



Employment Tool Kit for People with Autism

My Autism Guide
SIGN UP



Information
based on
your needs

guide.autismspeaks.org



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Introduction

The Autism Speaks Employment Tool Kit

Autism Speaks would like to help you with your employment search by giving you tools and tips while you look for a job. As an adult on the autism spectrum, you have strengths and abilities that employers are just beginning to understand. Therefore, we have written this guide to help you research, find and keep employment in the current, competitive labor market.

The Autism Speaks Employment Tool Kit is the culmination of a process that began with the Autism Speaks Employment Think Tank in June 2012, which captured the current state of employment for adults with autism. From that Think Tank we collected advice, stories, best practice data, tips and resources that we are happy to share with you. [Click here to read the Employment Think Tank Executive Summary.](#)

In addition to using the information gathered through the Autism Speaks Employment Think Tank, it is important to state that this Employment Tool Kit was developed by a diverse group of stakeholders led by adults with an autism spectrum disorder, parents, business leaders, and academic experts. Stories, tips and resources were developed from this collaboration of people dedicated to increasing the employment participation of adults on the spectrum.

Although this Employment Tool Kit is geared towards you, we know that families, transition coordinators, vocational rehabilitation staff, business leaders and anyone who is helping someone with autism find and keep employment will also find this resource helpful.



■ The **blue text** indicates a link that you can click on for additional information.

The notebook icon indicates helpful hints that you may want to remember and write down in the space provided.





How Do I Use This Tool Kit to Find a Job?

You are probably reading this Tool Kit because you are interested in learning about finding a job. This guide is divided into specific sections so you can choose to go through each section in order, or you can skip to an area that applies to your needs. To be an active part of your own employment search, we start the Tool Kit with some useful tips about self-advocacy, ways to plan your employment search and supports, tips on how to determine the right job for you, funding options, provider agencies that can help and other useful tools and tips. Whether you are looking for part-time or full-time employment, want to find a job on your own or are looking for supports, you will find what you need in this Tool Kit. We want to give you all the options that are available. Not all the recommendations will apply to you, so review the course of action that you need. This Employment Tool Kit we help you gather information on finding, getting and keeping a job with specific action steps to help you organize your job search.

Looking for a job can be a long process. It is important to focus on the positive steps to gaining employment such as networking and meeting new people, learning about your strengths, learning new skills and exploring careers. Choose a team to help you with your job search that includes the people that know you best and a known supported employment agency in your area if you need that support. [Click here to visit the Employment Resource section of the Autism Speaks Resource Guide.](#) From there, enter your zip code to view a list of employment service providers in your area.

We start with a success story. If you have one of your own, we would love to hear from you! Please send it to us at AdultServices@autismspeaks.org.

Matthew's Employment Story: Matthew Shumaker

Matthew Shumaker, a 26-year-old with autism from Northern California, has been interested in garden and landscape work since he was a child. By the time he was 16, Matthew was mowing, trimming and blowing the yards of many of his neighbors. His skills and interests were narrow, however, and he was not good at taking direction. He had a hard time, for example, understanding that some bushes and hedges look better if they aren't cut back too severely, or in too much of a straight line. He did not like to do some of the necessary grunt work associated with gardening, such as digging and cleanup.



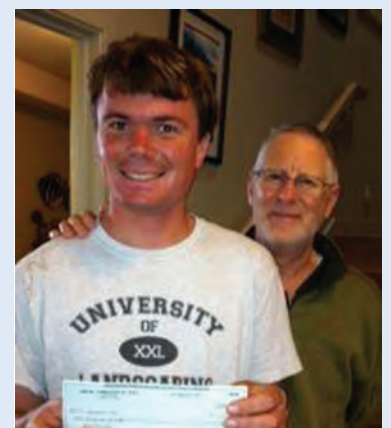
Matthew at 22 in vocational training

Matthew moved to a supported living program in Camphill Communities in California when he was 22 years old, where he took part in a vocational training program that included intense garden and landscape training.

It was still difficult to persuade Matthew to do some of the less pleasant garden tasks, and to learn the importance of taking direction from the customer. But over time, he mastered these skills. He expressed his desire to obtain outside paid work. His supported living plan was modified to include a supported employment program. Matthew now works with a job coach three mornings a week. He works independently at least two days a week and occasionally on weekends. His goal is to continue building skills, and to eventually work full-time.



Matthew, 11, with his first lawnmower

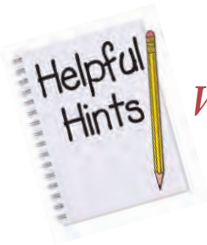


Matthew, 26, with his first paycheck!





Matthew represents just one individual with a particular vocational interest and ability. His job brings him much satisfaction and enjoyment. Your story will be different. So starting your employment search will require you to take action steps to secure the type of job that matches your vocational interests and abilities. Start your individual journey to employment with positive reasons for your job search.



What are some of the positive reasons for a job search?

Use this page to write down positive reasons for a job search

**I will meet people
in my field of interest.**

**I could earn money so that
I have more control
over my own life.**





Self-Advocacy

One of the most critical features of being an adult is the ability to make your own choices in life. Where you work and what job you perform are important choices and require decision making skills that you will use often as an adult. Use this section to develop strategies that can help you advocate for yourself as you start your journey into employment and adult life.

What are Self -Advocacy Skills?

Valerie Paradiz, Ph.D. offers a good description of self-advocacy and why it is so important.

“Self-advocacy is a life-long endeavor [and it is never too early – or late] to start cultivating self-awareness, self-monitoring, and deeper exploration of what it means to be autistic, by way of peer discussion groups. Self-advocacy differs from advocacy in that the individual with the disability self-assesses a situation or problem, and then speaks for his or her own needs. Learning how to do this takes practice and direct instruction. Too often, we raise our kids, treat our patients, and educate our students without ever speaking to them directly about autism. Perhaps we’ve made assumptions or even harbor fears that they aren’t capable of self-reflection. Yet if we deny kids our children this very important aspect of identity, we limit their ability to become the successful adults we want them to be. As with any academic subject, teaching self-advocacy takes training as well as knowledge of and respect for the disability movement. Parents can model self-advocacy at home, teachers can offer curricula in school, and most importantly, peers on the autism spectrum can offer strategies for good living and share mutual experiences.”

To read Dr. Paradiz’s full article, visit this website: [Developing Self Advocacy Skills: An Integral Aspect of Transition Planning.](#)



Self-Advocacy is:

- speaking up for yourself
- asking for what you need
- negotiating for yourself (working with others to reach an agreement that will meet your needs)
- knowing your rights and responsibilities
- using the resources that are available to you
- being able to explain your disability either by the use of written words, pictures or gestures

Learning to ask for help is another step in developing self-advocacy skills. In order to do this, you must be able to identify that there is an obstacle or difficulty, and then seek out assistance to have the issue resolved.

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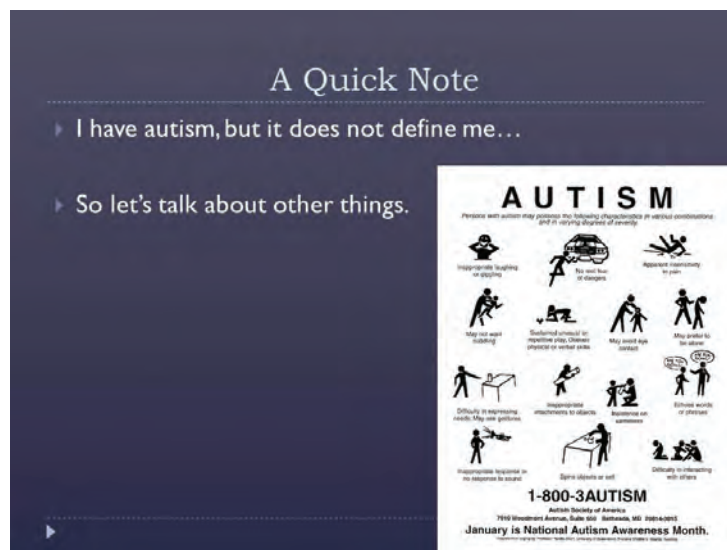
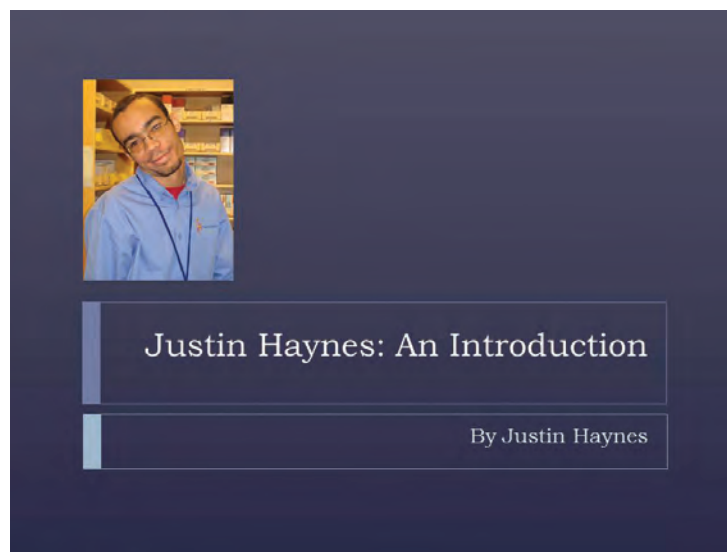




Justin's Self-advocacy Story: Justin Haynes

Justin, an employee at the National Institute for Health in Bethesda, Md., decided to share his social challenges with his co-workers by creating a PowerPoint presentation explaining how he has been impacted by autism. He shared his presentation at a department meeting with his co-workers and supervisors at the NIH. You can learn more about Justin by viewing some of the slides from that presentation below. His story is also featured in the book: [High School Transition that Works! Lessons Learned from Project](#), by Maryellen Datson, J. Erin Riehle and Susie Rutkowski (page 196).

A note about disclosure: By sharing his story, Justin was advocating for himself and working to improve his work performance and relationship with his co-workers. Not everyone will want to disclose their autism to their employer or co-workers in as public a way as Justin did. It is your choice. Skip ahead to the [Soft Skills – Understanding the Social Elements of Your Job Section](#) for more thoughts on disclosure and how it can affect your job.





Overview

Name: Justin A. Haynes
Age: 21
Birth date: 9-9-1989
Birthplace: Washington, D.C.
Gender: Male
Family: Mom/Dad/Older Sister/Cousins
Education: The Ivymount School



Interests

- ▶ I have an interest in Japanese Culture.
 - ▶ I would like to learn how to speak Japanese.
 - ▶ I like the geography of Japan.
 - ▶ I love those cherry blossom trees.
- ▶ I have an interest in Video game design.
 - ▶ I use PowerPoint to practice my creation of a main menu screen and a storyline.
 - ▶ I usually get pictures off the internet and create a scene.
- ▶ I like Georgetown Hoyas Men and Women's teams.
 - ▶ I like to go to a basketball game.



What I do now at OCR TME

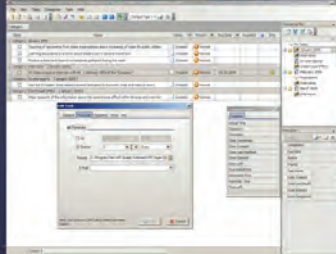
- ▶ I do grand rounds (Thursday or Friday).
- ▶ I go on a mail run (9:00).
- ▶ Sometimes I deliver mail to Bldg 31.
- ▶ Upload pictures to Flickr. Terra sent me that project. I've learned how to upload them now.
- ▶ Data Entry.
- ▶ I scan and/or copy agreements to Vicki and e-mail 'em to her.
- ▶ Miscellaneous office tasks.
- ▶ I know how to use Excel, PowerPoint, Word, Outlook, Flickr, scanner/copier.
- ▶ I'm comfortable with technology so I can learn new programs or projects quickly.





Justin's Learning Style

- ▶ I like to get instructions both verbally and in writing.
 - ▶ Writing down instructions helps me remember.
 - ▶ It doesn't matter if I get it by E-mail or printout.
- ▶ For new tasks I like to be shown how to do it once.
 - ▶ It helps me remember how to do it on my own.
 - ▶ Visual learner (pictures, graphs, charts).
 - ▶ Kinesthetic learner (physically doing it)
- ▶ I'd rather be in a quiet place.



Areas where I need some help

- ▶ Looking at people in their eyes makes me nervous when talking.
- ▶ Reason I work fast: I'm a fast learner. But I might make an error.
- ▶ Need help asking questions.
- ▶ Need help explaining. I have trouble explaining concepts. It does make sense but too hard to get it out of my head.
- ▶ Conversation Skills needed.
- ▶ Asking for more work.
- ▶ Prioritizing work.
- ▶ Giving direct answers.
- ▶ Sometimes I just need help getting started.
- ▶ Improving myself by talking on the phone.



