

Knowing your sensory needs

A guide for Autistic jobseekers

Knowing what sensory environment works best for you is a useful starting point - both for assessing whether a workplace is the right fit, and for requesting adjustments that support you to do your best work.

Why sensory environment matters

Everyone experiences their sensory environment differently. For many Autistic people, sensory factors such as noise, lighting, smell, temperature, movement etc can have a significant impact on focus, energy, and wellbeing at work.

Understanding what works for you is not about having a long list of demands. It is about knowing yourself well enough to ask the right questions, and to request the adjustments that will help you do your best work.

Common sensory factors to consider

Think about how each of the following sensory experiences impacts you at work:

- Sounds - for example, background noise, open-plan offices, loud machinery, music
- Sights - for example, bright or flickering lighting, busy visual environments, screen glare
- Smells - for example, strong cleaning products, food, perfumes or fragrances
- Touch - for example, temperature, seating, clothing requirements
- Movement - for example, whether you need to move during the day, stand, or take regular breaks
- Internal sensations - for example, hunger, tiredness, and how these affect your concentration

Noticing which of these have the most impact on you can help you think about what to look for - and what to ask about - when assessing a new workplace.

What adjustments might help

Adjustments to the sensory environment are a normal and reasonable part of inclusive employment. Some examples of sensory adjustments include:

- Access to a quiet workspace or low-stimulation area
- A dedicated desk rather than hot-desking
- Flexibility to use noise-cancelling headphones
- Alternatives to overhead fluorescent lighting - for example, lamps or natural light
- Normalising movement during meetings - for example, standing or stepping out briefly
- Breaks built into longer meetings and group working tasks
- Remote or hybrid work where the home environment is more manageable

This is not an exhaustive list. Adjustments are based on your individual needs - what works for one person may not work for another.

Questions you can ask an employer

Once you have a sense of your own sensory needs, you can use that to ask more targeted questions. Some examples:

- Can you describe the physical environment - for example, whether it's open-plan, the noise levels, and the lighting?
- Is there flexibility around where I work within the office?
- Is remote or hybrid work available, and how does that work in practice for this role?
- How is lighting managed - for example, is there access to natural light or alternatives to overhead lighting?

You do not need to explain why you are asking. A straightforward question about the environment is reasonable at any stage of recruitment.

Remember

You do not need to disclose that you are Autistic to request a sensory adjustment. You can simply describe what you need and how it helps you work effectively. An inclusive employer will treat this as routine.