



SESSION V: Transition to employment and independent living

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The purpose of these materials is to help provide an introduction to the INSAR Institute session on understanding barriers and facilitators that influence autistic individuals' transition through different life stages. The materials were designed to prepare students and trainees who are unfamiliar with this research with the general background to get the most educational benefit from the session. Toward this objective, we have prepared the following: (1) learning objectives for this session, (2) key terms and concepts, (3) a selection of recommended resources for further reading on the topic. These materials are considered supplemental to the presentation. In collaboration with Dr. Ashwin, Dr. Brosnan, and Mr. Corless, these materials were developed by **Charlotte Pretzsch, PhD** (postdoctoral researcher at King's College London; charlotte.pretzsch@kcl.ac.uk), **Jiedi Lei, MSc.** (doctoral student at the University of Bath; j.lei@bath.ac.uk), **Alan Gerber** (clinical psychology doctoral student at Stony Brooks University; alan.gerber@stonybrook.edu), and **Sowmyashree Kaku, PhD.** (Senior Research Associate and Child Psychiatrist at Center for Advanced Research and Excellence in Autism and Developmental Disorders at the St. Johns National Academy of Health Sciences, Bangalore, India; sowmeey@gmail.com).

Feel free to contact us with questions/comments. Register for this course and other sessions in this series at https://www.autism-insar.org/general/custom.asp?page=SI_Landing.

Learning Objectives

The INSAR Institute for Autism Research was established in direct response to requests from students and trainees for multidisciplinary training opportunities. The INSAR Institute priorities are to provide a (1) freely available, (2) multidisciplinary training platform for young scientists and others from various backgrounds, that (3) allows for international participation. The overarching goal of the INSAR Institute is to expose junior scientists to topics they are not currently engaged in, with the hope that basic scientists and clinical scientists may learn from each other to ultimately advance the understanding of autism.

The current session, *Transition to employment and independent living*, is led by Dr. Chris Ashwin, Dr. Mark Brosnan, and Mr. Lee Corless. A team of trainees who worked in tandem to prepare this handout and the web presentation. *Throughout the session, participants will learn about:*

1. **Recognise** employment rates in autistic people, which are very low despite the strengths of autistic people that make them well suited to many job roles
2. **Understand** how people with autism can be very successful in employment given some minor adjustment in the working environment
3. **Learn** about a global programme developed by JP Morgan, who have recognised this talent of autistic workers, to hire and support employees with autism in a variety of jobs
4. **Learn** about a collaborative initiative with CAAR at the University of Bath to develop the Bath Employment Spring School for Autism (BESSA) to help support autistic students transitioning into employment

Key Terms

Adaptive Behavior: Adaptive behavior is best understood as the degree to which people are able to function and maintain themselves independently and meet cultural expectations for personal and social responsibility at various ages. As such, adaptive behavior involves a person's physical skills, cognitive ability, affect, motivation, culture, socioeconomic status, family, and environment. Autistic people often demonstrate a discrepancy between intellectual potential and consistently-displayed adaptive skills.

Autism Spectrum Disorder:

→ **Diagnostic criteria:** The two core diagnostic criteria for autism described by Diagnostic Statistical Manual-5 are as follows -

- 1) **Restricted, Repetitive Behaviors, Interests, or Activities:** Repetitive behaviors occur over and over or are stereotyped. They can involve motor movements, use of objects, or speech. Restricted interests are highly restricted, fixated interests that are atypical in intensity or focus. There may be an insistence on sameness of activities or inflexible adherence to routines.
- 2) **Social Communication:** Social communication is a broad term that describes verbal and nonverbal behaviors used to interact with others. Examples include, but are not limited to, speech, prosody, gestures, and facial expressions. These behaviors can be used to initiate or respond to joint attention, to share emotion with others, or to signal when one person wants the attention of another person, and many other uses. Difficulties with social communication are a diagnostic characteristic of autism. (More information: <https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/autism/hcp-dsm.html>)

→ **Heterogeneity in autism:** Autism spectrum disorder has been associated with many environmental and genetic risk factors (e.g., autism has been associated with more than 500 genetic risk factors). Similarly, there is a wide range of clinical phenotypes. Several researchers suggest that biomarker approaches that stratify the autism population into clinically and biologically meaningful subgroups may be helpful.

→ **Strengths in Autism:** while some areas of research tend to focus on weaknesses in ASD, it is crucial to note that ASD can also be accompanied by a wealth of strengths. Many of these can help in the context of employment. For instance, research studies have shown that autistic individuals may have strengths in paying attention to details, focusing and concentrating on particular topics, recognizing patterns, mathematical reasoning, and visual thinking. Strategies to enhance employment in ASD should aim to harness these strengths.

