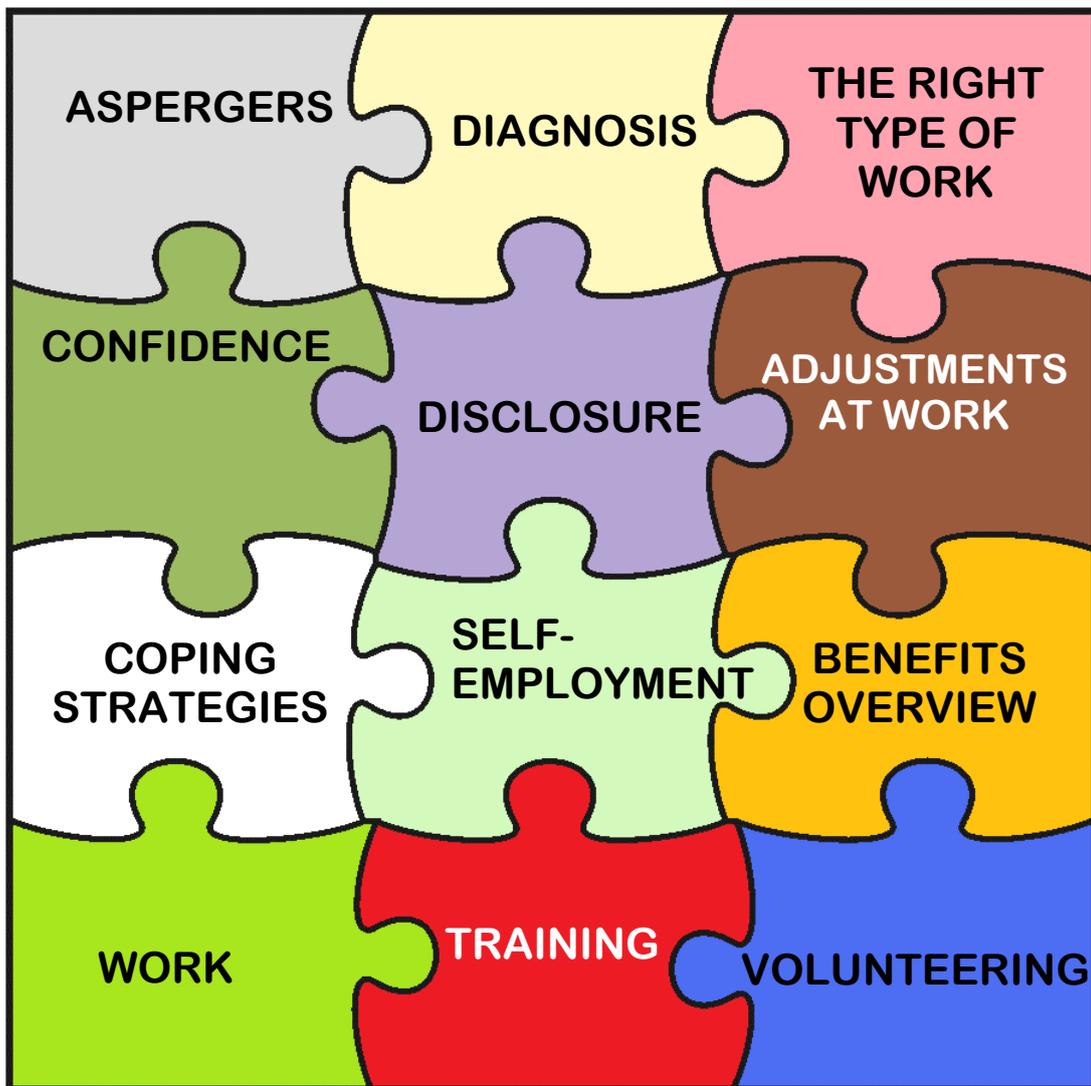




D.A.S.H.

Discovering Autistic Spectrum Happiness

EMPLOYMENT TOOLKIT



DASH EMPLOYMENT TOOLKIT

Introduction

This employment toolkit will hopefully be a useful guide to help you think about and look for work. It is presented in a number of chapters, which explain different aspects of looking for work and staying in work. You can progress through the toolkit in chapter order or just pick chapters that interest you. We hope that this toolkit will help you feel more informed and confident when you look for work and when you are working.

We have tried to keep information simple and straightforward, avoiding jargon whenever possible. Inevitably, some parts of the toolkit will become dated, particularly the chapter on benefits. It is important that you check for the latest advice on any financial or legal matters.

Information Sources

There are so many publications, articles and DVDs on job search and welfare benefits that it is impossible to list them all. Some of these resources become dated and of little value in a short time, others have value for many years. To maintain the value of this toolkit for as long as possible, I have avoided giving resource references or recommending specific tools. The internet has replaced so many of the traditional career choice and job search tools that it has become an indispensable tool for any serious or effective job search.

Web addresses have been provided in some chapters. Please understand that even these can be deleted, amended or become dated.



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CHAPTER 1

DIAGNOSIS

Chapter 1 - Diagnosis and employment

Why is diagnosis important?

Not all people with Asperger's Syndrome will request or require a diagnosis. If you are not experiencing any problems or difficulties in life or at work, there is probably no reason or motivation to seek a diagnosis. However, if you are experiencing difficulties associated with Asperger's (these could be: developing appropriate relationships; coping with sensory sensitivity; managing sudden change; feeling clumsy and ill-coordinated) assessment and diagnosis can be the key to understanding your problems, getting the right support and hopefully leading to a better work-life balance. It can also be a relief to know that the problems you have been experiencing are real and not just a whim or quirk of personality. The sense of relief for many people who receive a diagnosis is palpable.

Without an accurate assessment and diagnosis, many people with Asperger's struggle to make their needs known and accepted. This can lead to potentially serious problems at work, where people can be labelled as 'difficult', 'trouble-makers' or worse, 'aggressive'.

Other people with Asperger's will seek help with anxiety, stress and depression from mental health services, where they can receive a diagnosis such as obsessive compulsive disorder, schizophrenia, depression or anxiety. This can lead to people with Asperger's receiving the wrong clinical treatment and the wrong type of support at work.

A diagnosis is a formal acknowledgement that you have a recognised condition. This will help employers understand that your needs must be taken seriously. The signs and symptoms of Asperger's are recognised as 'qualifying characteristics' under the Equality Act 2010; the Act places certain obligations on employers to support people with 'qualifying characteristics', such as changing interview processes or making adjustments in the workplace. (See chapter 4 for more information on adjustments at work.)

However, a diagnosis is not an 'excuse' for your problems and behaviours at work. Rather, think of it as an 'explanation' that provides the framework for taking positive action to resolve the problems.

Employers are willing to help and support you. A diagnosis can help you understand your particular difficulties, so that you can explain them to an employer and plan adjustments to your work. This will benefit both you and your employer; an effective plan can help **you** be more effective, more efficient, happier and more fulfilled.

Assessment

Swindon NHS first commissioned an Assessment and Diagnostic Service as a pilot scheme in Oct 2010. This is now provided by SEQOL (Swindon's Health and Social Care Social Enterprise) and is accessible to any adult who suspects they may have ASC, via their GP.

When people are referred to this service they are initially offered a self reporting questionnaire that acts as a screening tool for assessment. If you 'score' above a certain threshold, you will be put forward for a full assessment.

The assessment examines specific aspects of social skills, language skills, cognitive abilities, movement skills, specific interests and establishes a developmental history.

It involves client interview, questionnaires and tests, family member interviews and questionnaires; other professional reports and observations can be accessed to reach a conclusion.

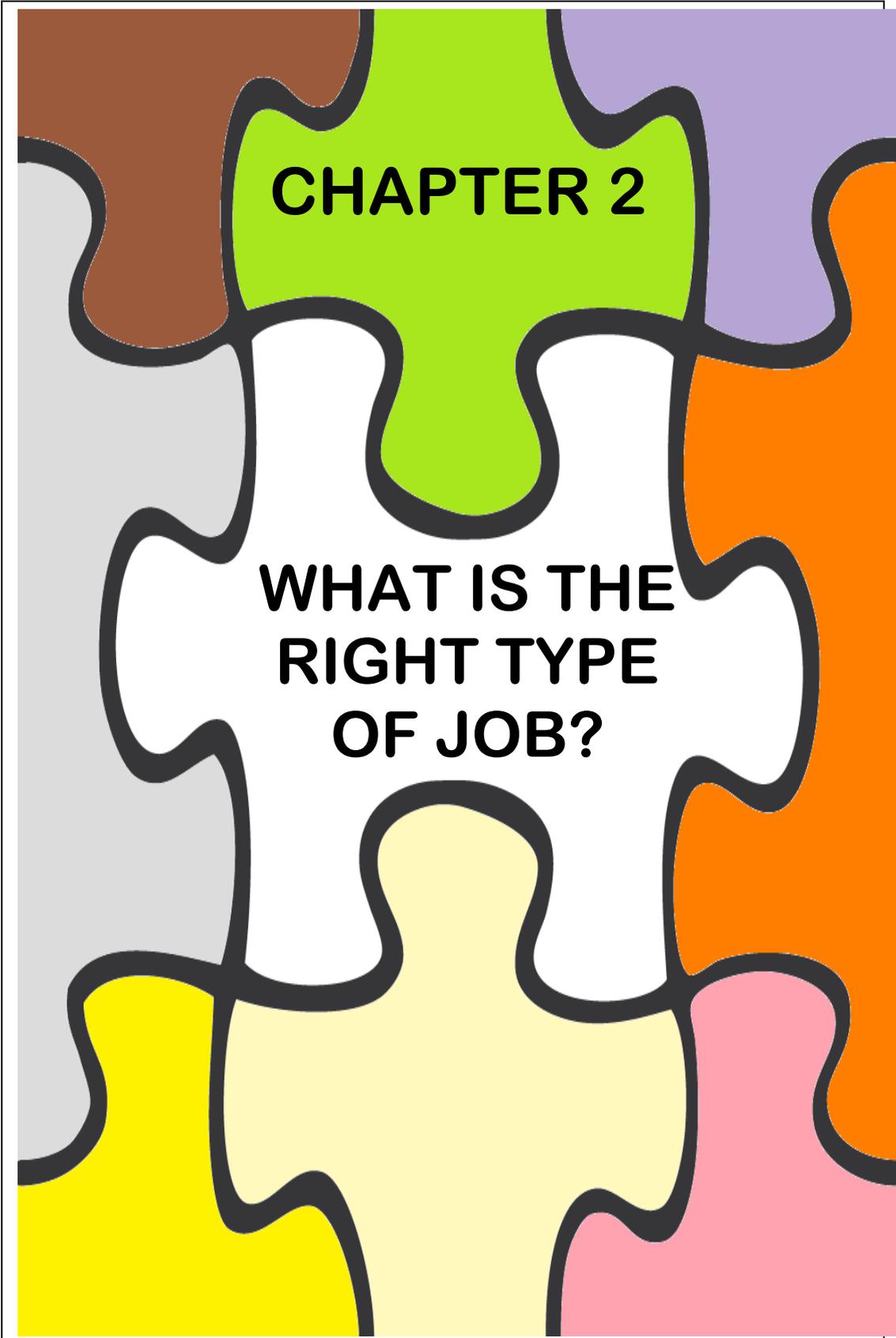
You will receive an in depth assessment to provide a diagnosis of autism spectrum condition (or not), feedback in a supportive environment with the provision of information and signposting towards relevant support agencies, and a follow-up session to help you understand where to go next and how to disclose the diagnosis. You will receive a Self-Advocacy book.