Goals

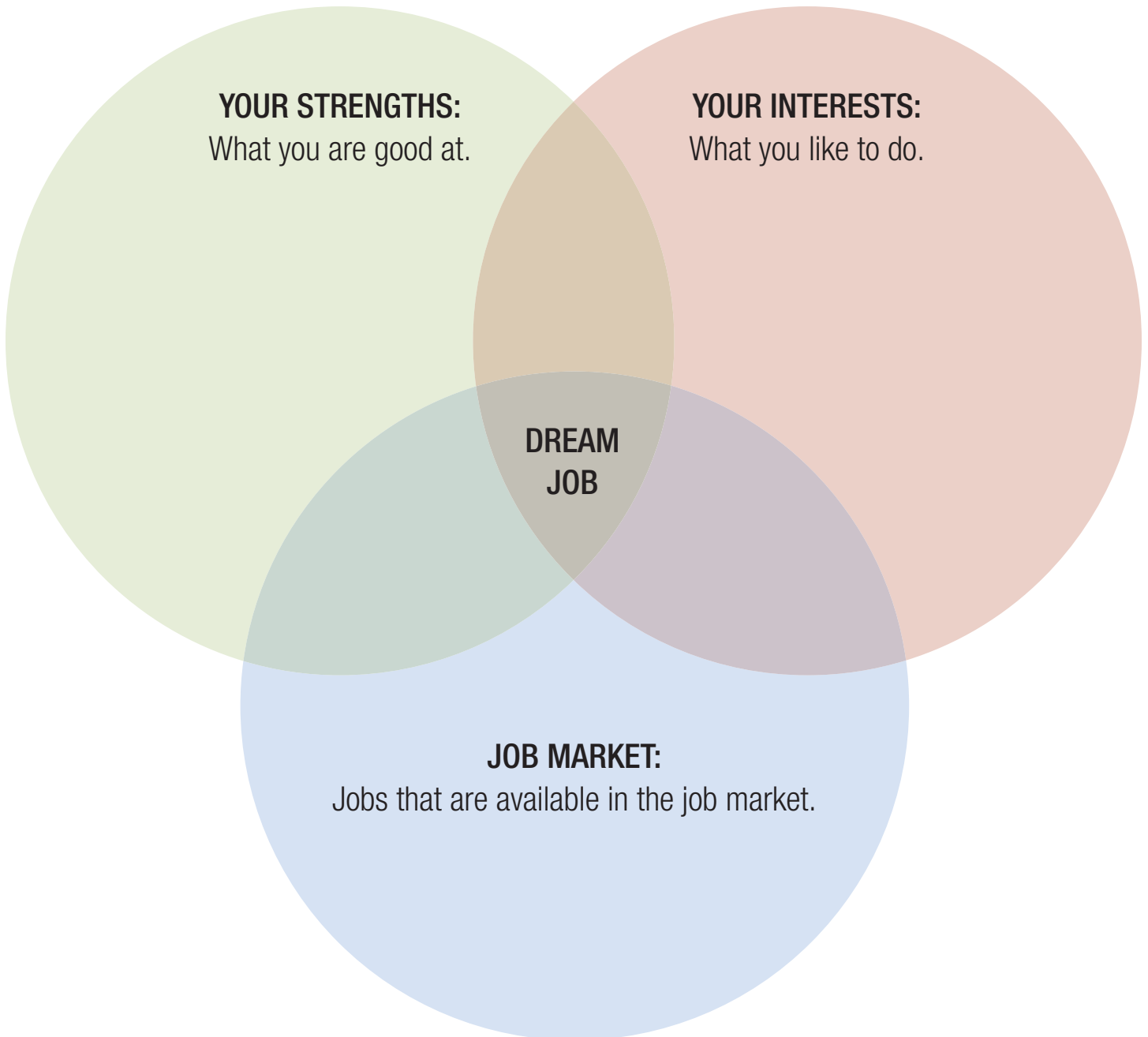
- ▶ Work better at my job at OCRTME.
- ▶ Go to college so I can become a game designer.
- ▶ I want to learn how to use more programs.
- ▶ Participating in more meetings.





What Job is Right for You?

It is important to understand your strengths and interests when you are looking for a job. We all hope to find a job that we are very good at and that we can truly enjoy doing for a long time – our dream job! But being realistic is important, too. Sometimes we need to realize that what we are good at is not always something we can do as paid employment, or there may not be a job available that matches our top interests. That's ok! A good approach is to list your personal strengths and interests, and then search the job market to see what positions are available that match up most closely with those ideals.



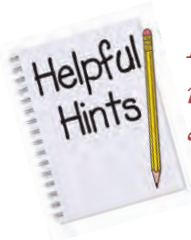


Assessing Your Strengths and Interests

Having a formal assessment of your skills and interests will help you choose the direction of your job search. There are many useful tools that can help determine these factors for you. Some of these tools can include functional and community-based vocational assessments and interest inventories. Vocational assessments can be administered by your state's Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) office by a vocational rehabilitation counselor. Each state has a VR agency that provides employment service supports to people with disabilities (including autism). [Click here](#) to find contact information for your state's VR office. In addition to assessments, your state's Vocational Rehabilitation office offers a variety of other services and funding. [Click here for additional information about funding options.](#)

For more information on assessments, visit these websites:

- [Do2Learn.com](#)
- [Institute for Community Inclusion \(ICI\)](#)
- [Occupational Information Network \(O*Net\)](#)



Document the types of assessments that you have participated in. If you have not had an assessment, request one from your vocational counselor.

Assessments

In School

-
-
-
-

Job-Related

- A community-based Vocational assesment through my DVRS Counselor
-
-
-





Volunteering

In addition to formal assessments, volunteering is a great way to learn about your interests and abilities prior to paid employment. There are many organizations that offer volunteer opportunities where you are not paid. Do not pass up a chance for work experience, as you will learn from all types of opportunities. Even learning that you do not enjoy a particular type of work is information that will lead you to the right career path in the future.

For more information on volunteering and to find volunteer opportunities in your area, visit these websites:

■ [Volunteers of America](#)

■ [Volunteer Match](#)

Note: Many states have their own volunteer agencies – try Googling it!

TIP: Always make sure that you get a recommendation letter from your supervisor when you have had a good work/volunteer experience. **Update your resume** with each work opportunity you have had so that it is always current. Don't forget about work experience that you may have gotten while you were in school or during the summer. All work experience is important and could help you get that next job.

Internships and Apprenticeships

A paid or unpaid internship is another way for you to learn vocational skills and gain valuable work experience. Your school should be able to assist you in finding internship opportunities. Some internships can offer you college credit for your work.

An apprenticeship is a combination of on-the-job training in which workers learn the practical and theoretical aspects of a highly skilled occupation or trade from experts in the field. Apprenticeships can teach you skills for a trade that is in high demand in the job market. This may make it easier for you to find a job. For more information on apprenticeships, visit the [U.S. Department of Labor](#).

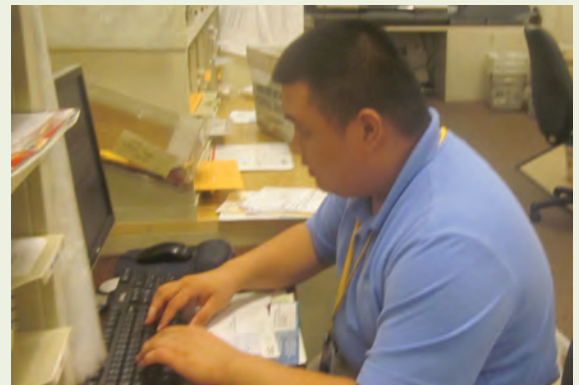




Training to Work: **Aspiritech**

Occupational and Vocational Training for Software Testers

Occupational and vocational training can take a number of forms, from pre-employment activities to on-the-job coaching. At Aspiritech, a not-for-profit near Chicago, Ill., we provide training and employment for adults with high-functioning autism and Asperger Syndrome. Our training covers both the technical skills of software testing, and the soft skills needed to succeed in the workplace. The initial training period, which is provided at no cost, covers the basics of software testing and is designed to be accessible to individuals on the spectrum who possess a moderate level of computer proficiency (programming skills are not required). It is hands-on and avoids abstract lessons to meet the needs of trainees with challenges in auditory processing and a more literal sense of language. This training period can last anywhere from a couple weeks to a couple months, depending on the needs, pace, and availability of the trainee. In addition to learning software testing, the initial training serves as an evaluation period and opportunity for trainees to learn if software testing is work that they can focus on and enjoy. Those who successfully complete their training are invited to work for Aspiritech as paid software test engineers.



While working at Aspiritech, employees continually undergo further training, developing more advanced technical skills. Soft skills are also taught through frequent team-building activities, job coaching, social skill groups and regular feedback. Some specific areas addressed include accepting constructive criticism, asking for help, appropriate topics of workplace conversation, and e-mail etiquette.

So far, we're finding that that this model provides significant benefits for our employees on the spectrum. In the past year, two employees have graduated on to full-time employment in the competitive workplace. Meanwhile, employee surveys and parent reports suggest increased self-esteem and self-determination among our employees.

For more information about Aspiritech, visit us at www.aspiritech.org.

Aspiritech received an Autism Speaks Community Grant to fund a job coach.

Some Jobs to Consider

A recent study has outlined jobs that individuals with ASD have successfully held after high school. This is by no means an exhaustive list of all of your options, but it could help you as you start thinking about which industries are right for you:

- Healthcare
- Computer-Related
- Skilled Crafts
- Mechanics
- Engineering
- Food Service/
Restaurant Management
- Business
- Clerical
- Education, Childcare and Home
- Economics

Source: [Newman, L., et al. The Post-High School Outcomes of Young Adults with Disabilities up to 8 Years After High School. A Report from the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 \(NLTS2\).](#)



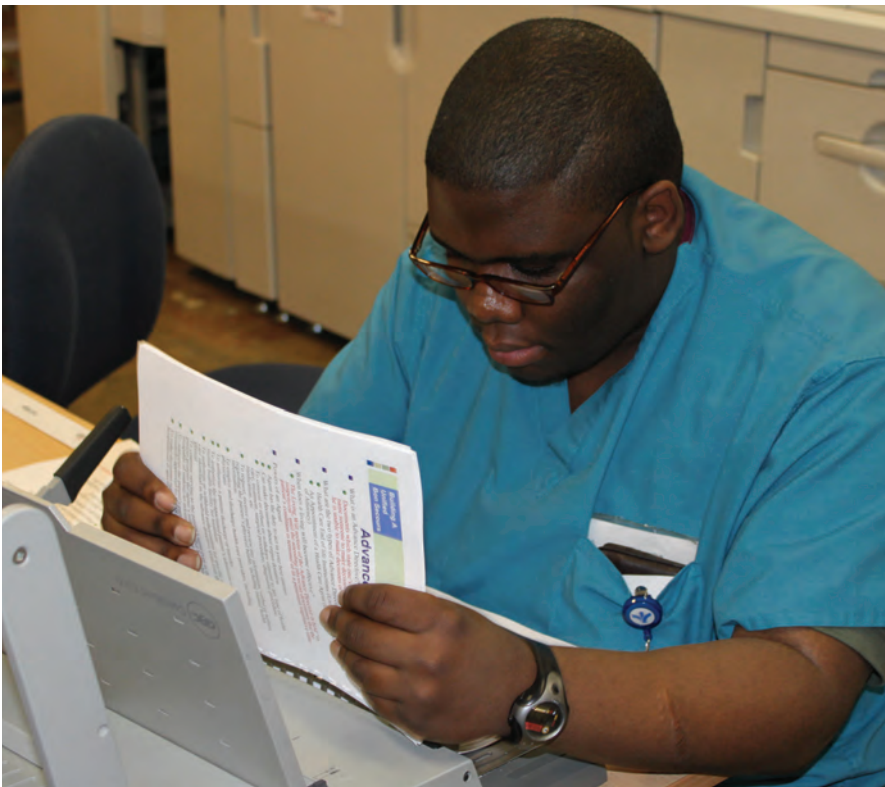


The STEM Fields

STEM stands for the fields of science, technology, engineering and mathematics. Pursuing an education and/or a career in one of these fields might just put you at an advantage over the competition.

Autism Speaks helped fund a national study entitled “STEM Participation Among College Students with an Autism Spectrum Disorder,” which was published online in November of 2012 in the [Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders](#). Co-author Paul Shattuck, PhD, assistant professor at the Brown School at Washington University in St. Louis, confirmed that individuals with ASD indeed gravitate toward STEM majors in college. In fact, students with autism are significantly more likely to declare a STEM major in college than their peers with or without disabilities. “STEM careers are touted as being important for increasing both national economic competitiveness and individual career earning power,” according to Dr. Shattuck. “If popular stereotypes are accurate and college-bound youth with autism gravitate toward STEM majors, then this has the potential to be a silver lining story for a group where gloomy predictions about outcomes in adulthood are more the norm.”

One theory for why this may be suggests that people with autism are very good at systemizing, which includes analysis and understanding of rule-based systems, and at looking for patterns. Another good reason to explore jobs in the STEM fields is that not enough students are graduating with STEM backgrounds to fill the open positions in the marketplace – especially in the United States. In fact, it is estimated that during the next decade, the U.S. demand for scientists and engineers is expected to increase at four times the rate of all other occupations. The U.S. Department of Labor expects that there will be 1.2 million job openings in STEM related fields by 2018, but there won't be enough qualified graduates to fill them. So individuals with autism should feel encouraged to give the STEM fields a try. You can learn more about the wide range of different STEM careers [here](#).





