on answering your questions, it can affect concentration if they need to focus on your eyes instead. Eye contact is an area where many candidates are immediately eliminated in the interview process. We can't stress enough they are not being rude and are certainly

not disinterested, it's very likely to be painful for them to sustain eye contact for any length of time. Alternatively, many people on the spectrum have been taught that eye contact is essential. Because of this, they tend to stare in your eyes because the social significance of eye contact is not present. A lot of people on the autism spectrum seem aloof and distant. This often occurs because while typical people tend to regulate their body movements together, this ability is not present in the person on the autism spectrum, leaving an unspoken barrier between two people.

4)Wrapping up the Interview

Letting the applicant know when the interview is coming to an end will allow him to mentally prepare himself. You could say something like “I’m going to go over some final details and the interview will end in about 5 minutes.” Be as specific as you can when it comes to details like work hours, vacation time and expectations. People on the autism spectrum don't like to assume anything and prefer precise information. When you have the information you need, be very clear that the interview is over. Remember the candidate is very nervous and afraid he will NOT get the job. If you can find a positive aspect about the interview, it will go a long way. For example you might say “I am very impressed with your attention to detail. You can expect to hear from us within 2 weeks with our decision. Thank you for coming.”

Dr. Pinnock's Tips:

- 1) Consider having the child or young person bring a person that they choose to help “translate” or provide answers.**
- 2) Let them choose where to sit in the room and change arrangement to accommodate them.**
- 3) Consider having only 1-2 persons ask them the questions**