The assessment service is not simply about providing a 'label'. In some instances it will be identifying that people do not have an autism spectrum condition. It will help individuals with complex social, communication and behavioural needs to have a better understanding of their own strengths and needs. It will lead them towards services and support in their community that may be able to help them as well as supporting those services to better understand their needs. The emphasis is to help find practical, forward steps for people, rather than creating further dependencies.

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CHAPTER 2

**WHAT IS THE
RIGHT TYPE
OF JOB?**

Chapter 2 - What is the 'right' type of job for you and is it available?

Background

When you think about the type of work that is right for you it can seem a little overwhelming, but there are tools that you can use to help make the choices simpler and more manageable.

These tools are usually divided into three activities:

- Work Values
- Skills Matching
- Career Choices

Which activity you complete first usually depends on your circumstances and why you are looking for work. As this is an Employment Toolkit, an employment-based approach is suggested. This meets the need of people who want a job now or in the very near future, without the need for extensive training or education. If you are thinking about undertaking education or training but have not decided what course of study you should apply for, you can use this tool but complete activity 3 **career choices** before activity 2 **skills matching**.

This chapter is in three parts or activities.

The first looks at why work is important to you – **work values**.

The second looks at how you can create an effective job choice list – **skills matching**.

The third looks at what you like doing – **career choices**.

Work Values

Background

The first question to ask yourself is “*Why am I looking for a job?*”

The answer might seem obvious but people work for all kinds of reasons, not just for money. Here are some examples:

Feeling useful	Occupying time	High earnings	Meeting people
Feeling important	Making friends	Chance to travel	Learning new skills
Business perks	Promotion	Developing a career	Getting out of debt
Pressure from benefits agency	Feeling independent	Something to talk about with	Maintaining well-being

Your reasons will have an impact on how you decide what work is right for you, so it is important to know what makes work worthwhile to you.

Activity

Make a list of the 10 most important reasons to you. You can use the list above as a guide or add your own reasons. If you struggle to reach 10, the activity is still worthwhile, because the next step is to reduce your list to the top 5 reasons and finally to the top 3 reasons. It does not mean that the other reasons are not important; they are just less important than your top 3.

Your list might look something like this:

Top 10	Top 5	Top 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Feeling useful• Feeling independent• Getting out of debt
			<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Meeting new people• Learning new skills
			<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Perks and fringe benefits• Feeling important• Buying things for my friends and family• Running my own budget• Having something new to talk about

Now you understand what makes work worthwhile for you.

Using the results of this activity

When you look at jobs or think about possible work opportunities you should compare your list with what the job or opportunity offers. You can do this most easily with specific jobs, because the job description is usually available, but you can also compare your list with possible opportunities. For example, you can think of a job, let's use Accounts Assistant as an example. Now compare the work of an Accounts Assistant with your list. How does it match? (the following section on careers choices explains how to find out about jobs and job descriptions)

Very few jobs will match all your reasons for wanting to work and you should not reject possible jobs that do not match your needs exactly, However, if the job has none of your top 3 and very few of your top 10, it's unlikely you will find it very interesting or rewarding.

Skills Matching

Background

Many people say that they will do any job, but studies show that this group of people tend to apply for fewer opportunities and take longer to find work. That is probably because they spend lots of time looking for **anything** and spend little time looking for **something**.

Some people restrict their choices to one or two very specific jobs, but studies show that this group tend to spend a lot of time looking but finding nothing suitable. Consequently, they apply for very few jobs, minimising their chances of finding work.

The most effective job search keeps a balance between looking for anything and looking for a very narrow band of jobs.

So how do I get the balance right?

You need to aim for no more than 3 or 4 main job choices. This will help you focus on looking for jobs that are likely to be available and make it easier to match your skills to these jobs. Skills are such an important part of this step that the following activity concentrates on identifying your skills. Skills are sometimes called *skills set* or *skills matrix*.

Activity 1

Make a list of **all** the things that you are good at.

Has anyone ever praised you for something you have done or complimented you on how well you have done something?

Have you received an award or certificate?

These could indicate things you are good at.

Do not restrict your list to work activity. Think of all aspects of your life; everything you do.

Sometimes, the value of a skill is not immediately obvious in a work environment. As an example, can you think how the following skill might be useful in a work setting?

I am good at swimming

At first, this might seem trivial, unless you are applying to be a lifeguard or swimming pool instructor, but if you think more carefully, this skill will reveal others. For instance, you will have learned to swim, showing the ability to learn new things, you will probably have had to try many times before swimming confidently, showing tenacity and resilience, swimming well shows confidence and independence. All these skills are vital in the workplace.

Keep adding skills to your list as you think of them.

A very small part of your list might look something like this:

Keeping things in order

Good attention to small details

Understanding instructions

Following instructions carefully

Concentrating on a project for long periods without getting distracted

Baking cakes

Conscientious

5 GCSEs

Researching vintage cars

Planning trips to vintage car exhibitions

Using the results of this activity

- **As a confidence boost.** Looking at the list should remind you just how many skills you have to offer.
- **For your CV.** You should identify 5 or 6 top skills to put on your CV. You might need some advice about which skills are most important for the jobs you want to apply for.
- **To tell someone at interview why you are right for the job.** We will look at this in more detail in the **Giving Examples** section.

Extra information

Some other information resources might make a distinction between skills, attributes and achievements. There are differences but most job applications will not require you to make a distinction. Also, the way we use language in most job applications makes it less important to be able to make these fine distinctions than to communicate confidently.

Activity 2

Make a list of jobs that match your skills.

You will almost certainly need to refer to other sources of information to complete this list. Here are some examples:

- *generic job descriptions*
- *lists of employment sectors*
- *job advertisements*
- *work blogs*
- *conversations with friends and family*

All these sources of information will help you understand what people do at work. One of the most effective resources is current job advertisements. They provide specific details of the job activity and describe the skills required. They also indicate what kind of work is currently available.

Do not disregard a job if you think you do not have all the skills to apply. You can learn new skills. Add the job if you have most of the skills required.

A small part of your list might look something like this:

Holiday planner

Postal Worker

Accounts Clerk

Library Assistant

Now expand your list.

Try to turn these job titles into employment opportunities, rather than specific jobs, because this will keep your search more flexible. To do this you need to look at all the things a job might include. Generic job descriptions are very helpful as they include all possible activities, not only the activities for a specific job.

Example

A specific job advertisement for a library assistant might not mention archiving, filing, maintaining records, referencing material, or providing help to people, but a generic job description almost certainly would.

Your job list can now be expanded from:

Library assistant

to:

Any job in archiving, filing or maintaining records

Using the results of this activity

This list will become your reference point when looking for work. You can show the list to anyone helping you find work. This might include an employment adviser, friends, family or Jobcentreplus.

Career choices

Background

Career choices are usually considered by people when they want to work in something completely new. This could happen when you are at school and thinking what you want to be when you start work, at university when you are planning a future after studies or in later life when you want a change of work activity.

It is important to make informed decisions about career options to avoid wasting time and money on training or further study. It is prudent to think about the types of work study or training will lead to.

A career choice should open up possibilities, give you different options and help you consider new and different choices.

Career choices usually take the emphasis from '*What **can** I do?*' and '*What **is** available?*' to a more general question '*What **could** I do?*'

This type of abstract thinking can be very difficult for people with Asperger's who might prefer more concrete, tangible methods of thinking. You might need help to imagine possibilities and get your ideas going.

Many career choice activities fail because people concentrate too much on the here and now. You must try to imagine future possibilities ‘*What might be available?*’, ‘*What could I learn?*’.

One method of making this process a little more tangible is to think of the activities you **like** doing.

Activity 1

Make a list of all the activities you like doing.

Do not restrict the list to work activities. Think of all aspects of your life, everything you do.

It might not be obvious immediately how an activity you like relates to work, but it might help you identify opportunities and career paths you might miss. As an example, can you think how the following activity might be connected to a work setting?

I like collecting stamps

At first, this might seem trivial, unless you are applying for a job in a specialist philately environment, but if you think more carefully, this activity will reveal other things you probably like. For instance, you probably have to catalogue the stamps in order, make decisions about whether to sort by date, country of origin, value, colour, size. You will probably research the stamps, learn more about how they were designed, do they commemorate a particular event? You might like talking about your collection with other enthusiasts. You might like the thrill of finding new or rare stamps.

All these activities are fairly common in organisations such as museums, libraries, historical archives, National Trust, English Heritage and all administration jobs.

Activity 2

Match your likes list to employment sectors.

An employment sector is much broader than a specific job description. It describes groups of work activity; many different types of job can be found in each employment sector.

Here is an example of an employment sector list:

Finance and banking
Caring professions
Medical professions
General Administration
Accounting and Book Keeping
Electronic and electrical manufacturing
Engineering
Automotive repair and servicing
Transport and Distribution
Retail

If we consider one of these sectors, **Caring professions**, we can identify a range of jobs that could be included:

Caring for the elderly

Personal carer

Nurse

Travel Buddy

Advising homeless people

Supporting people who misuse substances

Nursery Assistant

Playgroup supervisor

Residential Care Manager

Community Psychiatric Nurse

Matching your likes list to employment sectors broadens your opportunities and helps you think of a wider range of possibilities.

Using the results of this activity

Use the list to help decide on a course of study.

Identify the extra skills you need to work in these jobs or sectors.

Research if there are jobs available in these sectors.

Talk to people who work in these jobs and sectors to see how they like the work.

Asking questions about employment sectors will help you make an informed decision about further study or training.