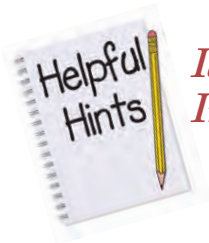
Understanding the Labor Market:

Due to the changing workforce, it is important to understand what jobs are available in the current and future economy. One helpful resource is the [Occupational Outlook Handbook](#), where you can search for occupations by their average salary, entry-level education required, available on-the-job training, and the number of new jobs expected to be created.

To browse the fastest growing jobs in the labor market over the next ten years, and the median salary for each job, click [here](#).

Recommended Reading:

- Temple Grandin's "Choosing the Right Job"



*Identify 3 types of jobs that match your skills and your interests.
Include your dream job!*

Jobs that match my skills and interests

- Software Tester



My dream job(s)

- Video Game Designer





Benefits and Funding

This section discusses how employment may affect your:

1. Social Security benefits;
2. Social Security work incentives that may be available to you; and
3. Agencies that can provide funding to help you find and keep a job.

What is Social Security?

Before even looking for a job, most people have questions about how employment will affect their Social Security benefits. Your Social Security benefits do not have to be disrupted because you want to work. The Social Security Administration (SSA) has developed incentives for people with disabilities to work even if they are collecting Social Security benefits. To get a better understanding of how your benefits could be affected, it is very important to sit down with a Social Security disability representative in your area. Call 1-800-772-1213, or [click here](#) and enter your zip code to find the contact information for your local Social Security office.



Use the chart at the end of this section to write down the contact information of the Social Security office nearest you. Write the name and contact information of the disability representative in that office and make an appointment to meet with him or her.

When you are ready to explore your work options, the Social Security Administration has a national call center where you can talk directly with professionals about work, benefits, or their work incentive programs. Just call 1-866-968-7842.

The Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) disability programs are the largest federal programs providing assistance to people with disabilities. While these two programs are different in many ways, both are administered by the SSA and only individuals who have disabilities and meet medical criteria may qualify for benefits under either program. Here is a general description of Social Security Benefits for your information:

Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) pays benefits to you and certain members of your family if you are "insured," meaning that you worked long enough and paid Social Security taxes. For example, Joe has worked for 20 years at Home Depot. But now due to his medical needs, he can no longer work. He can receive Social Security Disability Income because he's worked long enough to have paid into the SSDI Fund. He has paid for that insurance.





Supplemental Security Income (SSI) pays benefits to people with disabilities who have limited income and resources. It is designed to help aged, blind, and disabled people who have little or no income. And it provides cash to meet basic needs for food, clothing, and shelter.

As stated above, it is very important to schedule a consultation with a Social Security disability representative in order to understand your specific needs and the benefits you are entitled to receive.

To find out which benefits you might be eligible for and to learn how to apply for them, visit this website: [Benefit Eligibility Screening Tool \(BEST\)](#)

Social Security Work Incentives from SSA

Social Security offers some work incentives in order to allow you to work and keep your benefits, which may apply to you.

Plan for Achieving Self Support (PASS)

A Plan for Achieving Self Support, also known as PASS, is a plan for your future. Maybe you need to go back to school or you would like to start your own business, but you do not have the money. Whatever your work goal may be, a PASS can help you reach it. A PASS is an SSI work incentive that lets you use your own income or assets to help you reach your work goals. You could set aside money to go to school to get specialized training for a job or to start a business. A PASS is meant to help you get items, services, or skills you need to reach your goals without losing your SSI benefits.



For an excellent explanation of PASS, visit this website: [Cornell University's Employment and Disability Institute \(EDI\)](#).



Write down the goals that you would like to achieve in employment. Discuss these with your Social Security disability representative and see if a PASS can help achieve these goals.

Impairment-Related Work Expense (IRWE)

The Impairment-Related Work Expense (IRWE) is another work incentive available to individuals who receive SSDI and/or SSI. Using IRWE allows you to keep more of your Social Security check when you work. IRWE can be used if you are receiving SSI, you are working and you have expenses that:

1. Are related to a serious medical condition,
2. Are needed in order for you to work, and
3. Are paid for by you and will not be reimbursed by another source.





Some possible IRWE expenses may include:

- Costs for attendant care
- Costs for modifying your vehicle and other items
- Transportation costs (in certain situations)
- Costs for necessary medical devices
- Medications
- Medical services
- Job coaching expenses that you paid for on your own

Even though you may believe that something would qualify as an Impairment-Related Work Expense, the Social Security Administration may not agree. So it is important to speak with a Social Security representative in order to determine if an expense is eligible under IRWE (making your SSI check higher). For more information about IRWE, visit this website: [SSI Spotlight on Impairment-Related Work Expenses](#).



Write down what supports you need to keep working. Discuss these with your Social Security disability representative and see if an IRWE will help fund these supports.

Ticket to Work

Another program from the SSA is the Ticket to Work program. This is a type of support program that allows a person with a disability to take a Ticket to purchase support from an approved employment provider as part of the **Ticket to Work & Workforce Investment Act**. Organizations that are selected to participate in the Ticket to Work program must provide people with disabilities the opportunity and support to prepare for, obtain and keep jobs that will realistically enable you to achieve independence.



If you are eligible for Social Security disability benefits, you will be called a Ticket Holder. You may assign your Tickets to an Employment Network (EN) of your choice to obtain employment services, vocational rehabilitation services, or other support services necessary to help you become as self-sufficient as possible through work opportunities.

To learn more about the Ticket to Work program, visit this website: [Ticket to Work](#).





Funding Sources

In addition to Social Security incentives, there are other agencies that can help fund job supports you might need to assist you in finding and keeping a job. You need to know which agencies pay for what type of services. We have outlined below the key agencies that provide support for a job developer, job coach, transportation and other necessary supports for some adults with autism.

State Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Services



Each state has a Vocational Rehabilitation (Voc Rehab or VR) agency that provides employment service supports to people with disabilities (including autism). VR agencies can give you vocational assessments that lead up to the development of an Individual Plan for Employment (IPE). A variety of employment-related services can be provided under an IPE, including training, counseling, job placement, and supported employment. Services through VR agencies are considered to be successful when you are found to be stable in a job.

[Click here to find your local VR office.](#)

Read an Autism Speaks blog post on Vocational Rehabilitation [here](#).



Write down the contact information of the VR office nearest you.

State Developmental Disability Agencies/Home and Community Based Medicaid Waivers

State and local Developmental Disabilities services operate under a variety of different names across the country. Some states control these services through the supervision of local agencies or they may be managed by a local community service board. Frequently the funding for these services comes through the Home and Community Based Services Waivers (HCBS), which are made available through Medicaid. The requirements for gaining access to these services vary from state to state. Several employment services can be accessed through this funding source and can include supported employment, case management services and counseling and treatment services.



Visit the [Center for Medicaid & Medicare Services \(CMS\)](#) for more information about Medicaid Waivers.

Search for your state Developmental Disability Agency [here](#).



Write down the contact information of your state's developmental disability agency.





Print and keep this form handy!

My Local DVRS Office:

- Contact Info:
- My Appointment:

My State's Developmental Disability Agency:

- Contact Info:
- My Appointment:

My Local Social Security Office:

- Contact Info:
- My Appointment:

My Employment Goals

- I'd like to learn PowerPoint for my job to enhance my skills.
- I'd like to get my driver's license so I can drive myself to/from work.
-
-
-

Employment Supports I Need to Keep My Job

- I need to dry clean my uniform each week.
- I need to pay for a bus pass to get to work.
-
-
-



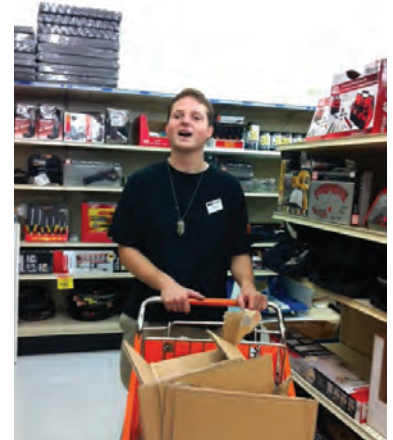


Employment Models – What Option Is Best for You?

There are several employment models for you to explore. Options can range from competitive employment to starting your own business. This section will help you determine which model works best for you. When you are done, you can learn about service providers in these areas by reviewing best practice examples from across the country.

Competitive Employment

Competitive employment is full-time or part-time work in a business that pays at or above minimum wage and provides the same benefits that your co-workers enjoy. You are independent in your job and do not require or want employment supports.



Supported Employment

Supported employment is a service that can help you gain competitive employment in integrated work settings, and then provide ongoing support services to help you maintain your employment. Job coaches, co-workers, business supervisors, and mentors have all been utilized as employment supports for people with autism. If any of us are to experience personal satisfaction and quality of life, regardless of where we are on the spectrum, we must be given the opportunity and support to express our preferences. You should be directing the process by choosing your service provider, your employment specialist, and the specific support services that you may need to obtain and maintain employment. State VR programs can assist you with this process of identifying and selecting a service provider. They can tell you the level of education and certification of employment specialists, the types of jobs obtained by the organization, their experience working with people with ASD, their rate of pay, and longevity of employment. But you may need to ask!

To review best practice supported employment programs, visit this website: [Vocational Rehabilitation and Autism Spectrum Disorders project](#).

Customized Employment

When your job skills and interests don't exactly match a job that is available but you can perform many parts of the job requirements, you can consider talking to a potential employer about customizing the job. Customized employment is a flexible process designed to personalize the relationship between you and an employer in a way that meets both of your needs. It is based on a match between your strengths, interests and needs and the business needs of an employer. Customized employment uses an individualized approach to employment planning and job development — one person at a time and one employer at a time.





Customized employment can take different forms:

- **Task reassignment:** Some of the job tasks of current workers are reassigned to a new employee (maybe you!). This allows the other worker to focus on the critical functions of his/her job and complete more of what they need to get done. This can mean that a new job is created for someone like you – it can then be negotiated based on current, unmet workplace needs.
- **Job carving:** An existing job description is adjusted so that it contains some – but not all – of the tasks from the original job description.
- **Job sharing:** Two or more people share the tasks and responsibilities of a job based on each other's strengths.

Self-Employment

Starting your own business can be exciting yet challenging. It's important to research other companies that were started by people with disabilities to see what has worked. Autism Speaks will be developing a promising practices guide for small business initiatives that will be linked to this Employment Tool Kit once it is finalized. Be sure to check back here periodically in the beginning of 2014.

To research the steps you need to take to start your own business, visit: [Self-Employment Technical Assistance, Resources, & Training](#)



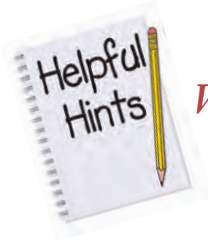
The Small Business Administration (SBA) has targeted programs to assist individuals with disabilities in entrepreneurial initiatives. There are programs for starting a business, financing a business (with access to targeted loans and grants), and understanding tax information that are dedicated to assist people with disabilities. The SBA is also a great repository of resources and can direct you to related professional and trade associations. For more information about the SBA, visit their [website](#).

Entrepreneur Success Story: Nathan Young [AutismCandles.com](#)

I started my candle-making project, AutismCandles.com, to employ myself and others with disabilities. I have had an interest in smells for some time – mostly from the dollar stores – but I wanted to create candles that were much better than the ones in stores. We can do things like make candles and be self-advocates. We can advocate for each other and build what I call the disability work industry: an industry for us, by us and with the help of others.

I tried very hard and it was amazing. It has been an amazing success with media exposure, day program support, the support of my Chamber of Commerce and the autism community. So as long as we do good work and be competitive, many tend to be loyal supporters that are customers. There are so many possibilities that if we believe enough to try, we may just succeed and others will help. Success might not come really fast but being persistent and believing in possibilities is what made my employment successful.





Write down any business idea that you've thought about starting.

Delivery/ Messenger Service

Blank space for notes

Blank space for notes

Blank space for notes





Finding Support Services and Providers in your Area

Click on the map below to visit the Employment Resource section of the Autism Speaks Resource Guide. From there, enter your zip code to view a list of employment service providers in your area.



Make a list of the providers in your area and their contact information. Set up interviews with them if you are interested in a supported employment provider.





Your Job Search

Once you know what job is right for you and have all the information you need about your benefits and organizations that can support you in your search for employment, you are now ready to start your job search. This section will discuss some strategies that hopefully will help you find a job you will love.

Networking

There are many ways to look for a job, but only some have proved effective for adults on the autism spectrum. Most jobs are not publically advertised (80%, according to Cornell University's Career Center). You may wonder, "Then how do I find out about job openings?" An important place to start is with your personal "network" – your family, friends, neighbors and other people who know you well.

Personal Perspective – “You Never Know Until You Ask.”

Ilene Lainer, Parent and Executive Director at New York Collaborates for Autism (NYCA)

The vast majority of job seekers find their jobs through a personal contact. However, for young adults with autism who already are faced with social and communication challenges, people often suggest that they seek their job by looking at job postings or responding to online openings. This approach is likely to fail not only because the impersonal approach is less successful for most people, but also because young adults with autism like you may benefit from a personal connection or the willingness of a friend or a relative to accommodate your needs.