Autism at Work Initiative (JP Morgan): *Autism at Work* program is an initiative led by JP Morgan to hire people on the autism spectrum—a traditionally underemployed population—for positions that can put their talents to use while catering to their specific environmental needs. You can learn more about Autism at Work here:

<https://www.jpmorganchase.com/corporate/news/insights/jmahoney-autism-at-work-program.htm>

BESSA: Bath Employment Spring School for Autism, an event aimed at facilitating graduate-level employment for autistic university students and recent university graduates. It is developed by CAAR and JP Morgan and therefore represents a collaboration between business and academia.

CAAR: Centre for Applied Autism Research, a research institute at the University of Bath. The research of CAAR focuses on the strengths and challenges experienced by autistic people, and on developing practical applications through participatory research to support the autism community.

Dual Process theory: A theory of cognition. It proposes that there are two different reasoning processes in humans: an intuitive style that is quick and automatic, and a deliberative style that takes more effort. Some researchers think that the autistic brain may be more prone to using deliberative reasoning compared to intuition.

(Un)Employment in ASD: a key issue raised in this webinar series is the low employment rate in ASD. The exact numbers may differ between countries. However, on average, 50-70% of autistic adults may be unemployed, including many with high functioning ASD. Among those individuals that are in employment, many switch jobs frequently, find it difficult to adjust to new jobs, and are often paid less than their peers. This means that programs such as BESSA are urgently needed to enhance employment in ASD.

Neurodivergence: A neurodivergent person is defined as one whose neurological development and state are atypical compared to “neurotypical development”. The term was coined in the neurodiversity movement as an opposite for “neurotypical” - previously the term “neurodiverse” was sometimes applied to individuals for this purpose.

You can read more about it here: <https://www.disabled-world.com/disability/awareness/neurodiversity/>

Neurodiversity: is an emerging principle of conceptualising autism and other conditions. It refers to the variation in cognitive functioning etc. within our species. Specifically, it suggests that there is no “right” or “normal” type of brain, but rather a variety of (neuro)diverse types.

Reasonable adjustments at work: A ‘reasonable adjustment’ is a change to remove or reduce the effect of:

- an employee’s disability so they can do their job
 - a job applicant’s disability when applying for a job
- The reasonable adjustment could be to:
- the workplace
 - the ways things are done
 - get someone to help the employee or job applicant

You can read more about reasonable adjustments here:

<https://www.acas.org.uk/reasonable-adjustments>

Recommended Resources

- Read more about the Centre for Applied Autism Research (CAAR):
<https://www.bath.ac.uk/research-centres/centre-for-applied-autism-research/>
- Read more about the Bath Employment Spring School for Autism (BESSA):
<https://www.bath.ac.uk/events/bath-employment-spring-school-for-autism-2019/>
- Read more about JPMorgan's Autism at Work Initiative here:
<https://www.jporganchase.com/corporate/news/insights/jmahoney-autism-at-work-program.htm>

Recommended Reading

- Wong J, Coster WJ, Cohn ES, Orsmond GI. Identifying School-Based Factors that Predict Employment Outcomes for Transition-Age Youth with Autism Spectrum Disorder [published online ahead of print, 2020 Apr 30]. *J Autism Dev Disord*. 2020;10.1007/s10803-020-04515-2. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-020-04515-2>
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- Lei, J., Brosnan, M., Ashwin, C., & Russell, A. (2020). Evaluating the Role of Autistic Traits, Social Anxiety, and Social Network Changes During Transition to First Year of University in Typically Developing Students and Students on the Autism Spectrum. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-020-04391-w>
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- Hendricks, D. (2010). Employment and adults with autism spectrum disorders: Challenges and strategies for success. *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation* **32**, 125-134. <https://doi.org/10.3233/JVR-2010-0502>
- Baron-Cohen, S., Ashwin, E., Ashwin, C., Tavassoli, T., & Chakrabarti, B. (2009). Talent in autism: hyper-systemizing, hyper-attention to detail and sensory hypersensitivity.

Philosophical transactions of the Royal Society of London. Series B, Biological sciences, 364(1522), 1377–1383. <https://doi.org/10.1098/rstb.2008.0337>

- Happé F, Vital P. What aspects of autism predispose to talent?. *Philos Trans R Soc Lond B Biol Sci*. 2009;364(1522):1369-1375. <https://doi.org/10.1098/rstb.2008.0332>
- Grandin, T. (2007). Thinking in pictures. *Bloomsbury Publishing*

Ways to get involved:

Ambassadors for Autism in the workplace:

- What adaptations would help you in searching for a job/at work?
www.tinyurl.com/AforAEmployees
- Employers can become *Ambassadors* by making adaptations for autistic candidates/employees:
- www.tinyurl.com/AforAEmployers

For Staff and students in education:

- How inclusive is your educational organisation?
- <https://www.bath.ac.uk/projects/inclusive-universities-project/>