CHAPTER 3

**BE CONFIDENT
ABOUT WHAT
YOU HAVE TO
OFFER**

Chapter 3 - Be confident about what you have to offer

Background

The **skills matching** section in the **What is the right type of job for you** section explains how to list your skills, attributes and achievements.

This section will look at how you can demonstrate your skills when applying for work, aiming for promotion or proving your competence.

This is sometimes known as '**selling yourself**'. Most people find it difficult or uncomfortable to do this effectively. People are not used to writing or talking about themselves; it feels like boasting. In everyday conversation, for example when we are talking to friends and family, this is probably true, but completing job applications and going for interviews is not like these everyday conversations.

Even when people are able to write about their skills effectively on CVs and application forms, they often struggle to match that fluency at face-to-face interviews.

It is important to be able to communicate your skills or '**sell yourself**' positively in writing and verbally.

One way to 'sell yourself' effectively is to prepare a number of examples of how you have used your skills and attributes in real life situations. These examples do not need to be restricted to work situations. People use skills in every aspect of their lives.

Activity

Think of some examples of when you have used your skills. Try to concentrate on times when things have gone well. Here are some examples:

I tidied up the filing system

I created a new data base to record customer involvement

I was made employee of the month

I passed my driving test

I won first prize for the best birthday cake at my church fete

My customer satisfaction scores improved by 20%

They are good examples so far but they are a bit dull. They don't have any **details**. We need to add **details**.

The way to add details is to imagine that you are telling a story. People like stories. They must have a beginning, middle and end, and they must keep us interested. It's the interesting details that keep people's attention, help them to remember and make them want to listen to more. That's what you want when you are 'selling yourself'.

What do you think of this story?

Someone found a body. Detectives looked for clues and found the murderer. The murderer went to prison.

Do you find this story satisfying or interesting? Do you want to read it again? Of course not. It has a beginning, middle and end but it is dull and could be about anybody, anywhere. We don't know what the detectives did; were they brilliant or lucky? We don't know if the murderer had any reason to kill; was it an accident? We don't know if the detectives arrested the right person or how they found them. We don't know when or where the story happened. It is not a satisfactory story and we are very unlikely to want to read it ever again. It has no **details**.

Now let's look at one of the work examples from before:

I created a new data base to record customer involvement

Is it really interesting? Does it have enough details. Of course not. Here are just some of the questions I want to ask to make it interesting:

'How did you do it?'

'How hard was it?'

'What computer packages did you use?'

'Did you have any help?'

'Did it make collecting the information easier?'

'Was your employer pleased with the results?'

'How long did it take?'

'Why was it worth doing?'

Employers might ask some of these questions if you give poor examples, without details, but you should not rely on this. You should prepare to give interesting, relevant examples full of details.

The way you can do this is by taking one of your examples and asking six questions:

- *What*
- *Why*
- *When*
- *How*
- *Where*
- *Who*

These questions are very important if you are going to tell an interesting story.

Here is a quote from Rudyard Kipling to help you remember the questions:

*"I keep six honest serving-men, (They taught me all I knew);
Their names are What and Why and When, and How and Where and Who"*

Here is an example of how to use the questions to make an example more interesting:

My employer asked me to look at a more effective way of collecting information on our customer involvement. I asked my colleagues what they thought were the problems with the existing system. From those discussions, I learned that the paper records were slow, difficult to fill in and when one person had them, others had to wait. If they had to wait a long time they sometimes forgot important details or just forgot to add any record. I suggested a computer data-base and my colleagues agreed this sounded better. I used my experience of Excel to design a simple record keeping system that everyone could access from their computer. I put the information into a more user-friendly order, which also prompted my colleagues to ask and record important details. I asked my colleagues if they would like to have a test run on the system and give me feedback. This helped me change the order of some of the data and put some information onto a separate tab in Excel. The system has been running for the last six months and my colleagues and boss have complimented me on how much easier it is to use and how much more accurate the information is.

Do you notice how long it is? Do you notice that most of the six questions in Kipling's quote have been answered? Do you notice how many times *I* and *my* appear? If you talked like this all the time, people would soon become bored but when you are looking for work it is **essential** that you learn how to speak about yourself and your skills in this way.

Activity

Use one of your own examples of when you used your skills. Ask yourself the six questions. Write your 'story'.

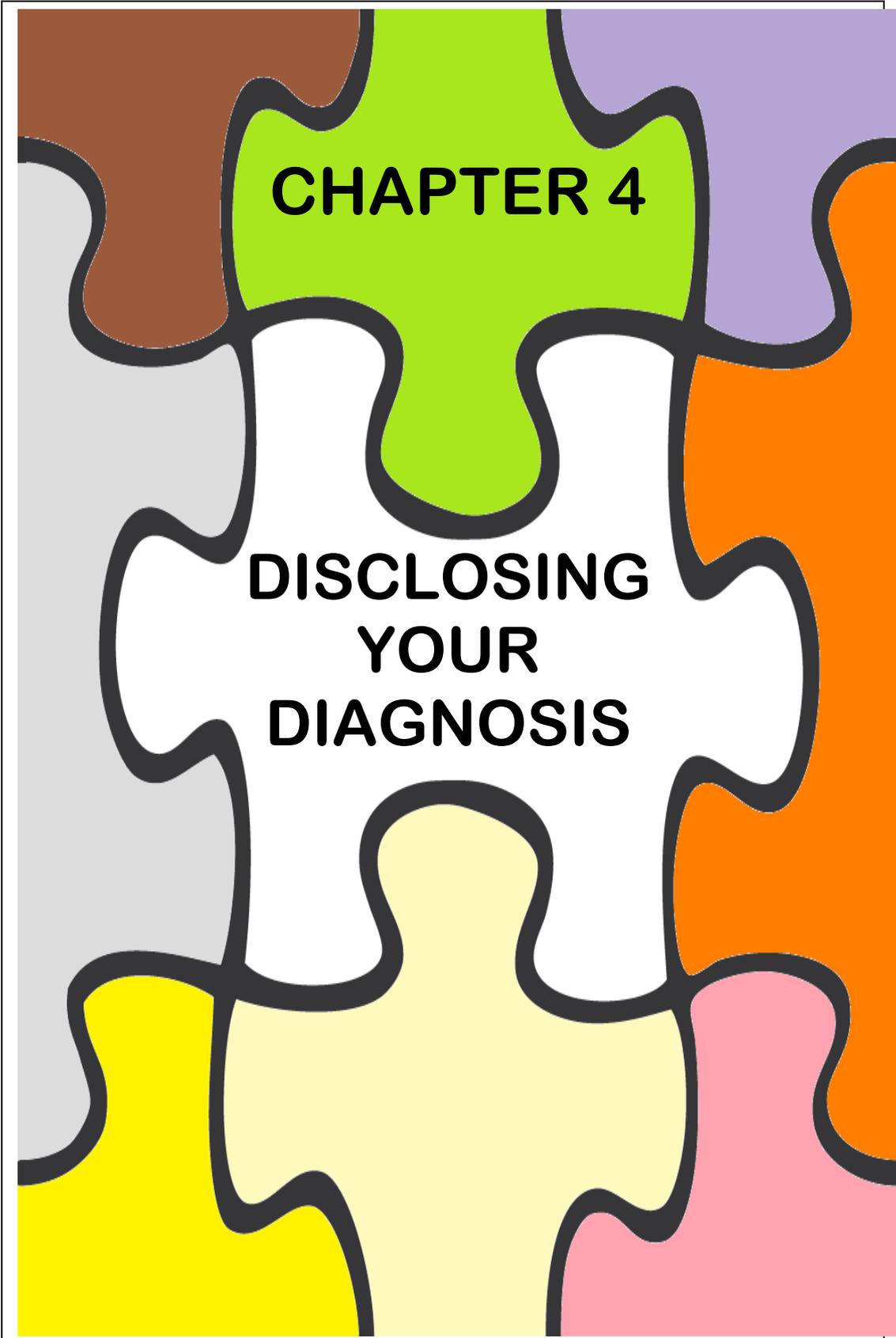
If you can, tell your 'story' to a friend, relative or your employment adviser. Ask them if there are any other details they would like to know. You can add these to your 'story' later.

Using the results of this activity

You can use these examples on many application forms and at interviews.

Many applications forms ask you for examples of the work you have done or ask you to explain why you think you are suitable for the role. These examples will answer those questions.

You should try to have lots of examples **and you need to remember them**. Become familiar with them. Read them aloud to help you remember



CHAPTER 4

**DISCLOSING
YOUR
DIAGNOSIS**

Chapter 4 – Disclosing your diagnosis

This section deals with:

- disclosing your diagnosis
- your needs during recruitment and when you are in work.

In the first part we will consider the **why**, **what**, **how** and **when** of disclosure.

In the second part we will look at some specific adjustments that might help you at work.

Disclosure

Why should I disclose information about my Asperger's to my employer?

Disclosure simply means “The act of revealing or making known”

It is not necessarily a negative process. For example, you would want to know about hazards and dangers in the workplace. You would want this information **revealed** or **made known** so you could take appropriate steps to avoid them or minimise risks.

However, people with Asperger's might feel nervous about revealing aspects of their diagnosis in a job interview or at work. Here are some of the reasons why:

- *Stigma*
- *Being judged*
- *Being thought of as weak or stupid*
- *Judged as unable to do the job*
- *Thought of as a patient not a job applicant*
- *Worried that people do not understand Asperger's*

These are all valid concerns. **But there are some good reasons for disclosing your needs.**

It is important that you know and understand these reasons so that you can make the right choices of **when** and **how** and **what** to disclose. Consider these examples:

- *Colleagues and managers know how to treat you*
- *Understand any special needs you might have*
- *Able to make adjustments to your work environment or your work load*
- *Better understanding of your moods, language or behaviour patterns and be able to react appropriately*
- *Share good practice for other people with Asperger's in the organisation*
- *Give people confidence to talk more openly about Asperger's*

These are all *good* reasons to disclose your needs in the workplace.

How, what and where do I disclose information about my Asperger's?

In this context:

- **how** and **what** means the tone and context of the information (is it positive, is it negative,)
- **where** means what document, conversation or other source reveals information
- **when** means the time you choose to reveal information.

The following section looks at this in more detail but these are the important rules of disclosure:

- **Disclosure should always be positive and relevant to the job or workplace.**
- **You can decide *how, what, where* and *when* you disclose.**

Making disclosure positive and relevant

To do this you need to look at work from the employer's perspective.

If you were an employer, what tools do you think you would use to recruit and retain people? Here are some examples:

- *Job advertisements*
- *Application forms*
- *on-line applications*
- *CV sifting*
- *Interviews*
- *Tests*
- *Group interviews.*
- *Work trials*
- *Appraisals*
- *Job evaluations*
- *Supervision meetings*

Do you think these are fair and reasonable methods?