First, determine that kind of job and type of environment in which you would be most likely to succeed. Then, tell everyone you know – friends, relatives, neighbors, local store owners with whom you have a connection, members of your house of worship, members of clubs or associations to which you belong, or any other person who you know –

“I am good at ‘X’ (data entry, packing boxes, filing, scanning documents, etc.). I am a hard worker who will follow the rules and not spend a lot of time socializing. I always have a smile and am a joy to work with.”

Ask them, “Do you know anyone who owns a business or is responsible for hiring an entry-level position in which I could do ‘X’ in a ‘Y’ kind of environment (quiet, not direct customer contact, outdoors/indoors, etc.)? Could you please help me meet this person? I want to ask if they have an entry level job opening and see if they would be willing to talk to me about it.”

You never know until you ask!!!!





Make a list of all the people you know who could help you find a job.

My Networking Contacts:



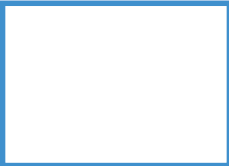
Mr. Simpson

- Owner of town sporting goods store
- He's known me since I was little and he likes me, and he knows how much I know about sports.



Person #2

- His/her position
- How he/she could help me find a job



Helpful Resource about Networking:

- [“Skills to Pay the Bills: Mastering Soft Skills for Workplace Success \(Section 4: Networking\)”](#), Department of Labor’s Office of Disability Employment Policy.





Online Social Networking Sites

Online social networking refers to the use of online technology tools that enable people to communicate easily via the internet to share information and resources. Social media can include text, audio, video, images, podcasts, and other multimedia. This continues to be an important way that people network and connect with others. Through social media sites, you can connect with friends and acquaintances and learn about job opportunities. Here are some popular sites that can help you with your job search by expanding your social reach:



■ **LinkedIn** – A business-oriented professional networking site

■ **Facebook**



■ **Google+**

■ **Twitter**



TIP: Social media can offer many advantages, but also has many risks. While it can help you connect with others, it can also open you up to bullying and might put you at risk of sharing personal information about you or your disability that you don't want someone to know.

CareerBuilder.com offers some helpful tips to protect your online image and your job opportunities in their online article, "[Warning: Social Networking Can Be Hazardous to Your Job Search.](#)"

1. **Be careful.** Nothing is private. Don't post anything on your site or your "friends" sites you wouldn't want a prospective employer to see. Derogatory comments, revealing or risqué photos, foul language, and lewd jokes all will be viewed as a reflection of your character.
2. **Be discreet.** If your network offers the option, consider setting your profile to "private," so that it is viewable only by friends of your choosing. You may want to use the "block comments" feature. Remember, everything on the internet is archived, and there is no eraser!
3. **Be prepared.** Check your profile regularly to see what comments have been posted. Use a search engine to look for online records of yourself to see what is out there about you. If you find information you feel could be detrimental to your candidacy or career, see about getting it removed – and in the meantime make sure you have an answer ready to counter or explain "digital dirt."



Helpful Social Networking Resources:

"[A Word About Social Networking](#)", Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy.

GCF Learn Free: This site offers some good resources on networking and using social media to help with your job search.





Researching Companies and Jobs

Another helpful way to job search is to look at companies that are already hiring people with disabilities, since they have a current practice that is working.



DiversityInc

DiversityInc is a leading source of information on diversity management in the business world. They hold an annual competition to determine which corporations do the best job meeting their diversity standards in different industries. As part of that, they publish a list of the top companies for people with disabilities, including autism.

It is not simply about who provides accommodations and flexible work schedules, although those are important. Information collected as part of their diversity survey shows these companies make a concerted effort to recruit, retain and promote people with disabilities and to create an inclusive corporate culture for people with both physical and hidden disabilities like ASD.

[Click here](#) to view the most recent “DiversityInc Top 10 Companies for People with Disabilities.”

The U.S. Business Leadership Network (USBLN) issues a report on the “[Leading Practices on Disability Inclusion](#),” which lists companies that are leaders in disability integration in the workplace. Here’s another tip: Take a look at the [companies the support USBLN](#) for an idea of companies that are supportive of hiring people with disabilities.

Other Job Search Resources

These sites offer online job postings by companies looking to hire people with disabilities

- [GettingHired.com](#)
- [U.S. Jobs Disability – by the National Labor Exchange](#)
- [Think Beyond the Label](#)
- [Disability.gov](#)

Other Places to Research Job Openings:

Career Centers

- [Secondary or Post-Secondary School Career Centers in your area](#) [One-Stop Career Centers](#)

Job Search Websites (Not specifically targeted for people with disabilities):

- [CareerBuilder.com](#)
- [Monster.com](#)
- [SimplyHired.com](#)

Local Online Classifieds:

- [Craigslist.com](#)
- Your local news website

Remember to consider your transportation options when searching for a job. If you rely on public transportation, you’ll need to ensure you can get to and from any job for which you are applying. We discuss more about Transportation Options in the following section.





Job Search Planning Tool

Business/Contact Name	Phone Number	Date Contacted	Appointment Date	Documents Needed	Status	Follow-Up
AG's Drug Store Manager: John Doe	555-555-JOBS	11/30/2012 12/6/2012	12/9/2012	Completed application, Resume, Cover letter, ID	Interview Scheduled	Send thank you letter





Transportation Options



Reliable transportation to and from the job is a critical piece of your planning process. You will need to work with your family and your supported employment provider to determine the best options for transportation. Transportation can be done privately if you or someone who supports you drives and has a reliable vehicle. If not, then you will need to review public transportation options such as buses, trains or cab services. Safety should always be considered when making these choices.

Online Transportation Resources:

- [Disability.Gov – Transportation Options in your State](#)
- [Easter Seals Project Action \(ESPA\)](#)
- [GET Going! – Developed in partnership by Easter Seals Project ACTION, the Daniel Jordan Fiddle Foundation and Feeley Consulting](#)

Driving Safety

In 2010, Autism Speaks awarded a grant to the Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center in Boston, Mass. to evaluate and assess driving safety for persons with autism and other neurological disorders. Entitled “DriveAdvise”, their project entailed the development of a toolkit and an educational video to facilitate decisions about whether an individual with ASD might consider driving in the future. For those of you who will remain non-drivers, materials from DriveAdvise emphasize strategies for promoting maximum independence and self-esteem that are not linked to driving.

To learn more about “DriveAdvise” and another program called “DriveWise,” and to view their educational video, [click here](#).



Write down a list of transportation options in your area. Discuss these options with your vocational rehabilitation counselor or job coach.

Transportation Options:

Bus	Train	Car/Ride from Friend or Co-worker	Other
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● NJ transit Bus #45 goes from Main Street to Princeton Shopping Plaza, where I work. ● 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● ● 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● ● 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● ●

Remember, you should consider transportation options when you begin your job search to ensure you are able to get to and from any jobs for which you are applying.





Resumes, Cover Letters & Applications

Developing Your Resume

Resumes are important to have available when looking for a job. A resume puts all of your skills and experience on one form that makes it easier for a potential employer to review. Since it is often the first thing a potential employer sees about you, a resume should be professionally presented in order to make a good impression.

Here's an example of a basic resume:

Christine Person 1234 Hope Road • Suburb, MD 23456 • 301.555.0101

SUMMARY of QUALIFICATIONS

- Positive work attitude
- Learn best when shown visually how to perform a task
- Friendly and a good team member

WORK EXPERIENCES

Office Assistant
Corporate International; Baltimore, MD Sept. 2011–Present

- Collect, clean and redistribute computer & technical equipment
- Collate and package materials as specified
- Alphabetize and sort documents
- Sort and deliver office mail

Dining Room Assistant
Chicken Out; Towson, MD Sept. 2010–June 2011

- Cleaned and rolled silverware
- Bussed tables during dining hours

Office Assistant
Rebuilding Together; Baltimore, MD Summer 2010

- Collated and stamped mail
- Prepared projects for bulk mailing

Floral Assistant
Flowers World Wide; Baltimore, MD Fall 2009–Spring 2010

- Watered, cut and arranged flower bouquets
- Made bows for arrangements
- Light cleaning of shop

Activities Assistant
Hebrew Home; Baltimore, MD Summer 2009

- Assisted residents during recreational activities

JOB TRIAL EXPERIENCES
Office Clerk: *Weichert Realty*; Towson, MD
Retail Worker: *DSW*; Baltimore, MD

EDUCATION
Currently a full-time student in a trade tech program
County Community College in Townville, MD

There are online tools that can help you build your resume:

■ [Job Tips: Resumes and Cover Letters](#)

■ [Career One Stop](#)





Personal Perspective – “Building a Resume – One Accomplishment at a Time” Michelle Rubin, Founder, Autism After 21

Building a resume for a young adult with autism can seem a bit difficult, but I began building a resume for my son Scott when he entered high school. He is now 20 years old and has used his resume to enter a post high school transition program. There is a wonderful online tool called [Naviance Family Connection](#) that helped me do this.

When my son had any accomplishment during his high school years, I visited www.naviance.com where I had set up “Family Connection” page for him. On this page you can use the “About Me” tab to chronicle everything from classes, sports, Special Olympics, awards, work training, and even computer programs he knew how to use. After four years, this program had organized all this information into a professional resume format and it was so easy to keep up a bit at a time.

A big part of the Naviance page speaks to college planning – my son with autism is not college-bound. However, on this portion of the page I learned about how building a resume works for everyone! It also can give your son or daughter a sense of accomplishment by entering their information on their own or with your help.

I found using this online tool helped me as a parent not to have to remember five years of high school (yes, my son stayed in high school five years), and it gave us some confidence when we began exploring other programs that he really had accomplished quite a bit during those years besides receiving his special diploma. For families of students still in high school, start a resume now. And for students ready to graduate, you can still benefit from putting together a professional resume.

***Note:** Naviance is a web-based service provided for parents and students by some school counseling departments. Your school must have a Naviance account in order to use these tools. Nevertheless, the tips included above can be achieved without access to an online service. Start tracking accomplishments and experiences for your resume while you are still in high school. This activity can be incorporated into your transition plan.*

Additional tips:

Create a Portfolio: In addition to your resume, you can put together a portfolio of your work – or pictures or videos of your work – for future employers to see.

Prepare a List of References: As you are preparing information for your resume, create a separate list of your references to share with potential employers once you secure a job interview.





Start creating your own resume today! Use the following template for help:

[Street Address], [City, ST ZIP Code] [phone] [e-mail]

[Your Name]

OBJECTIVE

[Describe your career goal or ideal job.]

EXPERIENCE

[Dates of employment] [Company Name] [City, ST]

[Job Title]

[Job responsibility/achievement]

[Job responsibility/achievement]

[Job responsibility/achievement]

[Dates of employment] [Company Name] [City, ST]

[Job Title]

[Job responsibility/achievement]

[Job responsibility/achievement]

[Job responsibility/achievement]

[Dates of employment] [Company Name] [City, ST]

[Job Title]

[Job responsibility/achievement]

[Job responsibility/achievement]

[Job responsibility/achievement]

EDUCATION

[Dates of attendance] [School Name] [City, ST]

[Degree Obtained]

[Special award/accomplishment or degree minor]

REFERENCES

References are available on request.





Cover Letter

When distributing your resume to a potential employer, you should always include a cover letter. Here are some useful suggestions from **JobTIPS** about writing an effective cover letter:



WHAT is a cover letter?

A cover letter is a brief letter that you write to your potential employer expressing your interest in the job and stating why you are applying. In this letter, you should briefly describe your strengths and skills and how they match the job of interest. When you send a cover letter, you should always send a copy of your resume with it.

WHY write a cover letter?

You write a cover letter to send along with your resume. In other words, your cover letter serves as an introduction to your resume. Sending just a resume in an envelope does not look as professional as sending a cover letter with your resume.

HOW to write a cover letter:

- Like a resume, a cover letter is a formal document and needs to look professional.
- Your cover letter should be no longer than one page.
- It should be typed in a business-letter format, which contains the following information in this order:
 - Your name and contact information
 - The name and address of the person you are writing
 - The date (including the day, month, and year)
 - The greeting or salutation (Example: Dear _____,)
 - The body of the letter (2 short paragraphs)
 - The closing phrase (Examples: "Sincerely" or "Thank you")
 - Your signature
 - Your typed full name





SAMPLE cover letter:

Christine Person
1234 Hope Road
Suburb, MD 23456
(301) 555-0101
cperson@gmail.com

Mrs. Anne Darcy
Windham Publishers, Inc.
101 Willow Drive
Nashville, TN 12345

January 7, 2013

Dear Mrs. Darcy,

I am writing to express my interest in the editorial assistant position at Windham Publishers. I am a very detail-oriented person, which is important when fact-checking and editing manuscripts for grammatical errors. Grammar and the English language have always been a strong interest of mine, and I have excelled in related courses throughout my education. In addition to being detail-oriented, I am a hard worker and consider myself responsible and dependable. I am confident that I would be a valued employee at your publishing company.

I am interested in learning more about this position, as it seems like a great match for my skill set. I am enclosing a copy of my resume for your consideration and am happy to provide you with references if necessary. Thank you for your time and consideration of my application.

