



## AWARENESS

# AUTISM AWARENESS IN THE WORKPLACE

**World Autism Awareness Day (WAAD) is celebrated on the 2nd of April every year. It's a permanent fixture on the global health calendar to raise awareness about autism and encourage early diagnosis and treatment.**

### What is autism?

Autism is a complex developmental disability that generally causes problems with social interaction and communication. People with autism can have very different symptoms. Healthcare providers think of autism as a 'spectrum disorder' (ASD), a group of disorders with similar features. One person may have mild symptoms, while another may have serious symptoms.

### What are the symptoms of autism?

The main signs and symptoms of autism involve having problems in the following areas:

- **Communication:** Both verbal (spoken) and non-verbal, may have trouble holding a conversation, often repeating words or actions.
- **Social:** Difficulty sharing emotions, understanding how others think and feel, or behaving awkwardly in group interactions.
- **Obsessively following routines or schedules.**

### Embracing autism in the workplace

As society becomes more aware of autism and the different ways it manifests, companies are actively starting to recruit people with autism spectrum disorders.

In fact, many people with high functioning autism are often extremely bright and have exceptional skills.

Here are some tips for hiring and managing employees with ASD, according to the National Autistic Society (UK):

- **Clarify job expectations and provide** clear and structured training.
- **Organise tasks into a timetable**, breaking up larger tasks into small steps.
- **Be mindful of sensory distractions.** Autistic employees sometimes benefit from using noise-cancelling headphones or having their desk cornered off.
- **Promote kindness and patience** by providing other staff with information and sensitivity training.
- **Give information about any changes** relating to tasks or routine well in advance and provide reassurance in stressful situations.

Autistic employees may need some support within the workplace but can be highly valuable team members, especially when given the confidence to utilise their strengths.