Why would you use these tools? Here are some examples:

- *I want to find the right person for the job.*
- *I want to deselect inappropriate applicants.*
- *I want applicants to know the job is right for them so they can become effective employees.*
- *I want to choose from the widest selection possible.*
- *I want people to know I have a successful, growing business.*
- *I want people to work hard and be successful*
- *I want people to be happy at work and be positive representatives in the wider community*

Do you agree that these are fair and reasonable aims?

Good. Now you are thinking like an employer. You know what employers want and what is relevant to them.

So, before you decide what you disclose and how you disclose it, ask yourself this important question:

‘Will disclosing my diagnosis help to meet the aims of the employer?’

If the answer is no, you have no good reason to disclose.

Here are some examples of disclosure. Let’s assume all these statements are true:

I don’t like being bothered at work but prefer to get on without distraction.

I love getting details right and follow instructions scrupulously.

I have Asperger’s

I like things kept neat and tidy, I hate mess

I like focussing on single topics and excluding distractions

I like routine activities

I have a very enquiring mind

Do you think they are positive or negative examples of disclosure?

The answer is - it depends. I know this might be very difficult to accept if you want absolute clarity but people use language in so many different and intuitive ways that one answer cannot possibly suit all occasions.

However, if you ask yourself the important question

‘Will disclosing my diagnosis help to meet the aims of the employer?’

You should be able to work out when these examples might be positive or negative. Here is an example:

I love getting details right and follow instructions scrupulously would be a **positive** statement if you are applying for a job where attention to detail is important, such as accounting or filing.

It would be a **negative** statement if you were applying for a job that required a lot of imaginative thinking or creating new rules such as product development or design.

You can also refine these statements to make them more relevant in particular cases. Here is an example:

I have a very enquiring mind which I think will suit the research activities in this role. I like focussing on topics and find that I can concentrate for long periods without being distracted. I am also a very tidy worker so I can quickly identify any Health & Safety issues, which is very important in any work environment.

Notice how these examples do not reveal a list of symptoms or complaints. These would not meet the employer's aims. For example, in isolation, the statements:

I have Asperger's

I hate mess

I don't like being bothered

are **not** helpful, because they do not say anything positive or relevant about your qualities and skills.

How and when to disclose

Do you worry about these things?

- Information about my Asperger's is likely to be negative, ill-informed and judgemental
- People will think only of clinical/medical, symptoms and diagnosis rather than me as a person
- I have to mention my Asperger's on all application forms and on my CV. It will be on references from my previous employers. It will come up during my interview.

These are all legitimate concerns but they are not all true. The previous section, about keeping disclosure positive and relevant, shows that not all information is negative. Now, if we look at some general information on rights and responsibilities during recruitment and at work, we can see that disclosure is not *always* necessary; when it is, we can choose where and when to disclose.

What general rights and responsibilities do employers and applicants have during the recruitment process?

Employers

- *Employers have the right to ask people to work for them and complete tasks accurately and efficiently.*
- *Employers have the right to expect people to be well enough to attend work for reasonable periods of time*
- *Employers are allowed to decide which applicant best meets their needs.*
- *Employers are allowed to use **reasonable** assessment tools to decide if applicants can do this.*
- *Employers must do this transparently and fairly.*
- *Employers must keep records of recruitment and selection.*
- *Employers must abide by the law. Law includes such things as The Health & Safety Act, Working Time Directive, Common Law and The Equality Act 2010. These laws provide protection for employers and employees by clarifying rights and responsibilities.*

Here are some relevant extracts from the Equality Act 2010. They have been reworded to simplify legal terms:

Employers are not allowed to discriminate on grounds of health (including Asperger's) unless it is a specific requirement for the job.

Employers are not allowed to use health information to exclude applicants (health information could include number of days sick, types of illness, gaps in work history due to illness and recovery)

Employers are not allowed to ask questions about health and sickness (including Asperger's) that are not relevant to the job.

Employers are allowed to ask questions about health relating to a job... but they must be specific. For example, they could ask someone if they are able to climb a ladder if that was an activity in the job.

Employers are allowed to ask questions for national security reasons.

Employers are allowed to take 'positive action' to assist people who are disadvantaged or under-represented in employment. For example, a guaranteed interview scheme for people with a particular health problem.

Applicants

- *Applicants have the right to be treated fairly and with dignity.*
- *Applicants have the right to ask for feedback (although the quality may vary).*
- *Applicants must disclose information that will have a **significant impact** on their ability to do the job.*
- *Applicants should not lie.*
- *Applicants must abide by the law.*

Hopefully, you can see that employers cannot make you disclose details of your health condition unless they have a legal reason for doing so.

This means you **do not have to** disclose your diagnosis or details of your health on an application form, on your CV, at interview or when you start work.

As general rules:

- you should **never** disclose your Asperger's on a CV
- only disclose your Asperger's on an application form if you need a specific adjustment at the interview or there is a guaranteed interview for people with Asperger's
- only disclose at interview if it helps to explain your qualities and skills positively

- only disclose at work if you would benefit from some adjustment in the workplace
- do not disclose a list of symptoms and problems

And **always** follow the important rule:

‘Will disclosing my diagnosis help to meet the aims of the employer?’

Special notes on application forms and interview questions

It is sad but true that not all employers always demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of the full requirements of The Equality Act 2010. Here are some examples:

- You might find questions about your health or sickness absences on application forms.
- You might be asked to complete health questionnaires as part of the recruitment process.
- You might be asked direct questions about your health, that are not relevant to the job, during an interview.

There is no single, easy way to deal with these situations. You have access to the Equality Act 2010 and the Employment Tribunal process if you believe that you have been unfairly discriminated against but this is often a time-consuming and costly process. You should not be deterred by this. However, the nature of this toolkit is to concentrate on practical steps to minimise problems and maximise your chances of finding suitable work.

How you might deal with these situations

You could simply refuse to answer these questions, but it is unlikely that your application will be taken forward.

You could point out the requirements of The Equality Act 2010 as a reason for not answering. This is a legitimate strategy but again, unlikely to result in a successful application.

or

You could explain that you are willing to discuss any matters of reasonable adjustment after the recruitment process.

The words **reasonable** and **adjustment** are very powerful, as they resonate with the Equality Act, without explicitly mentioning it.



CHAPTER 5

**ADJUSTMENTS
IN THE
WORKPLACE**

Chapter 5 - Adjustments in the workplace

Background

There are a number of reasons why employers are prepared to make reasonable adjustments to help you at interview, help you settle into work and help you stay productive and happy in your job.

Two major reasons are:

- **The law says they must**
- **It makes good *business sense***

The Law

The Equality Act 2010 and The Health & Safety Act set out the legal requirement for employers to make reasonable adjustments to the workplace in certain circumstances. Reasons of health and disability inform a significant part of the Acts. We are interested not in the detail of the Acts but their practical application in the workplace.

Business sense

Research shows that happier, more engaged workforces are more productive and contribute to the success of the business.

Requesting adjustments

The important rules

- **Know what problem you are trying to solve**
- **Know what solution you are asking for**
- **Know how it will help you and your employer**
- **Be prepared to discuss alternative suggestions**

Here is an example:

Know what problem you are trying to solve

I find it very difficult to concentrate on my work when the phone keeps ringing and I'm not sure if it's my turn to answer or not. My colleagues might think I'm avoiding the phone and I don't want them to feel responsible all the time.

This is why you are asking. It describes the problem with the current situation.

Know what solution you are asking for

Can we agree a rota for answering the phone? We can divide the day into equal parts so that everyone knows when they are responsible for answering the phone. The rota can be on display so that it is always clear who is responsible for answering the phone.

This explains exactly what you need. It is a clear request with actions that can be measured and evaluated.

Know how it will help you and your employer

I will aim to do work that demands less of my critical attention during those times, so I am able to answer the phone quickly and confidently. Everyone will know what is expected of them and there will be no bad feelings in the team. The phone will not ring and distract me or others in the team.

This explains the benefits of your solution.

Be prepared to discuss alternative suggestions

Your employer thinks your idea will work but some people will spend more time on phone calls because of the nature of their job. The rota will not be exactly divided between all people in the team. In emergencies, everyone will have to accept extra time on the rota, whether they are busy or not. Sometimes the phone will ring when the person on the rota is busy on another call. In that circumstance, the rota will make clear who is the next responsible person.

This is when you must be prepared to listen to alternative suggestions.

Types of adjustment

Any adjustments that are made at work need to be monitored and reviewed to ensure they continue to meet the needs of you and your employer. For example, what if somebody new joins the team? The rota will have to be updated.

Adjustments need to adapt to changes that happen in the workplace.

Here are some possible adjustments that might help you:

Getting advice from the right person

- Agree who you will seek advice from if your regular manager is away.
- Know if there are certain times when you cannot disturb your manager or colleagues.