Sincerely,

{Signature}

Christine Person



Write a cover letter and ask a trusted friend, family member or counselor to read it.





How to Send Your Resume and Cover Letter

Spelling and grammar are important and could make the difference in getting a job interview. Make sure your resume and cover letter are proofread by a friend or family member.

By Mail:

Make sure it's clean: If you are mailing your resume and cover letter, it should be printed on clean, white paper with no tears or wrinkles.

By Email:

File Format: You'll be sending your resume as an attachment to your email, so use a format that most businesses can open. Microsoft Word is the most common professional word processing program.

File Name: Name your resume document appropriately. Using your name as the document's name will help an employer find the file on his/her computer. Using the example provided on the first page of this section, the resume document should be named **ChristinePersonResume.doc** or **ChristinePerson.doc**.

Don't Forget Your Cover Letter: If sending by email, you still need to send a cover letter. You can include your cover letter document as an attachment or you can write the cover letter in the body of the email you are sending.

Send from a Professional Email Address: Some of us have email addresses that we use every day that might be too informal from which to send a resume (e.g. aspie373@yahoo.com). As you continue on your job search, consider setting up a professional email to use. For example, cperson@gmail.com or christineperson@aol.com might be good email addresses to use.

Applications

Every employer will require you to complete an application. This is a document that will provide the company with some basic information about you, such as your name, where they can contact you, where you went to school, your Social Security number so they can pay you, and other items. So it is very important to fill it out neatly and accurately. [JobTIPS](#) provides an excellent overview of the application process.

There are three possible ways to complete a job application:

1. Write on the paper application, and then return it to the place of business.
2. Type your responses onto a downloaded version of the application, then print it out or email it to the employer.
3. Complete the online application and submit it electronically.





Where do I find applications?

First, you can try finding the company's job application online. If you don't know the company's website, try searching for it on Google, Bing or Yahoo. Once you are on the employer's homepage, you will have to look carefully to find the jobs link. On some homepages, the jobs section is very easy to find, while on other home pages, you will have to look very carefully to locate it. It might be on the sidebar, at the very bottom of the page, or at the top of page. Some terms to look for are:

- "Careers"
- "Employment opportunities"
- "Job opportunities"
- "Join our team"
- "Corporate info"
- "Open positions"
- "Job openings"

Once you find the right page, look for the job application. You might be able to download it and save it to your computer, or you may have to complete it directly online. It can sometimes be confusing – don't be frustrated! You can always ask for help.

You will sometimes be able to obtain a paper application in the actual place of business, such as in a store or a restaurant. If that is what you'd like to do, make sure you are dressed in neat, clean clothes and that you have showered and combed your hair. You want to try to make a good first impression.

When you walk into the place of business, find an employee and wait until they are not too busy to talk. Then walk up to him/her and say something like, *"Excuse me, I would like to pick up a job application. Can you please give me two copies, or can I please see your manager?"* You should request two copies because if you make a mistake on the first copy, you will still have a second one to use. Make sure you say *"Thank you"* before you leave with the applications. You can take them home with you or somewhere else that is quiet where you can concentrate.

How do I fill out the application?

JobTIPS provides a thorough step-by-step guide to filling out job applications, including an [application worksheet](#) and an [application checklist](#) that will list all of the information you'll need to have with you when it comes time to complete your application.

After you complete and submit your resume, cover letter and application, you'll probably need to wait patiently. The company may not respond to you right away, but that does not necessarily mean that you won't get the job. If you have not gotten confirmation that your application was received, wait at least three days and then you can call or email them. You could say, *"Hello. My name is _____. I recently applied for a position at your company. I am very excited about this job opportunity and was wondering what the status of my application is?"*

After that, you will need to wait to hear from them. That is why it's often a good idea to apply for several different jobs at once – you can always decline other offers once you've been hired!





Pre-Employment Screening Assessments

Some companies require you to take their Pre-Employment Screening Assessment before you can be called in for an interview and hired. These assessments are online or paper tests that ask you to read questions and choose the best response. They also require you to read questions and rate your response using a scale (between 1 and 5, for example). Most of these assessments are not like the math or history tests you may have taken in school. These ask questions to determine your work-related attitude, personality, productivity, social judgment skills, and reliability. There's not much you can do to prepare or "study" for them and many of these types of questions do not have clear right or wrong answers. So just try to stay calm and answer as best you can!

Here is an example of a multiple choice question:

You have noticed that many of your co-workers come to work late and leave early. The supervisor does not seem to be aware of this problem. For two days in a row, you decide to come to work late because you are tired. Your supervisor asks to meet with you, and she is obviously frustrated by your behavior. How should you handle this?

- A. Apologize to your supervisor, but also inform her that your co-workers are not following these rules either.
- B. Apologize to your supervisor, and tell her that it will not happen again.
- C. Ask your supervisor to meet with the entire staff.
- D. Quit your job because this situation is not fair at all.

Many of these tests also require you to use a rating scale to answer a question. Here is an example:

Rude customers should be avoided.

(5) Strongly Agree (4) Agree (3) Neither Agree nor Disagree (2) Disagree (1) Strongly Disagree.

For more information about these Pre-Employment Screening Assessments, visit JobTIPS [here](#).





The Job Interview



JobTIPS provides an excellent step-by-step guide to help you prepare for your job interview. The following is an abbreviated version. For the full JobTIPS guide, [click here](#).



A job interview is usually a face-to-face meeting between you and a manager or supervisor from the company you'd like to work for. It is very important because the employer will base much of their decision of whether or not to hire you on the interview. The interviewer will ask you a number of questions about your educational and work experiences, your personality, your strengths and weaknesses, your skills, and why you want the job. You will also have the opportunity to ask a few questions about the company and the job position. The interview normally takes place in the manager's office, but some interviews are also done over the phone or even during a meal at a restaurant. Sometimes there is more than one interviewer, and sometimes there may be other job applicants interviewing with you at the same time (group interview). This meeting can last between 15 minutes and one hour – it all depends on the company and the position you are applying for.

Before the Interview:

- Make sure your resume is up-to-date and print out two clean copies with no wrinkles.
- Print a copy of at least two of your references listed with all of their contact information.
- Prepare a list of important information (your phone number, address, social security #, etc.) to help you fill out the job application, if needed.
- Make sure you have a form of photo identification (like a driver's license) or state issued I.D.
- Review the job description or the "Help Wanted" description.
- Research information about the company including their "mission" or goal – read over their website or Google them!
- Practice your interview with someone you trust. Rehearse your responses out loud. It is important to rehearse what you will say and how you will say it – including practicing your tone of voice, eye contact, and facial expressions. Your responses should be more than one sentence long, if possible.
 - For a list of 10 standard interview questions with some tips for what to say and what not to say, visit JobTIPS [here](#).
- Make a list of 2-3 questions you may have about the position.
- Put all of your materials in a professional-looking folder, briefcase, day planner, or handbag.
- Have a clean, professional outfit ready to wear (see below).





Day of the Interview:

■ Dress for Success!

- No matter what kind of job you hope to get, it is very important to look neat, clean, and professional. That means clean, wrinkle-free (ironed) clothes that fit appropriately, and matching belt, shoes and socks.
 - If your interview is formal (for an office job or in a professional field), then you need to dress formally:
 - For men: wear a suit and tie. Your suit should be black, gray, or navy. If you do not own a suit, you should wear nice slacks, a sport coat, and a dress shirt and tie.
 - For women: wear a pants or skirt suit with a professional shirt underneath. If you do not own a suit, you should wear nice pants or a skirt, and a professional looking shirt.
 - If your interview is less formal (for a manual labor or retail position), or if you are an adolescent (younger than 18), you are not expected to wear a suit. But it is still better to be over-dressed than under-dressed. Try this:
 - For men: wear nice slacks (not jeans, sweatpants, or shorts), a long-sleeve shirt with a collar that is tucked-in, and matching belt, shoes, and socks.
 - For women: wear a skirt or nice slacks and a blouse (not sleeve less or low-cut), and flat shoes or shoes with a low heel.
 - If you do not have appropriate job interview clothing and need financial assistance, the following non-profit organizations can help. You can also search the web for other groups in your area:
 - For men: www.careergear.org
 - For women: www.dressforsuccess.org
 - Grooming Tips: Be sure that you are showered/bathed, your teeth are brushed, hair is neat and combed, fingernails are neatly trimmed, you have put on deodorant, and for men, that you have shaved on the day of the interview.
- Plan to arrive at the interview location at least 15-30 minutes early. This will make a good first impression and ensures that you are not late. You can wait outside or in the waiting area if you are too early.
- Be polite and friendly to any staff you come into contact with. You might need to tell an employee that you are there for an interview so that your interviewer knows you have arrived. You could say, “Hello, my name is _____ and I am here to see (interviewer’s name) for an interview.”
- Be ready to begin with a greeting, a smile and a handshake. Reach out your hand and smile when you first enter the office, looking the interviewer in the eyes as you introduce yourself. You could say, “Hi, my name is _____. Thank you for seeing me.”





- Your handshake should be firm – not too hard, but not limp. Practice this with a friend before the interview.
- Handshakes should last only 2-3 seconds, then let go.
- Reaching out your hand to initiate a handshake shows that you are friendly and confident. You do not have to initiate a handshake if you don't want to or if it makes you too uncomfortable. But if the interviewer reaches out his or her hand to you, you must reach out and shake.
- Wait for the interviewer to sit down first, then you can take your seat (unless he/she insists that you sit down first). Once he/she sits down, you should sit down too.
- Make occasional eye contact for at least 5 seconds throughout the interview.
 - If direct eye contact makes you uncomfortable, then try looking at the interviewer's face or mouth periodically.
- Be sure to smile occasionally.
- Sit up straight in your chair and face the interviewer.
- Try your best to sit still as you talk.
- Use an upbeat tone of voice as you talk, if you can.
- Answer each question politely, even though the information may already be in your resume or application.
- It's okay if the interviewer interrupts you to ask more about something you have just said. You need to answer the questions they ask, when they ask them. Be sure that you do not criticize the interviewer, even if they interrupt you.
- It is not appropriate for you to end the interview – that would seem rude. Usually, you need to wait until the interviewer indicates to you that the interview is ending.
- Always say "Thank you" when the interview is over. You should also express interest in the job by saying something like, "This seems like a really great place to work. I look forward to hearing from you."
- Once again, smile and make eye contact as you shake hands.

After the Interview:

Within two days after your interview, you should always write a thank you letter or email to your interviewer for meeting with you. [Click here](#) for some suggestions and a sample letter from JobTIPS.

Now is time for you to wait. You must wait to hear whether or not you got the job. This can be hard! You should not contact the employer more than once about the job. JobTIPS provides some [helpful guidance](#) about whether or not to contact your potential employer.





Accommodations and Disclosure

A majority of employees with autism require some type of accommodation in their employment. Some of those accommodations are easy and inexpensive to implement, while other accommodations require a more thoughtful plan. This section offers information on different types of accommodations that may apply to you or others. It is also important to note that oftentimes in employment the job responsibilities can change according to the needs of the business. Accommodations are often needed not only to get the job but to keep the job, as those tasks and possible supervisors can change.

Universal Design for Accommodations

Universal Design is defined as, “the design of products and environments to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialized design.”

– Center for Universal Design, NC State University

Employers who participated in the [Autism Speaks Employment Think Tank](#) in June 2012 agreed that neurotypical employees (people without neurological disabilities) also benefit from the supports put in place for their co-workers with autism. Visual reminders, simplified job descriptions, and “traveling” interviews – where job candidates observe employees performing the job for which they are being considered – are useful for all company employees. Frequently, productivity can be increased for all employees with these universal accommodations.

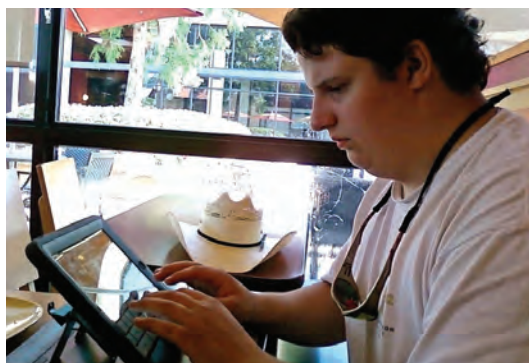
Job Accommodation Network (JAN)

In order to understand all your options for a job accommodation, it is important to speak to someone with experience in understanding and applying accommodations. JAN provides free, confidential technical assistance about job accommodations and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Their website also outlines some accommodation suggestions for individuals with ASD. [Click here](#) to learn more.



Natural Supports

Natural supports are strategies that workers and managers use on a regular basis with all of their colleagues in the workplace, regardless of whether or not they have a disability. We have heard from many individuals with ASD that you wish to be treated just like anybody else – and of course we agree. Natural supports in the workplace are more sustainable and cost-effective than more formal interventions such as job coaches, and often benefit all employees. Some business leaders who participated in the Autism Speaks Employment Think Tank expressed interest in the idea of using the “manager as job coach,” making clear that supporting employees with ASD like you should specifically be part of a manager’s responsibilities. This also helps phase out the job coach, who is best used as a temporary accommodation during times of transition or only when you need them.