Handling changes to routine

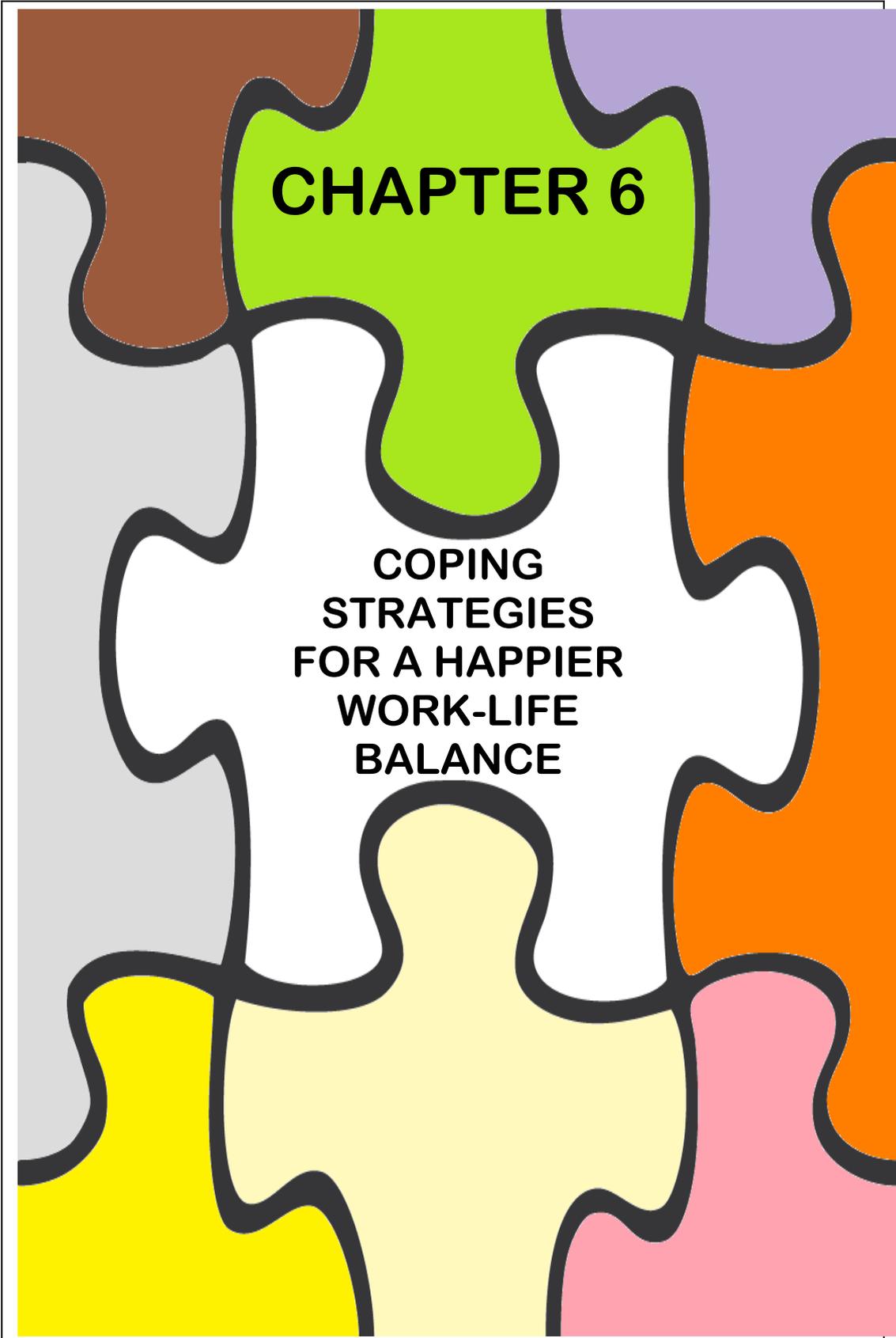
- Ask that any changes to routines or processes be highlighted immediately. You could use a buddy to make sure you know what the changes mean for you.
- Ask for extra support if a major change is planned. Ask for extra learning time or advance notice, so that you can adapt more easily.

Minimising distraction

- Agree times when you are free to discuss new items of work.
- Work in a quieter part of the workplace or use noise-cancelling headphones.
- Use the RED-AMBER-GREEN traffic light system to let colleagues know if you can be disturbed or not.
 - **RED** means 'don't disturb me. I have to use critical concentration'.
 - **AMBER** means 'it's probably OK to disturb me but I might seem distracted by what I'm working on.'
 - **GREEN** means 'it's OK to disturb me.'
- To let your colleagues know if you are **RED**, **AMBER** or **GREEN**, you can use any kind of indicator or sign you like. Here are some examples:
 - Coloured cards on your desk
 - Wearing a coloured badge
 - Messages via email

Getting on with colleagues

- Ask someone you trust to give you constructive feedback on your attitudes and behaviours.
- Ask your employer to arrange Asperger's awareness training for your colleagues.
- With someone you trust, agree what topics of conversation are appropriate at work.



CHAPTER 6

**COPING
STRATEGIES
FOR A HAPPIER
WORK-LIFE
BALANCE**

Chapter 6 - Coping strategies for a better work life balance

Background

Many research studies show that 'good' work is good for our general physical and mental well-being. We feel more useful, more productive, more engaged and more financially independent. This is often referred to as work life balance, when we do not feel so pressured at work that we have no time or energy for home life. Defining 'good' work is difficult, as it can mean different things to different people. Previous sections have explored deciding on the right type of job for you but all jobs are slightly different and you will have to learn to adapt and be flexible to meet the needs of your employer and your customers. This section will provide information on how to develop strategies to cope with general workplace situations that are common to all jobs. You might have to adapt them to fit your workplace.

This section will explore the following topics:

COMMUNICATION

Being assertive

Asking for what you need rather than what you want

Grievances and disputes

TIME MANAGEMENT

Meeting deadlines and maintaining quality

MANAGING CHANGE

Understanding what you can and cannot control

GENERAL WELL-BEING

Relaxation

Reducing Anxiety

Mindfulness

COMMUNICATION

Background

This is almost certainly the single, most important part of working life. All employees will be expected to communicate with people. This could include colleagues, partner organisations, customers and anybody that the organisation has to do business with. It will include, at the very least, your line manager, who will be responsible for ensuring you meet requirements and complete tasks to time and quality standards.

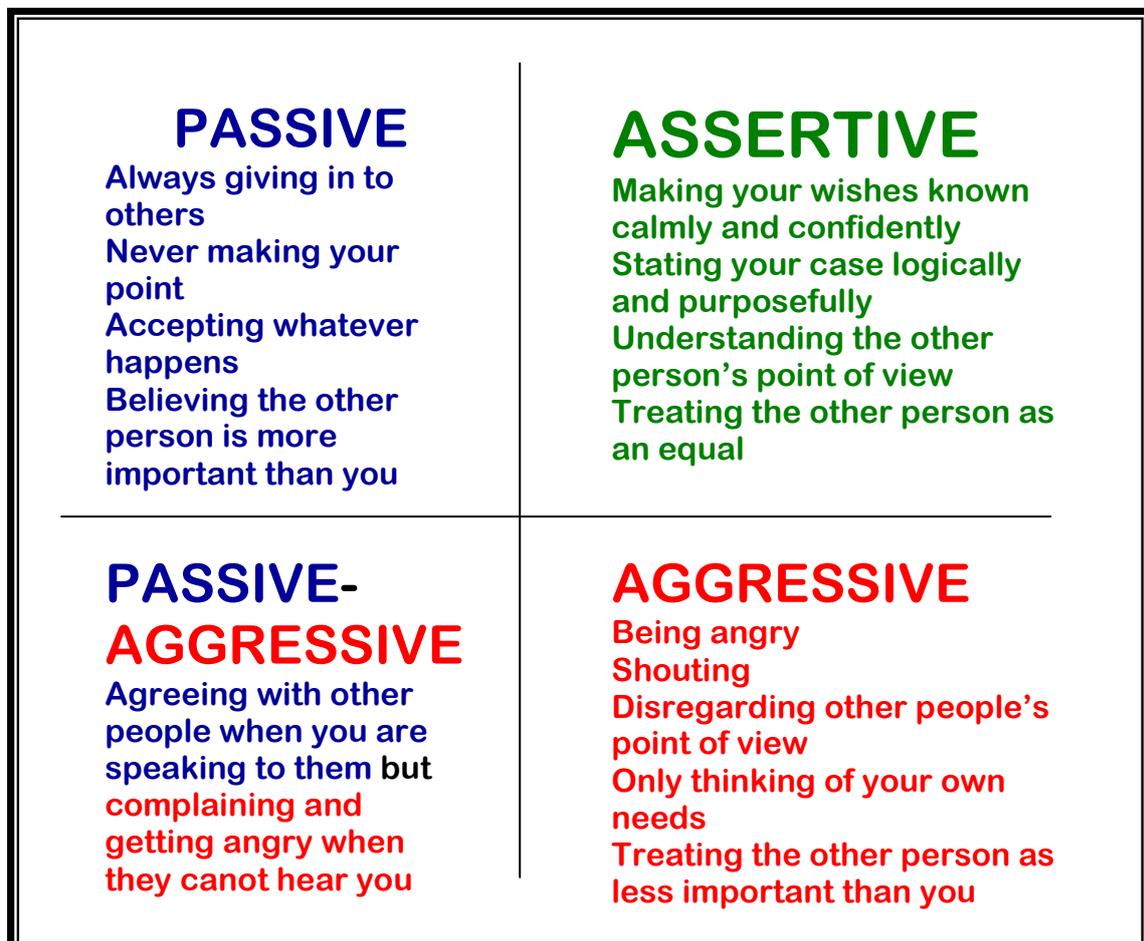
Here are the social conventions of conversations. They are still important.

- Be polite
- Allow other people time to speak
- Listen carefully to what others have to say
- Speak clearly and at a speed and volume appropriate to your surroundings

However, communication at work is often more complicated than social interaction. Sometimes you might have to give someone bad news, apologise for a mistake or ask for something that makes you feel uncomfortable.

You will need to learn and practice ASSERTIVE communication skills

This diagram shows some communication styles and what they mean.



There might be times when you need to communicate **aggressively** or **passively** but these would be extremely rare at work.

In almost every work situation you need to communicate **assertively**.

Here are some ways that you can practice assertive communication:

You could use the FACT/FEEL/NEED technique

Let people know the facts. This is not what you *think* or *feel* but what you **know** to be true. Facts are things everyone can agree on.

Let people know how you feel. It is acceptable to feel angry, upset, happy, confused, threatened, frightened. Do not blame other people for the way you feel. Do not say “*You make me feel angry/upset/confused*”. This cannot be proved. Stick to how you feel.

Let people know what you need. It is acceptable to let people know what you need. Be clear and specific. Do not use vague phrases such as ‘I want things to be better.’ Your needs have to be reasonable and achievable. This is usually agreed in discussion with the other person or other people. You will have to accept that sometimes it might not be possible to meet your needs. However, you could restate them at another time or agree a compromise.

Here is an example of a FACT/FEEL/NEED scenario:

I have to prepare the data sheets every Friday and they must be printed and on your desk by 4pm. FACT
It takes me five hours to complete all the necessary work to achieve this task. FACT
You have asked me to answer the telephones between 10am and 4pm because we are short-staffed at the moment. FACT
I feel under pressure when I have to answer the phones because I feel as though I won't have enough time to complete the data sheets. FEEL
I feel confused when I have to swap between answering the phone and preparing the data sheets. FEEL
I feel as though my Aspergers symptoms are more obvious when I have to multi-task like this. FEEL
I would like to agree with you one of two things. Can you extend the deadline for the data sheets or reduce the amount of time I am expected to cover the phones. I would prefer to limit answering the phones to 1pm to 4pm. This would give me the whole morning to complete the data sheets and some extra time before the 4pm deadline. NEED

Notice that the NEED includes some reasonable alternatives. This allows room for compromise.

Asking for what you need rather than what you want

We have to accept that all of our wishes and wants are unlikely to be met at work. The needs of other colleagues, the organisation, customers and managers have to be considered. We sometimes have conflicting wants and these should be discussed and agreed using compromise.

Here is an effective way of improving your chances of getting what you need. It is sometimes called the **4 Ps**.

PREPARE

Ask yourself ...

'Do I really need this?'

'Is it essential for me to be able to do my job?'

If the answer is 'Yes.' Plan your request like this:

POSITION

Explain what the current situation is. The current position.

Don't blame anyone or become angry. This is the same as stating the facts in the FACT/FEEL/NEED technique

PROBLEM

Explain why it is a problem to you and your organisation.

If it is a problem only for you, it might be more difficult to get what you need but you should persevere.

Some reasons for the problems could be:

- The current situation upsets you
- It is not efficient
- It wastes time
- It places an extra burden on colleagues
- It does not meet your customers' requirements
- It is too confusing for everyone

Keep the number of problems as small as possible and be specific about the problem.

Don't use vague phrases such as:

'It's too difficult.'

or

'I don't understand.'

Be specific.

What is confusing?

What don't you understand?

PROPOSE SOLUTIONS

Explain what ideas you have to solve the problem.
Try to present more than one solution for each problem.

Be specific.

Don't use vague phrases such as:

'I want you to make it better.'

or

'I want you to improve it.'

Be prepared to discuss and consider alternatives.

Be prepared to compromise.

Grievances and disputes

Grievances and disputes are not easy or comfortable for the employer or the employee. They are often used as a last resort when all other attempts to communicate have failed. Sometimes, however much we want to avoid making a grievance, it is the most appropriate choice.

There are many reasons why people choose to make a grievance.

For example, you might feel

- you have been treated unfairly
- you have been bullied
- you have been pressured to do things that make you uncomfortable
- your organisation is breaking its own rules or the law

These are not the only reasons for making a grievance.

Before you make a grievance...

Ask yourself:

'Have I tried every other way to resolve this?'

Take advice from your Trade Union or Staff representative, if you have one. If not, speak to a colleague you trust about making grievances.

Read your organisation's grievance policy. It is a legal requirement for employers to have a grievance policy.

To proceed with the grievance...

Make sure you follow your employer's rules and policies. Be very accurate about this.

Try not to make the grievance personal. This can be very difficult if you are unhappy with your boss or a colleague. It feels very personal. You should try to stay calm and reasonable.

You should understand that a grievance is like a legal process. Evidence will be gathered and a judgement will be made.

Accepting the outcome...

The judgement will decide if there is sufficient evidence to decide the outcome. Sometimes there is insufficient evidence so no 'judgement' will be made. In simple language, no-one will be declared right or wrong. This can be very difficult to accept if you feel you are in the right.

The aim of the grievance process is to resolve the problem and help everyone return to effective working.

After the outcome...

If you are still unable to resolve your feelings of frustration or unfairness, you might want to speak to a health care professional. Your GP will be able to help you contact the appropriate service.

Your employer might suggest mediation if two or more people cannot resolve a dispute.

Always be prepared to try mediation. It shows you are a reasonable, fair, adaptable employee.

The aim of mediation at work is to help people agree and plan effective working relationships.

TIME MANAGEMENT

Most jobs have targets and deadlines. We can think of these as the tasks we have to do and when we have to achieve them. These can also be called priorities.

Priorities, targets and deadlines can place extra pressures on us at work. Sometimes it might be difficult to understand why we have to meet them but they are an important and necessary feature of working life. They ensure that customers and colleagues receive services on time and to the right standard.

Here is an example:

When you order food in a restaurant, you expect it to:

- arrive reasonably quickly
- be of good quality
- have everything you ordered
- be served politely and professionally
- be the right temperature (not cold if you ordered a hot meal)

Your expectations will place targets and deadlines on the chef and the waiting staff. You will expect them to meet these priorities to serve your food.

Another problem we can encounter at work is when priorities are changed. This means we have to stop working at one task and start another. The priority has changed. This can be very uncomfortable if you have been concentrating on one task, trying to do your best, only to be asked to stop and do something else, especially if you are asked to change priority suddenly.

Here is an example:

Imagine how it would feel if the chef cooking your meal is asked to stop and prepare the ice cream desserts for the evening meals because VIP guests are coming.

The chef might feel:

- frustrated
- angry
- stressed
- worried about your meal
- worried about your reaction if your meal is cold or not properly cooked

The chef will have to prepare the desserts and still cook your meal, or ask somebody else to, but these are the changed priorities and the chef will have to do their very best to meet them.

Sorting priorities into tasks

One of the ways we can plan our work to help meet these changing priorities is to use a simple **priority matrix**. This can help us plan tasks, as well as keeping track of what we need to do.

A simple way to decide when a task is a priority is to ask:

'Is it URGENT or NOT URGENT?'

'Is it IMPORTANT or NOT IMPORTANT?'

- URGENT means it **must** be completed **immediately**
- IMPORTANT means it **must** be completed **at some time**
- NOT URGENT MEANS you do not have to complete it immediately. You could plan to do it sometime in the future.
- NOT IMPORTANT means you probably do not need to do it. It would not matter if you did not complete it.

When you have the answer, tasks can be sorted into one of the four categories below. This is the **priority matrix**

1. URGENT and IMPORTANT
2. NOT URGENT but IMPORTANT
3. URGENT but NOT IMPORTANT
4. NOT URGENT and NOT IMPORTANT

BOX 1 – PRIORITY	BOX 2 – LOWER PRIORITY
URGENT and IMPORTANT	NOT URGENT but IMPORTANT
These are the tasks you must complete now. They are the PRIORITY.	These are the tasks you can plan to do in the future. You could put a note in your diary. These tasks are lower priority at the moment but will become URGENT in the future. They will become a PRIORITY and move into Box number 1. Once they are entered into the matrix you will not forget them.
BOX 3 – LOW PRIORITY	BOX 4 – VERY LOW PRIORITY
URGENT and NOT IMPORTANT	NOT URGENT and NOT IMPORTANT
Tasks that can be sorted into this box are LOW PRIORITY. They are usually tasks that you or someone else thinks you ought to do immediately. If they are not IMPORTANT they are probably not really URGENT. You should ask why you are being asked to prioritise them.	Tasks that can be sorted into this box are VERY LOW PRIORITY. If they are NOT URGENT and NOT IMPORTANT you should ask if they are really necessary.

This priority matrix can be very helpful if you are challenged about what you spend your time doing. You can show people your matrix to explain why you have prioritised tasks. This might help your manager or colleagues discuss their priorities with you.

MANAGING CHANGE

Change can be one of the most difficult things to manage at work.

It can seem:

- Arbitrary
- Ill-informed
- Badly managed
- Sudden
- Threatening

These are normal thoughts and feelings that we all have.

Learning to understand these thoughts and feelings will help you manage workplace change more effectively.

Here are some of the things you can practice to make change more manageable.

1. Accept that change is inevitable.
 - Business thrives on change.
 - Changes happen to improve products or services, meet customer demands, keep pace with the competition, meet new legal requirements or save money.
 - You cannot single-handedly prevent change.
2. Understand it is rarely personal.
 - Most changes are not designed to make your life more difficult.
 - They are rarely directed solely at you and your work.
3. Get advice from the right people.
 - When changes happen there is usually a lot of gossip and ill-informed speculation.
 - Get the fact from people who know what is going to happen.
4. Consider the advantages and disadvantages.
 - Acknowledge any benefits.
 - Think of practical ways to deal with any disadvantages.
5. Know your limits.
 - Understand that you cannot control every aspect of change in your organisation.
 - You can propose ideas and improvements but you rarely have the power or authority to force your organisation to adopt them.
 - Be responsible for what you can control but have the understanding to know what you cannot control.
6. Keep some things the same.
 - If everything seems to be in upheaval, keeping some things the same can be a comfort.
 - It could be something as minor as keeping your pens in the same place or using the same tea cup.

GENERAL RELAXATION

Everybody needs time to rest and recuperate. Even the most business-focussed, ambitious, task-driven people need some time to relax and refresh.

Finding the time and place to relax, in a busy workplace, can be difficult.

It is important to use your break periods and holidays sensibly to maximise the opportunities for rest and relaxation.

It is also important to try to make time during the working day to practice general relaxation techniques.

They can reduce anxiety and depression as well as helping us focus more clearly on tasks.

Here are two examples of relaxation techniques that take only minutes to complete:

Controlled Breathing (about 3 minutes)

Settle yourself into a comfortable, upright posture (easiest if you are sitting but you can do this exercise standing up)

Breathe normally for 3-4 breaths.

Don't exaggerate your breathing or try to change it. Breathe naturally.

On the 5th breath notice how long your inbreath takes. Count along to your inbreath.

On the 6th breath notice how long your outbreath takes. Count along to your outbreath.

On the 7th breath take a short pause after the outbreath, before you breathe in. Don't force the pause. Let it happen naturally.

Do this for the next 3-4 breaths until your outbreath lasts one or two counts longer than your inbreath.

This exercise helps to slow your breathing and ensures you are making best use of the oxygen you breathe in. When we become stressed we tend to take short, shallow breaths that increase our anxiety levels. Slower breathing has a calming effect, which counteracts anxiety.

Mindful Breathing (about 3 minutes)

Settle yourself into a comfortable, upright posture (easiest if you are sitting but you can do this exercise standing up)

Breathe normally for 3-4 breaths.

Don't exaggerate your breathing or try to change it. Breathe naturally.

Now begin to notice what it feels like to breathe in and out. Really notice and pay attention.

Notice how the air feels moving in and out of your nostrils or over your lips. Is it warm or cold? Does it have a smell?

Now imagine the air going into your body. Feel it flowing into your chest.

Imagine the flow of air all the way from outside to inside and back out again.

Notice the sensation as you breathe in and out. Does your chest rise? Does your stomach rise?

Really feel the sensations but don't judge them or worry.

Try to keep your concentration going as you count up to five breaths.

Don't worry if other thoughts pop into your head or you get distracted. Bring your attention slowly back to your breathing.

When you are ready, bring your focus away from your breathing and back to the present.

This exercise helps to concentrate attention on the here and now, on a specific body function that is natural and ongoing. We spend most of our time worrying about past events or what is going to happen in the future (notice we spend time **worrying** not **planning**). Living and being in the here and now is often called **mindfulness** and helps to counteract anxiety and stress.



CHAPTER 7

**THE
SELF-EMPLOYED
OPTION**

Chapter 7 - The Self-employed option

Background

This section is not intended as a complete guide to self-employment. There are a number of legal and financial aspects to becoming self-employed that you will need to consider before you take up this option. You should always seek advice from business professionals, such as accountants, tax advisers or business consultants before committing to this type of work. The term 'business' is used frequently. This is because when you are self-employed you are technically a business.