Technology

Personal digital assistants (PDAs) – smartphones, iPod touches, iPad and Android tablets, among others – offer task management and organizational features that may be utilized to help you function more successfully in the workplace. Additionally, onboard video cameras and add-on software applications provide rich opportunities for the implementation of personalized vocational supports designed just





for you. At this writing, more than 600,000 applications are available for Apple mobile devices and nearly as many are available for Android and Microsoft mobile products. Workers with ASD who have been trained to use Apple iPod touch PDAs as vocational supports in the workplace have seen improved performance and reduced behavioral challenges.

For more information on how technology can help you in the workplace, visit these online articles and resources:

- [VCU Rehabilitation Research & Training Center](#)
- [Autism Speaks Technology Central](#)
- [Apple iPad™ Success Stories](#)

Useful Accommodations You Can Ask For

Below is a quick overview of some job accommodations that have been useful for employees with ASD. For more in-depth information, access JAN's publications [here](#). To discuss your specific accommodation situation, contact JAN directly [here](#).

Exhibiting Acceptable Workplace Social Skills:

- Look for mentors that always model acceptable social skills.
- Use a job coach to help you understand different social signs and cues.
- Review or ask your job coach to review with you conduct policies to understand what is unacceptable behavior.
- Use role-play scenarios with your job coach or trusted friend to demonstrate acceptable behavior in workplace.

Interacting with Coworkers:

- Look for a mentor to help you learn how to interact with co-workers.
- Minimize personal conversation, or move personal conversation away from work areas.
- Ask for a job accommodation that is an alternative form of communication if needed between you and your co-workers, such as email, instant messaging, or text messaging rather than conversational.

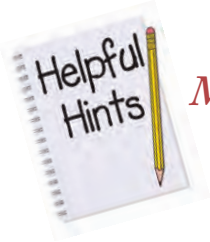
Communicating Effectively with Supervisors:

- Ask for day-to-day guidance and feedback.
- Ask for clear expectations and the consequences of not meeting expectations.
- Ask to establish long term and short term goals.
- Ask for assigning of priority of tasks.
- Ask for assignment of projects in a systematic and predictable manner.

Communicating in the Workplace:

- Ask for advanced notice of meetings, particularly when you may be required to provide information at the meeting.
- Ask if you can provide a written response in lieu of verbal response.
- Ask for advanced notice of meeting topics, particularly when you are required to participate verbally.
- If you need support, ask to bring an advocate to any performance review or disciplinary meetings.





Make a list of accommodations on and off the job site that you may need.

Accommodations I need to be employed

**iPod touch –
to keep my schedule**





To Disclose or Not to Disclose?

The issue of disclosure (telling someone about your autism or disability) for individuals with obvious disabilities – a person who walks with leg braces or crutches, for instance – is presented immediately upon meeting with a potential employer. For people with ASD and other “invisible” disabilities, however, the decision to disclose your diagnosis can be complicated. Many employees with autism fear being judged because the accommodations they need are often related to the “soft skills” on a job site, and are not always easy to see or understand. It’s always a good idea to discuss this decision first with someone you know well and trust (a family member, friend, or support person). There are lots of different pros and cons to disclosure that you will have to weigh. But ultimately, the decision of whether to disclose your diagnosis is entirely up to you.

In general, a good time to disclose a disability might be when you need to ask for a reasonable accommodation. This can be when you know that there is something in the workplace that is preventing you from competing for a job or performing a job well because of your autism. Knowing who the best person to disclose to is also an important decision. If your workplace has a Human Resources (HR) department, that is a good place to start. The employee handbook might also have a section about how to ask for an accommodation. And of course, you could decide that your direct supervisor or manager needs to know about your autism.

Finally, it is important for you to know that you have a right to keep information about your disability private. It is not necessary to tell your co-workers and colleagues about your autism or your need for accommodations. They might become aware of the accommodations you have, if any (like extra breaks or a flexible starting time), but they are not entitled to know why. And your employer is required by law to keep your autism and other medical information confidential.

For more information, visit the page: [Disclosure Resources from Job Accommodation Network \(JAN\)](#).



Write down the reasons you may want to disclose your disability and why you may not want to. Share this list with a trusted family member and/or job coach to determine what you should do.

Should I disclose that I have autism (at work)?

Yes

- I need an accommodation to work fewer hours or take extra breaks.
-
- **If YES, who should I tell**
 - My manager
 - Human resources (HR) department
-

No

- My autism does not affect my job performance.
-
-
-





Soft Skills – Understanding the Social Elements of Your Job

Soft skills have been defined as required workplace skills for success since the 1990's. In the workplace, soft skills can include your communication abilities, your ability to work with a team of co-workers and your problem solving abilities. It will be important for you to determine which soft skills are important to do your job, and which skills you need to work on with someone.



The difference between soft skills and hard skills is that hard skills can be defined and measured easily – how many words per minute you can type, your ability to use specific types of equipment (like a scanner) or computer programs (like Microsoft Excel) and your writing ability are some examples. Soft skills are more difficult to master because the rules change depending on where you are and the people you are with. For example, it is perfectly acceptable to jump up and down and cheer out loud for a teammate who has just hit a home run on the ball field. But this type of behavior would not be acceptable in an office setting after hearing that a co-worker just developed a great new idea.

As you interact with your co-workers, it's important to know that many people are taught that you don't discuss religion, politics or finances at work. It would be also important to not talk about other personal topics such as race, sexual orientation or certain physical characteristics (including a person's age, height or weight) and even someone else's disability because it could be hurtful and make co-workers feel uncomfortable.

There are a number of ways to learn appropriate social skills on the job. One way is to find a mentor at your workplace. A mentor is a positive role model who can guide you, inspire you and support you. A mentor can be someone from your place of work, or even a family member or someone from your community. When new on the job, you should try to find a mentor whether or not he/she has a disability like ASD. And when you become more experienced, you may wish to mentor other new employees, who may or may not have a disability.

The following resources provide other ways to learn about soft skills:

- *Social Skills for Students With Autism [Paperback] (2012)*
Brenda Smith Myles (Author), Gary M. Sasso (Author), Debra M. Kamps (Author),
Richard L. Simpson (Editor)
<http://www.amazon.com/Social-Skills-Students-With-Autism/dp/0865863024>
- *The Hidden Curriculum: Practical Solutions for Understanding Unstated Rules in Social Situations*,
Brenda Smith Myles (Author), Melissa L. Trautman (Author), Ronda L. Schelvan (Author) (2004).
<http://www.amazon.com/Hidden-Curriculum-Practical-Understanding-Situations/dp/1931282609>
- "Skills to Pay the Bills: Mastering Soft Skills for Workplace Success"
from the Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy
<http://www.dol.gov/odep/topics/youth/softskills>





Success Stories and Lessons Learned

As we stated in the beginning of this Tool Kit, looking for a job can be a long and difficult process, but the end result will mean more than just a paycheck. There have been many people that have successfully made this journey. So in this section, we offer you some examples of employment success stories and honest, first-person accounts that can inspire you in your job search.

JOHN TAYLOR Q & A

John is the Family Services Database Coordinator at Autism Speaks and has a diagnosis of Asperger's Syndrome.

What do you love most about your job?

The thing I love most about my job is the fact that I'm working for a cause. It's very motivating to know I'm making a difference.

How does it feel to have found full-time work in a field that is important to you?

Working full-time helps me feel like an adult. Officially, that happened over 10 years ago. But I'm sure you get the point.

What did you find to be the most helpful when you were looking for this job?

I had a very competent job coach who I still communicate with about once a month.

What was the most difficult part of looking for and applying for your job?

You know the famous catch-22. A job ad says 3-5 years' experience is needed to apply. But, you can't get that experience because every other job ad has the same requirements. Entry level jobs do exist, but it takes a lot more effort to find them. This is definitely not an autism-specific problem.

Did you need to ask for any accommodations to help make your job as comfortable as possible for you? If so, what accommodations did you ask for, and how did you ask for them?

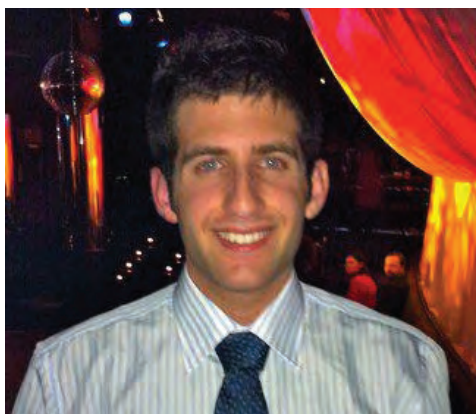
I did not exactly need to ask for any accommodations. But, I listen to music or something else to help me focus.

If you could share any advice with others who are on the spectrum and are looking for work, what would it be?

Tough one. The problem with my perspective is that I work for an organization that knows about autism, hence the name. Not everyone on the spectrum will be applying for such a job. But, nevertheless, some pointers:

- Ask for accommodations ASAP.
- Regarding accommodations, remember not to abuse them. Harsh as it may sound, there seem to be those who use autism as an excuse to do whatever. This could end up being a rant, so I'll stop here.
- Many of us thrive on routines. It may take you a while to figure out one that works for you. As you progress in a job, you will be given more responsibilities. Sometimes you can continue with the same routine, other times you'll have to figure out a new one.
- Schedule monthly meetings with your boss to stay on the same page.





JAY LYTTON:

Having Asperger's Syndrome is a challenging and life-defining experience. As a child, I did not know what Asperger's was. I was oblivious as to how my disorder affected the people around me because I only attended to my own interests. I remember when I was in high school, I always had to be right. I berated my teachers and peers when I disagreed with a request or opinion. Even though that resulted in me being ostracized both in the classroom and on the school yard, I still believed that I was RIGHT. At the end of high school and during college, I began reading books about body language and studying non-verbal cues. I wanted to figure out why I was so alienated and why I did not connect with anyone.

When I became fluent in Spanish during my early twenties, I realized that I had also been speaking another foreign language my entire life.

As I began transitioning from a school setting into a career position, I did not realize how valuable these skills I had learned would become – whether they were for a job interview, for networking, or for socializing in the workplace. By learning non-verbal cues, I learned a new way to manipulate my environment. I was able to redirect the way I communicated my thoughts and beliefs in a manner which "mainstream" society could understand. The challenges I have faced in the workplace have been similar to what I faced in my primary and secondary educations. However, the experiences that benefited me the most were the ones which gave me support, but also held me to high expectations.

For instance, while I was attending the University of California, Davis, I had the opportunity to intern at the [UC Davis M.I.N.D. Institute](#), a research center that focuses on neurodevelopmental disorders. While I was there, I worked on several research and clinical projects, including a senior thesis. I also partnered with the M.I.N.D Institute's Director of Research to create a student organization to promote awareness of Autism Spectrum Disorders. The professors with whom I worked, who were aware of my issues because of their work in the field of neurodevelopmental disorders, understood what that meant for me and still always held me to the highest standards.

Today I work with adults at [New Horizons](#), a non-profit organization that helps individuals with developmental challenges. Part of my role involves looking at how to facilitate career growth for these individuals in the workplace. I am trying to do the same thing for our clients that the M.I.N.D Institute did for me. I am able to empathize with the clients' needs, but I make sure to set the bar high for them.

My goal is to not only help them succeed at their jobs, but also to push their limits so they can take on new challenges. Many of these clients have also had a lifetime of people expecting less of them because of their disabilities. We need to encourage them to expect more of themselves in order to give them the best chance of rising to their full potential.

One thing that is unique about my organization is that some of the clients are also considered staff members. If we can encourage individuals with disabilities to feel included in the workplace, then they will not only perform the expected workplace tasks, but may rise beyond the challenges of that particular job.

Accommodating people with disabilities is legally mandated, socially responsible, and economically beneficial. What I have learned is that schools, organizations, and companies will not know how to accommodate individuals like myself if they do not understand the challenges of having disabilities like autism or Asperger's. Accommodating individuals with disabilities does not mean simply fixing a problem by providing a piece of equipment. It means understanding what the individual's challenges are, finding common goals, and setting high expectations. Our efforts to enable people with disabilities to lead independent, successful lives will result in their contributions back into the economy and into society.





JASON

Jason is a 20 year old young man with a diagnosis of Asperger's Syndrome as well as physical disabilities that impact his endurance. For leisure, Jason enjoys reading historical novels and playing his Nintendo DS game system. In his last year of high school, he had three nine-week hospital-based internships where he worked in the hospital's Coronary Care Unit, the Biomedical Durable Equipment Department and the Intensive Care Unit. Upon graduation, the hospital made Jason a job offer to work 20 hours per week in the ICU at a competitive wage to do many of the same tasks that he did in his internship rotation to include stocking bedside carts, stocking linen in patient rooms, removing soiled linen from the unit, restocking syringes in 2 cabinets, and making lab deliveries as needed.

Jason's quality and quantity of work is inconsistent, though the unit is pleased with all of the work that he does accomplish in a day. He has an iPod Touch that contains a checklist of supplies for bedside carts, photos of properly stocked carts, and reminder alarms. Jason's job coach has created several schedules and daily logs to hold him accountable for both the work that he completes and the way that he spends his time during his work day. These tools have been adjusted many times to better accommodate his needs. Jason is occasionally misinterpreted as speaking to people in a condescending/rude manner though that is not his intent. His job coach continues to work with him and the people on his unit to ensure that the supports in place are being used properly and updated as needed.