This chapter will help you think about self-employment as an option and identify some of the general issues you should consider.

Advantages and disadvantages

Self employment can be an effective and rewarding choice for many people.

Self employment has a number of potential advantages:

- You can choose what kind of work you do.
- You can concentrate on tasks and activities you know you are good at.
- You can produce goods or provide services that are important to you.
- You can choose the pattern of hours you work.
- You can choose how much to pay yourself.
- Your efforts and hard work affect the business directly.

Of course, these advantages do not always apply. Some things that will affect these advantages include:

- Your business will have to compete with other businesses and be priced attractively, which will affect how much you can afford to pay yourself.
- You might have to work the hours your customers need you to work.
- You are responsible for the business and how it runs, which includes paying taxes and possibly National Insurance, as well as meeting legal requirements.
- You might have to change your activities to meet the demands of customers or competition.

Becoming self-employed can be a daunting prospect. Nevertheless, this news article, from the BBC website, indicates that self-employment is an increasingly popular option.

Britain now has more people working for themselves than ever before.

As of the last quarter of 2013 some 4.3 million of us earn our own crust and are officially self-employed.

This represents a pretty stonking increase. Though there was a slight trend upwards for many years in the early to mid-2000s, the number of self-employed has increased by 573,000 since the recession of 2008-09 - a rise of 15%.

Interestingly, over 60% of this increase has actually taken place even more recently - from around the middle of 2011.

19 February 2014

Further things to consider

You will need to decide how to run your business. Will you be a sole trader, a limited company, a social enterprise or a co-operative?

Each has different rules and responsibilities. You should always seek advice before making a decision like this.

Being self-employed is like having two jobs.

One job is doing whatever activity you choose as your business.

There are so many possibilities but just as examples:

- it could be making and selling something, such as food, pieces of art, jewellery, greetings cards, clothing....
- or providing a service, such as career advice, health care, counselling, training...

Whatever you choose to do, the purpose of your activities is to make an income – **to sell your product.**

Selling your product is the second job – it's really running the business.

There are many tasks to running the business but as examples:

- it could be marketing and advertising, preparing a budget, keeping accurate financial records, sorting out tax and National Insurance, developing a business plan, holding meetings with customers or suppliers, negotiating prices for stock.....

Do not be dissuaded from starting self-employment because you don't know how to do these things. Most people who start self-employment are concerned about some, or all, of these responsibilities, but you **can** learn and you **can** ask for help from experts, much of it free.

There is a Business Link service which provides free advice and support to anyone thinking about becoming self-employed.
www.gov.uk/business-support-helpline

Government agencies provide websites full of information about tax, insurance and legal aspects. They are very helpful when you contact them with specific queries.
www.gov.uk
www.hmrc.gov.uk/selfemployed/

DWP often has schemes to help and support new businesses, such as Access to Work and New Enterprise Allowance. These change over time, so you always need to ask at your local Jobcentreplus office, or look on the government website.
www.gov.uk/access-to-work
www.gov.uk/new-enterprise-allowance

Accountants will often provide a free, initial meeting to discuss your financial plans and provide advice on important tax and insurance rules.
www.icaew.com/en/about-icaew/find-a-chartered-accountant

Working in a co-operative

The definition of a co-operative business is that they are owned and run by the members - the people who benefit from the co-operative's services.

Although they carry out all kinds of business, all co-operative businesses have core things in common.

Co-operatives share their profits

Co-operatives want to trade successfully – they are businesses, not charities.

Members can often do better by working together. As well as sharing the profit, they share the responsibility for running the business.

In practice, that could mean someone is responsible for the marketing or accounting, someone else is responsible for buying stock and other materials, while someone else makes the product.

Co-operatives are owned by ordinary people

Co-operatives exist to serve its members, whether they are the customers, the employees, or the local community.

The members are the owners, with an equal say in what the co-operative does.

Across the UK, co-operatives are owned by 13.5 million people – and these numbers keep on growing.

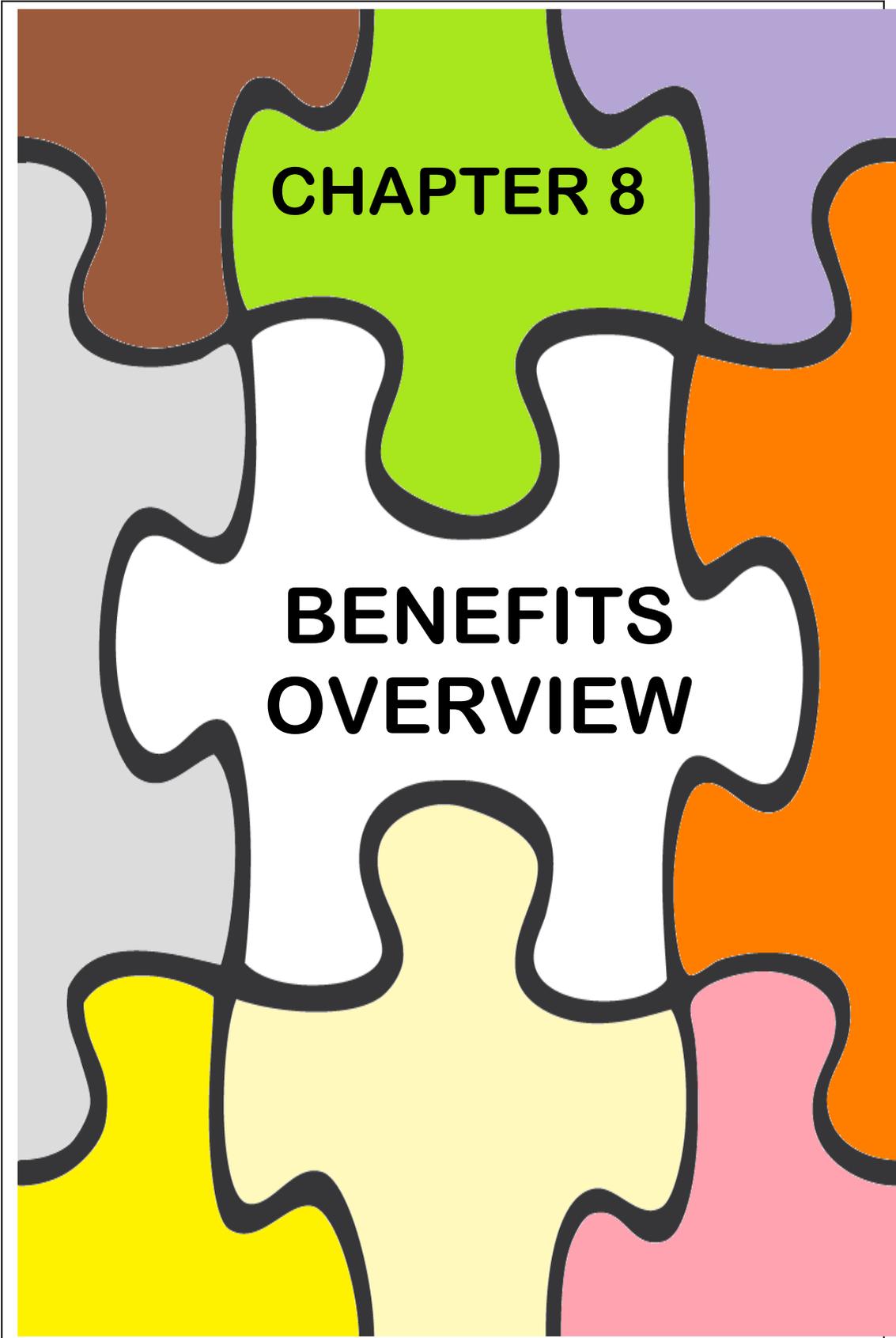
Making a plan

Whatever business model you decide on, and whatever activity you choose, most advisers will tell you to prepare a business plan, to make sure your ideas are viable.

Here is an example of a simple business plan:

- What is your business idea?
- Why do you think people will pay for it?
- Who do you think your customers will be?
- Do you have any competition?
- How will you let customers know about your services or products?
- How will you collect money owed to you?
- How much does it cost you to provide your service?
- Do you have to pay for anything before you can start?
 - materials
 - insurance
 - business premises
 - machinery or tools
 - advice like accountancy services or banking
- What are your continuing costs (outgoings)?
 - premises
 - telephone
 - postage
 - bank charges
 - accountancy charges
 - stationery
 - materials
 - IT
- How much profit do you need and want?
- How much will you charge for your products or services?
- Is your price competitive?

Do not be put off the idea of self-employment if you think making a plan is difficult or worrying. Most people who start self-employment have concerns about this, but you **can** learn and you **can** ask for advice and support from experts. The government website has a number of business plan templates that you can use.
www.gov.uk/write-business-plan



CHAPTER 8

**BENEFITS
OVERVIEW**

Chapter 8 – Benefits Overview

How to use this chapter

This chapter is intended to provide a brief explanation of some of the welfare benefits that might help you when you are looking for work or when you are in work. It does not provide information on **all** benefits you might be entitled to. Benefits rules change frequently, so you should use this information as a guide only. Some information in this benefits section is simplified deliberately, because benefit rules can be so complex and confusing. The department or organisation responsible for paying benefit will provide current information and you should contact the correct department or organisation if you think you might be eligible to receive a benefit.