JEREMY SICILE-KIRA

My First Experience with Work

My early experiences with work were with my mom and my high school teacher. When WorkAbility told them I was not ready for the community, they decided to create a job for me. They figured out a way for me to earn money based on my nice teacher's realization that there was a market not being met: teachers who could not leave campus for lunch. I took orders for sandwiches and earned one dollar for each sandwich I delivered from the health food store.

The next year I put together flowers I bought at a wholesaler and nicely sold them at lunchtime to students. I learned about the cost of doing business and profit and loss. I made enough money to get my assistance dog, Handsome. My mom made me pay for the costs of everything for doing my business. I even put in a bid to do the flowers for a wedding, and I got the job. I paid the support staff and driver to help me and I still made a profit.



Here are some lessons I learned from my self-employment experiences at school:

- The less you sell the less you make.
- You must take in more than you spend.
- The number of buyers is related to the amount they are willing to spend.
- Money plays an important part in everyone's life.

I think these are good lessons for everyone to learn.

Now I earn a little money by helping people - I write articles and present at conferences or disability awareness events about autism. I even got a contract to write a book, [A Full Life with Autism \(Macmillan 2012\)](#). I hope to earn more money in the future.





AMY GRAVINO

Amy is a self-advocate and college coach, consultant & speaker at A.S.C.O.T Coaching, LLC

Lessons Learned: Thinking Outside of the Cubicle

When it comes to working in an office environment, there is very little room for those who think outside the cubicle. To me, that's what people with autism are and do, and in a place where you're expected to conform and follow the rules, this often can lead to real trouble. I took a position as a file clerk in a college Dean's Office, which I'd gotten through a temp agency. It was one of only a few attempts at employment that I made while I was living in Seattle several years ago—alone and 3,000 miles away from my friends and family. The agency did not specialize in autism or Asperger's Syndrome, or finding employment for people on the spectrum. There was no on-site support in place; no one for me to check in with or whom I could ask for help if I needed it.



So when I got in trouble for bringing a chair into my workspace to sit on, there was nobody who could make me understand why.

I shared the office that I was in with two other people—a man, and a woman. Both of them sat in chairs at their desks. I stood by the cabinet against the wall, filing papers as my position entailed. After a while, my back began to hurt, and that was when I brought in the chair.

When they held a meeting about the chair, I grew upset—but at myself, for not knowing better. Soon this led to workplace behaviors that in hindsight I know were inappropriate, but at the time, I didn't: lying down on the white couch in the lobby, for instance, or taking my designated breaks in the office instead of going out, as I was apparently required to do.

It was then that I realized that there was one thing I could do that I thought would make things better for me: disclose my Asperger's diagnosis. Normally, I'm completely open about it, but having heard so many horror stories about individuals on the spectrum never getting past the interview phase because of disclosing, I chose not to do so at the start.

It was one of my colleagues whom I first told—the man with whom I shared the office. I had planned to tell my supervisor that same day, but before I had the chance, my co-worker went and told her first, and I was called into another meeting. My supervisor insisted on knowing why I hadn't told her, and said that it was something she would have needed to know. Soon after, my supervisor's supervisor decided that they no longer needed a temp employee, and I was let go.

Because of this—because of the shame, the embarrassment, and the overall blow to my self-esteem—that job was the last office job that I took, and I have not tried to get one since. But there were things that I learned because of what happened, and as a result, I do not feel it was an entirely negative experience. The unspoken social rules of an office environment are a challenge for me, and I cannot pick up on them inherently as others can. Yet, if I am carefully taught something, step-by-step, I can do it without a problem.

For me, this means that my ideal work environment is one where I won't be afraid to ask for help, and when I do, I actually get it. Like all individuals on the spectrum, I have a great deal of potential, but only if employers themselves can learn to think outside the cubicle.





My Employment Rights

There are a number of important federal laws that protect individuals with disabilities from discrimination in employment and the job application process. These laws are outlined below.

Americans with Disabilities Act

The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 prohibits discrimination based on disability. Under this act, disability is defined as “a **physical or mental impairment that substantially limits a major life activity**”. The ADA requires employers with 15 or more employees to provide a reasonable accommodation for the individual with the disability. A “reasonable accommodation” is defined as any change or adjustment to a job or work environment that permits a qualified applicant or employee with a disability to participate in the job application process, to perform the essential functions of a job, or to enjoy benefits and privileges of employment equal to those enjoyed by employees without disabilities.



Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (PL 93-112)

The Rehabilitation Act is an act of Congress signed into law by President Richard M. Nixon on September 26, 1973. It prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability in programs conducted by federal agencies, in programs receiving federal financial assistance, in federal employment, and in the employment practices of federal contractors. Section 504 of the Act (see below) created and extended civil rights protections to people with disabilities. As a direct result of the Rehabilitation Act, many people with disabilities were provided opportunities in education and employment. The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 was amended in 1978 (to establish independent living centers), 1986 (to enhance support for rehabilitation engineering), 1992 (to ensure consumer choice in career opportunities), and 1998 (to provide federal funds to assist people with disabilities in finding meaningful employment).

Section 503

Section 503 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 prohibits discrimination and requires employers with federal contracts or subcontracts that exceed \$10,000 to take affirmative action to hire, retain, and promote qualified individuals with disabilities. This law is enforced by the Employment Standards Administration’s Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs (OFCCP) within the U.S. Department of Labor.





Section 504

Section 504 states that "no qualified individual with a disability in the United States shall be excluded from, denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under" any program or activity that either receives federal financial assistance or is conducted by any executive agency or the United States Postal Service. Basically, this means all government-funded programs/entities must adhere to this law, meaning they cannot discriminate against an employee with a disability, or a potential employee with a disability.

Enforcing the Laws

Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC)

The EEOC enforces laws against workplace discrimination on the basis of an individual's race, color, national origin, religion, sex, disability, and age. The law also protects people from discrimination based on their relationship with a person with a disability (even if they do not themselves have a disability). For example, it is illegal to discriminate against an employee because her husband has a disability. It is illegal to harass an applicant or employee because he or she has a disability, had a disability in the past, or is believed to have a physical or mental impairment that is not transitory (lasting or expected to last six months or less) and minor (even if he or she does not have such an impairment). Harassment can include, for example, offensive remarks about a person's disability. Although the law does not prohibit simple teasing, off-hand comments, or isolated incidents that aren't very serious, harassment is illegal when it is so frequent or severe that it creates a hostile or offensive work environment or when it results in an adverse employment decision (such as the victim being fired or demoted).

Resources if you feel your rights have been violated

- [Filing a charge of discrimination with the EEOC](#)
- [U.S. Department of Justice – Civil Rights Division](#)
- [National Disability Rights Network](#)





Glossary Terms

- ***Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA; PL 101-336)***: ADA prohibits discrimination based on disability in numerous venues, including (but not limited to) employment, public entities/transportation, public accommodations, and telecommunications.
- ***Autism Spectrum Disorders***: Developmental disabilities significantly affecting verbal and non-verbal communication, and social interaction, generally evident before age 3, that adversely affect a child's educational performance. Other characteristics often associated with autism are engagement in repetitive activities and stereotyped movements, resistance to environmental changes or changes in daily routines, and unusual responses to sensory experiences.
- ***Competitive Employment***: Full-time or part-time work in a business that pays commensurate wages – at or above minimum wage, and benefits equal with co-workers.
- ***Customized Job***: The creation of a new or negotiation of an existing job description in a business for an individual with a disability.
- ***Customized Employment***: A process for individualizing the employment relationship between a job seeker or an employee and an employer in ways that meet the needs of both.
- ***Day Programs and Sheltered Workshops***: Segregated programs that offer skills training, pre-vocational training, make-work vocational activities, field trips, recreation, and other types of special education–related curricula for individuals with severe disabilities.
- ***Developmental Disability***: A lifelong disability that can be attributed to mental and/or physical impairments and manifests before the age of 22.
- ***Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (EHA; PL 94-142)***: EHA was the predecessor of IDEA and required public schools that accepted federal education funding to provide education to students with physical and mental disabilities. Schools are also required to assess students with disabilities to evaluate their performance and create an appropriate educational program for them.
- ***Employment First***: A concept built upon the notion that competitive employment should be the first choice for all persons with disabilities.
- ***Employment Specialist***: A vocational rehabilitation professional who assists individuals with the most severe disabilities with gaining and maintaining work using an individualized supported employment approach; also known as a job coach.
- ***The Home and Community Based Services Medicaid Waiver (HCBS)***: Funding that can be accessed by Community Service Boards and agencies to assist individuals with disabilities with housing, supported living services and employment supports; that is targeted towards providing services in the community for individuals who without these services, because of the significant nature of their disability and resulting support needs, would need to live in an institutional setting.





- ***Impairment-Related Work Expense:*** A Social Security work incentive that can be used to pay for items that are necessary to work and are incurred due to the individual's disability.
- ***Job Development:*** The process of creating a work opportunity on behalf of a jobseeker with a disability that is achieved by earning an opportunity to connect with an employer to learn about business needs and operations and then moving on to propose a job description and get a commitment from the employer to meet and possibly hire the person.
- ***Medicaid:*** A health program for people with limited incomes and resources. Medicaid was established by a 1965 amendment (Title XIX) to the Social Security Act. The program is jointly funded by the state and federal governments, and is managed by the states. Eligibility is determined by a means test, which establishes whether an individual is sufficiently indebted or indigent.
- ***Medicare:*** The United States' social insurance program that was established by the Social Security Act of 1965 (signed into law by President Lyndon Johnson on July 30, 1965) and is administered by the United States government. It provides health insurance coverage to persons aged 65 and over, persons under 65 with physically disabling conditions or congenital physical disabilities, or others who meet certain legal criteria.
- ***Plan for Achieving Self-Support (PASS):*** A provision of the Supplemental Security Income (SSI) section of the Social Security Act that enables people with disabilities to return to work. PASS allows its users to set aside money and/or items in service of a particular work goal.
- ***Public-Private Partnership:*** A service or business venture that is funded and operated through a partnership of government and one or more private sector companies.
- ***Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (PL 93-112):*** An act of Congress that prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability in programs conducted by federal agencies, in programs receiving federal financial assistance, in Federal employment, and in the employment practices of federal contractors. Section 504 of the Act created and extended civil rights protections to people with disabilities.
- ***Social Security:*** A social welfare and insurance program more properly known as the Old-Age, Survivors, and Disability Insurance (OASDI) program. Created by the Social Security Act of 1935, it has been part of each amendment of the Social Security Act since its inception.
- ***Social Security Administration:*** An independent agency of the United States government that administers Social Security benefits.
- ***Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI):*** A Social Security Administration program that provides benefits to people with disabilities (including those with visual impairments) who are "insured" by workers' contributions to the Social Security trust fund, based on one's wage earnings (or those of one's spouse or parents) as required by the Federal Insurance Contributions Act (FICA). Title II of the Social Security Act authorizes SSDI benefits.





- **State Developmental Disability Agency:** State agencies that offer services to individuals with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities and may operate under a variety of different names such as the local Community Service Boards. Some states operate these services under direct state supervision of local agencies. These local boards and/or state-directed programs frequently also serve individuals with disabilities based on mental health and/or substance abuse issues. Eligibility for these services is usually based on the presence of a disability that meets specific state guidelines, and these eligibility criteria will vary from state to state and may include case management along with a variety of other services (housing, employment, etc.).
- **Student Earned Income Exclusion (SEIE):** A Supplemental Security Income (SSI) provision whereby a person with a disability under the age of 22 who is regularly attending school can exclude a certain amount of their earnings from their reported income (for the purposes of receiving SSI).
- **Substantial Gainful Activity (SGA):** A term used (in the Social Security Act) to describe the level of work activity a person has or the earnings one receives. Work is “substantial” if it involves doing significant physical or mental activities or a combination of both. For work activity to be substantial, it does not need to be performed on a full-time basis. “Gainful” work activity is work performed for pay or profit; work of a nature generally performed for pay or profit; or work intended for profit, whether or not a profit is realized.
- **Supported Employment (SE):** A federally-funded program to facilitate competitive employment in integrated settings for people with moderate-to-severe disabilities who need ongoing support to succeed in a work environment. Such support could include job coaches, transportation, assistive technology, specialized job training, and individualized supervision.
- **Task Analysis:** Using a Task Analysis that you develop with your job coach will help you learn the job. Task analysis is the process of breaking a skill down into smaller, more manageable components:
 - Step 1. Identifying the target skill
 - Step 2. Identifying the prerequisite skills of the learner and the materials needed to teach the task
 - Step 3. Breaking the skill into components
 - Step 4. Confirming that the task is completely analyzed
 - Step 5. Determining how the skill will be taught
 - Step 6. Implementing intervention and monitoring progress
- **Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Counselor:** A professional who is a fundamental partner in transition who can assist eligible youths with employment by providing guidance and counseling, vocational assessment, job placement and/or other services such as supported employment for youth with severe disabilities.
- **Workplace and Job Analysis:** An analysis of workplace factors and job characteristics that is conducted during job development in order to examine how an existing position may meet a particular jobseeker’s abilities and expectations and/or determine possible ways to create or develop a new job description for an individual with a disability that will benefit the business.
- **Workplace Supports:** Supports that exist in a workplace that are available to all employees and may be categorized as environmental, procedural or natural.





Employment Resources

- **Asperger Syndrome Training & Employment Partnership (ASTEP)** aims to help employers create a more inclusive workplace environment for existing employees with Asperger Syndrome and high-functioning autism (AS/HFA) and to bring together employers and vocational support professionals to successfully recruit and integrate individuals with AS/HFA. ASTEP does this by Educating Employers & Building Relationships.
- **Aspiritech** is a non-profit organization in IL with a mission to provide a path for high functioning individuals on the Autism Spectrum to realize their potential through gainful employment.
- **AskEARN.org** supports employers in recruiting, hiring, retaining and advancing qualified individual with disabilities through consultation and technical assistance, customized training, online resources and links to state and local community-based organization serving job seekers with disabilities. The Employer Reference Desk found on the home page of this website contains useful resources that can be used to support employers in hiring and employing individuals with disabilities.
- **Association of People Supporting Employment First (APSE)** is a national organization with an exclusive focus on integrated employment and career advancement opportunities for individuals with disabilities. APSE's HR Connect offers consultation services to help businesses reach out to and partner with one of the strongest labor and customer pools in the country: the disability community.
- **AutismCandles.com** specializes in hand-poured, soybean wax, richly scented goodness. Beginning as a social awareness project in Northern California, the candle-making venture was founded by self-advocate Nathan Young. The business has achieved much success and recognition over the past several years, putting tens of thousands of project candles into the hands of the local population.
- **Autism Speaks** is the world's leading autism science and advocacy organization, dedicated to funding research into the causes, prevention, treatments and a cure for autism; increasing awareness of autism spectrum disorders; and advocating for the needs of individuals with autism and their families.
- **Autism in the Workplace** (Autism Speaks) highlights individuals with autism who are working as well as testimonials from their employers. This page should serve as a source of inspiration and resources for individuals with autism spectrum disorders, as well as for prospective employers.
- **Autism Speaks Employment Think Tank Executive Summary** provides a summary of an intensive two-day think tank that took place in June on the role of adults with autism spectrum disorders in the workforce and the needs of the current labor market. Participants in the June event included individuals with autism and their family members, business leaders, small business owners, service providers and academic researchers.
- **Autism Speaks Technology Central** is designed to provide the autism community with the latest information, tools, and resources so that everyone can benefit from the great strides being made in the world of technology.
- **Benefit Eligibility Screening Tool (BEST)** helps you find out if you could get benefits that Social Security administers. Based on your answers to questions, this tool will list benefits for which you might be eligible and tell you more information about how to qualify and apply.
- **Center for Medicaid & Medicare Services (CMS)** is a federal agency within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) that administers the Medicare program and works in partnership with state governments to administer Medicaid, the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP), and health insurance portability standards.
- **Center for Universal Design, NC State University** has worked since 1989 on accessible design for environments and products.





- **Cornell University's Industrial and Labor Relations (ILR) School** aims to prepare leaders, inform national and international employment and labor policy, and improve working lives. The school offers undergraduate and graduate education as well as career-long learning for professionals.
 - **Employment & Disability Institute** contributes to developing inclusive workplace systems and communities in a variety of ways. The EDI team engages in research and produces scholarly articles, develops training materials, conducts training sessions domestically and internationally, and offers technical assistance on a wide array of disability-related matters.
 - **Person-Centered Planning Education Site** provides a description of person-centered planning and offers a free self-study course.
 - **PASS Online** provides basic information about a PASS and also includes a PASS application form.
- **“Developing Self Advocacy Skills: An Integral Aspect of Transition Planning”**, by Val Paradiz. Asperger’s Association of New England (AANE).
- **Disability.gov** is the federal government website for comprehensive information on disability programs and services in communities nationwide. The site links to more than 14,000 resources from federal, state and local government agencies; academic institutions; and nonprofit organizations.
 - **Employment Resource Search** allows you to search for employment resources on a state and national level.
 - **Transportation Resources Search** allows you to search for transportation resources on a state and national level.
- **DiversityInc: Top 10 Companies for People with Disabilities** is an annual list of DiversityInc’s top choices of employers for people with disabilities.
- **Easter Seals Project Action (ESPA)** promotes universal access to transportation for people with disabilities under federal law and beyond by partnering with transportation providers, the disability community and others through the provision of training, technical assistance, applied research, outreach and communication.
- **GCFLearnFree.org** creates and provides quality, innovative online learning opportunities to anyone who wants to improve the technology, literacy and math skills needed to be successful in both work and life. They offer a very helpful “Career” section which includes “Personal Branding.”
- **GettingHired.com** aims to create sustainable employment growth and opportunity for people with disabilities. Their internet-based portal accomplishes its mission by serving and connecting job seekers with disabilities with committed employers, advocacy organizations and service providers.
- **Choosing the Right Job**, by Temple Grandin. Autism Research Institute, 1999.
- **Institute for Community Inclusion (ICI)** offers training, clinical, and employment services, conducts research, and provides assistance to organizations to promote inclusion of people with disabilities in school, work, and community activities.
- **Job Accommodation Network (JAN)** is a source of free, expert, and confidential guidance on workplace accommodations and disability employment issues. Working toward practical solutions that benefit both employer and employee, JAN helps people with disabilities enhance your employability, and shows employers how to capitalize on the value and talent that people with disabilities add to the workplace.





- **JobTIPS - www.Do2Learn.com** is a free program designed to help individuals with autism spectrum disorder and other learning differences explore career interests, seek and obtain employment, and successfully maintain employment.
- **NISH** is a national nonprofit agency whose mission is to create employment opportunities for people with severe disabilities by securing federal contracts through the **AbilityOne Program** for its network of community-based, nonprofit agencies.
- **Occupational Information Network (O*Net)** is a primary source of occupational information. Central to the project is the O*NET database, containing information on hundreds of standardized and occupation-specific descriptors. The database, which is available to the public at no cost, is continually updated by surveying a broad range of workers from each occupation.
- **Plan to Achieve Self-Support (PASS)** provides general information PASS from the Social Security Administration.
- **Project SEARCH** is a unique, business led, one year school-to-work program that takes place entirely at the workplace. Total workplace immersion facilitates a seamless combination of classroom instruction, career exploration, and hands-on training through worksite rotations.
- **Self-Employment Technical Assistance, Resources, & Training (START-UP USA)** provides technical assistance and disseminates resources nationally to individuals interested in pursuing self-employment.
- **Small Business Administration (SBA)** has delivered millions of loans, loan guarantees, contracts, counseling sessions and other forms of assistance to small businesses.
- Social Networking and Job Search Sites:
 - www.LinkedIn.com
 - www.CareerBuilder.com
 - www.Facebook.com
 - www.Twitter.com
 - www.plus.google.com
 - www.Monster.com
- **Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI)** provides benefits to disabled persons who are “insured” by workers’ contributions to the Social Security trust fund. These contributions are based on your earnings or those of your spouse or parents).
- **Social Security Office Locator** provides information and directions to the Social Security office that serves your area, just enter your U.S. Postal Service five-digit ZIP code on this page and select Locate. You’ll get information about your local Social Security office and other agencies in your area that may be able to help you.
- **SSI Impairment-Related Work Expenses (IRWE)** provides an in-depth looks at some of the IRWE program rules. It is designed to help you through the process of applying for and receiving IRWE benefits.
- **State Directory of Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Agencies** provides a state-by-state list of contact information for state VR agencies. Agencies are state-supported divisions of services that assist individuals with disabilities who are pursuing meaningful careers.





- **Statewide Independent Living Councils (SILCs)** are community-based, cross-disability, non-profit organizations that are designed and operated by people with disabilities. They are unique in that they operate according to a strict philosophy of consumer control, wherein people with all types of disabilities directly govern and staff the organization.
- **Supplemental Security Income (SSI)** program pays benefits to disabled adults and children who have limited income and resources.
- **Think Beyond the Label** offers job seekers a network and digital hub that provides information, tools and resources to aid in your job search so you can find meaningful employment in your chosen field. Their jobs feed allows users to search and apply for jobs with companies that are actively seeking to hire you.
- **Think College** is an initiative of the Institute for Community Inclusion (ICI) at the University of Massachusetts Boston. ICI currently has three federal grants designed to conduct research and provide training and technical assistance for professionals, families, and students related to postsecondary education for individuals with intellectual and other developmental disabilities.
- **Ticket to Work & Workforce Investment Act** provides an introduction to the Ticket to Work program by the Social Security Administration.
- **U.S. Business Leadership Network (USBLN)** is a national non-profit, non-partisan business to business network promoting workplaces, marketplaces, and supply chains where people with disabilities are included.
 - **“Leading Practices on Disability Inclusion”** is a publication that highlights successful strategies that can be used by businesses of all sizes to create a more inclusive workplace, marketplace, and supply chain.
- **U.S. Department of Labor** is a Cabinet department of the federal government of the United States. Its purpose is to foster, promote, and develop the welfare of the wage earners, job seekers, and retirees of the U.S.; improve working conditions; advance opportunities for profitable employment; and assure work-related benefits and rights.
 - **Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP)** provides national leadership by developing and influencing disability employment-related policies and practices affecting an increase in the employment of people with disabilities.
 - **“Skills to Pay the Bills: Mastering Soft Skills for Workplace Success”** is a curriculum developed by ODEP that focuses on teaching “soft” or workforce readiness skills to youth, including youth with disabilities.
 - Bureau of Labor Statistics: **The Fastest Growing Jobs Over the Next 10 Years**
 - Bureau of Labor Statistics: **Occupational Outlook Handbook** is a list of the 20 occupations with the highest projected numeric change in employment.
- **U.S. Jobs Disability (by the National Labor Exchange)** provides a place where you can make your resume available to leading U.S. employers, save your searches, and schedule “Job Search Agents” to search for new matches automatically on your own schedule.
- **Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) Rehabilitation Research & Training Center** provides resources for professionals, individuals with disabilities, and their representatives.
- **Vocational Rehabilitation Agency (VR or Voc Rehab)** is a state-supported division of services that assists individuals with disabilities who are pursuing meaningful careers. VR assists those individuals to secure gainful employment commensurate with their abilities and capabilities through local job searches and awareness of self-employment and telecommuting opportunities.





A “Step-by-Step” Guide to Your Employment Search

Even though we’ve given you action steps in each section of this Tool Kit, use this list as a summary to jump-start your job search process.

1. Use a binder to create a portfolio with all of your employment-related information that you have and that you will collect. You can also create a folder on the computer that can keep your online employment-related files.
2. Write about what you see yourself doing in the future. You can list your dream job and jobs that you would be willing to do. ([What Job is Right for You? Section](#))
3. Create a list of your strengths – write down your skills and what you do best. ([What Job is Right for You? Section](#))
4. Create a list of jobs that you may be interested in trying. ([What Job is Right for You? Section](#))
5. List businesses that are accessible to you via public transportation, walking distance, etc. ([Transportation Options Section](#))
6. Speak with a Vocational Rehabilitation counselor about the supports that you can get – that may include help with writing a resume, job development and job coaching. ([Benefits and Funding Section](#))
7. Make a list of all of your contacts who could help you get a job. ([Your Job Search Section](#))
8. Consider joining social networking and job search websites to help you expand your contact list – check out [LinkedIn](#), [Facebook](#), [Google+](#), [CareerBuilder](#) and others. ([Your Job Search Section](#))
9. Write a good resume. Make sure you include your name, address, telephone number, and e-mail address. Then list your education and training experiences. And then list your work history and experience. Make sure you include any non-paid work experiences too, such as internships and volunteer activities. ([Resumes, Cover Letters & Applications Section](#))
10. Write a cover letter. This will be used to introduce yourself to the people you hope will hire you. It should be concise – simply identify who you are and why you are applying for the job. It also should invite the employer to contact you for an interview. Make sure to include a copy of your resume with your cover letter. ([Resumes, Cover Letters & Applications Section](#))
11. Fill out several job applications! This is often how the employment process begins, and it may be the first impression an employer has of you. You can go to the actual job site to ask for an application – if so, make sure you wear clothes that are clean and ironed. Be polite and bring a pen and a copy of your resume with you. If possible, take the application home with you so you can fill it out in a familiar, stress-free environment. And remember that neatness counts, so if you have trouble with your handwriting, ask someone for help or use a computer. ([Resumes, Cover Letters & Applications Section](#))
12. Prepare outfits for an interview. If you’d like to be treated like a professional, try your best to dress like one. ([The Job Interview Section](#))
13. Practice your interviewing skills. Have a friend or support person ask you practice questions. Try to make this as realistic as possible (practice introducing yourself, shaking hands, making appropriate eye contact, and sit down across a desk from each other, etc.). Make sure you arrive at the interview location early (say, 15 minutes before the appointment). And remember to focus on your abilities, not your disabilities – tell them about your strengths, not your weaknesses! ([The Job Interview Section](#))
14. Consider taping your interviews so you can listen or watch later and learn from what you did well or where you might need improvement. ([The Job Interview Section](#))





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