The Benefits

This chapter will provide information on

- DISABILITY LIVING ALLOWANCE
- HOUSING BENEFIT AND COUNCIL TAX BENEFIT
- JOB SEEKERS ALLOWANCE
- EMPLOYMENT AND SUPPORT ALLOWANCE
- PERMITTED WORK
- WORKING TAX CREDITS

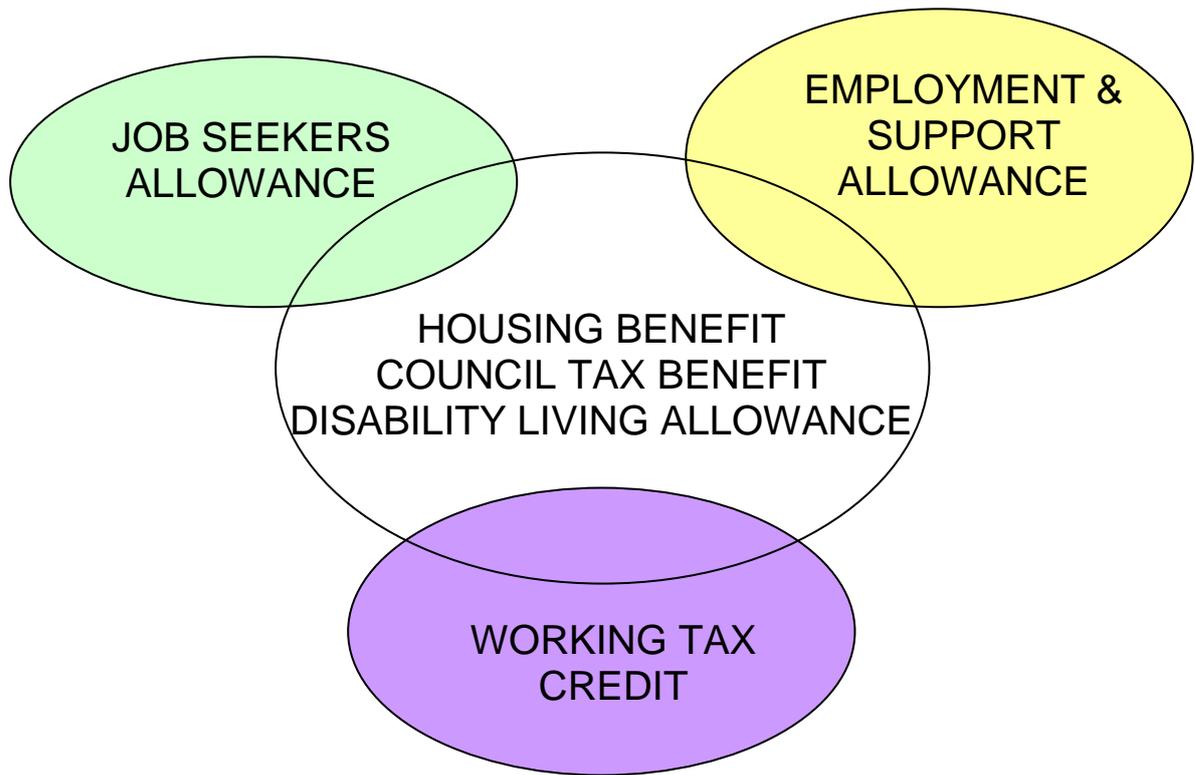
What benefits can I claim?

The following pages will explain the basic eligibility rules for each benefit. There are some general rules affecting all benefits:

- **If any of your circumstances change, inform the department or organisation that pays the benefit**
- **ask for benefits advice before you start any paid or unpaid work activity**
- **You can claim some benefits at the same time but some are not compatible**
- **You can claim only one of the following benefits at any one time**
 - JOB SEEKERS ALLOWANCE
 - EMPLOYMENT AND SUPPORT ALLOWANCE
 - WORKING TAX CREDITS

The following diagram shows what benefits can overlap:

BENEFITS DIAGRAM



Quick Guide

If you need help to do ordinary daily things or you need help to travel, go to
DISABILITY LIVING ALLOWANCE

If you pay rent and/or Council tax, go to
HOUSING BENEFIT AND COUNCIL TAX BENEFIT

If you are in paid work and working 16 hours a week or more, go to
WORKING TAX CREDIT

If you are not in paid work, or work less than 16 hours a week, go to
JOB SEEKERS ALLOWANCE or EMPLOYMENT AND SUPPORT
ALLOWANCE

If you are receiving EMPLOYMENT AND SUPPORT ALLOWANCE and
would like to do paid work for less than 16 hours a week, go to
PERMITTED WORK

DISABILITY LIVING ALLOWANCE

Basic eligibility rules

either

- **I need help to do ordinary daily activities** (*for example, feed, wash or clothe myself, learn simple tasks like setting an alarm, or remembering to do important things like paying bills*)

or

- **I need help to travel to places I need or want to go**

or both

You might be entitled to claim DISABILITY LIVING ALLOWANCE

DISABILITY LIVING ALLOWANCE can be paid if you have an income, savings, both and if you have no income or savings.

It is not an income related benefit (See the separate note on income related benefits at the end of this chapter.)

You will continue to receive these payments until your needs change so that you no longer require help to do ordinary daily activities or need help to travel.

From April 2013 this benefit will be changing. It will be called PERSONAL INDEPENDENCE PAYMENT. Some rules might change.

Here is a web link with further details:

<https://www.gov.uk/dla-disability-living-allowance-benefit>

HOUSING BENEFIT AND COUNCIL TAX BENEFIT

Basic eligibility rules

- **I pay rent and/or Council Tax**
- **I have a low income** (it is difficult to explain exactly what this means. If you think you are struggling to pay your rent or Council Tax you should apply for HOUSING BENEFIT AND COUNCIL TAX BENEFIT)

The amount of benefit you receive will depend on

- how much rent you pay
- how much Council Tax you pay
- how much income or savings you have coming into your household

It is not possible to be more precise as all claims are calculated separately.

You will continue to receive HOUSING BENEFIT AND COUNCIL TAX BENEFIT until the income or savings coming into your household increase sufficiently, or your rent decreases sufficiently, or you no longer pay rent.

It can take a long time to calculate HOUSING BENEFIT AND COUNCIL TAX BENEFIT so if you start any paid work it can take time to recalculate how much you are entitled to.

If you start paid work you might be entitled to 4 weeks payment of HOUSING BENEFIT AND COUNCIL TAX BENEFIT while you are working. This is often called HOUSING BENEFIT AND COUNCIL TAX BENEFIT 'run-on'.

It is an income related benefit (See the separate note on income related benefits at the end of this chapter.)

Here is a web link for further details:

<https://www.gov.uk/housing-benefit>

JOB SEEKERS ALLOWANCE

Basic eligibility rules

- **I am not in paid work**
- **I am looking for work to start immediately**
- **I am prepared to look for most types of work**
- **I am prepared to travel about 90 minutes to reach work**
- **I am prepared to keep a record of everything I do to look for work and discuss this record with Jobcentreplus**
- **I am prepared to visit the Jobcentre regularly to discuss my job search activities**
- **I am prepared to attend training courses or work programmes**

You will receive JOB SEEKERS ALLOWANCE until you do not meet **any one** of these conditions above. The most obvious is when you start paid work but your benefit could be affected if you refuse to start work or training.

You might still receive JOB SEEKERS ALLOWANCE if you start temporary work. You might still receive JOB SEEKERS ALLOWANCE if you do some work each week. The amount you receive will be reduced, depending on how much you earn and how many days you work in one week.

You will receive up to 6 months JOB SEEKERS ALLOWANCE if you have paid sufficient National Insurance Contributions (see the separate note about National Insurance Contributions at the end of this chapter). This is called JOB SEEKERS ALLOWANCE contribution based - sometimes written as JSA (C).

You can receive JSA (C) even if you have savings or other income is coming into your household.

If you have none or very limited savings and there is no or a very low income coming into your household you might be entitled to receive JOB SEEKERS ALLOWANCE indefinitely. This is called JOB SEEKERS ALLOWANCE income related - sometimes written as JSA (I) This is sometimes called INCOME SUPPORT. (See the separate note on income related benefits at the end of this chapter.)

The amount of JOB SEEKERS ALLOWANCE income related you receive is always affected if the income or savings coming into your household changes.

Here is a web link with further details:

<https://www.gov.uk/jobseekers-allowance/overview>

EMPLOYMENT AND SUPPORT ALLOWANCE

Basic eligibility rules

- **I do not think I can do paid work at the moment because of my poor health**
- **I would like to do some paid work but I do not think I am quite ready yet**
- **I will consider some types of work but my health places restrictions on what I can do**

You might receive EMPLOYMENT AND SUPPORT ALLOWANCE if you meet any or all of these conditions.

You must understand that your health condition and eligibility will be reviewed regularly. If the review finds that your health circumstances have changed EMPLOYMENT AND SUPPORT ALLOWANCE might be discontinued. (See the separate note on **Personal Capability Assessments** at the end of this chapter.)

You will receive up to 12 months EMPLOYMENT AND SUPPORT ALLOWANCE if you have paid sufficient National Insurance Contributions (see the separate note about National Insurance Contributions at the end of this chapter). This is called EMPLOYMENT AND SUPPORT ALLOWANCE contribution based - sometimes written as ESA (C).

You can receive ESA (C) even if you have savings or other income is coming into your household.

If you have none or very limited savings and there is no or a very low income coming into your household you might be entitled to receive EMPLOYMENT AND SUPPORT ALLOWANCE indefinitely. This is called EMPLOYMENT AND SUPPORT ALLOWANCE income related - sometimes written as ESA (I). This is sometimes called INCOME SUPPORT. (See the separate note on income related benefits at the end of this chapter.)

The amount of EMPLOYMENT AND SUPPORT ALLOWANCE income related you receive is always affected if the income or savings coming into your household changes.

Here is a web link with further details:

<https://www.gov.uk/employment-support-allowance/eligibility>

PERMITTED WORK

Basic eligibility rules

This is not a benefit. It is a benefit rule that might help you do some paid work while you claim EMPLOYMENT AND SUPPORT ALLOWANCE.

When you are receiving EMPLOYMENT AND SUPPORT ALLOWANCE you can work for less than 16 hours a week and earn up to £99.50 per week.

You might lose some of your benefit but you will always keep a minimum of £20 benefit.

If you are receiving EMPLOYMENT AND SUPPORT ALLOWANCE and HOUSING BENEFIT/COUNCIL TAX BENEFIT, your HOUSING BENEFIT/COUNCIL TAX BENEFIT will not be affected.

Usually, you are allowed to do this work for a maximum of 12 months. At the end of 12 months you might be allowed to:

- **Carry on doing the work unpaid (this is not always allowed)**
- or
- **Leave the job**
- or
- **Stop claiming EMPLOYMENT AND SUPPORT ALLOWANCE**

In some circumstances you might be allowed to do paid work for longer than 12 months and still receive EMPLOYMENT AND SUPPORT ALLOWANCE. This is called **Supported Permitted Work**.

Here is a web link with further details:

<http://www.nidirect.gov.uk/permitted-work-working-while-claiming-employment-and-support-allowance>

WORKING TAX CREDITS

Basic eligibility rules

- **I usually work for 16 hours or more a week**

You might be entitled to WORKING TAX CREDITS but there are more eligibility rules.

- **I usually work for 16 hours or more a week**
- **I have a health condition or disability that puts me at a disadvantage in getting a job**

and

- **I have evidence that I am receiving, or have recently received one of these benefits**
 - **Disability Living Allowance**
 - **Attendance Allowance**

or

- **Within the last six months I have received**
 - **Employment and Support Allowance for at least 28 weeks**
 - **A mixture of Statutory Sick Pay and Employment and Support Allowance for 28 weeks**
 - **Some other benefit with a Disability Premium**

Working Tax Credits will provide you with extra money while you are working. The amount depends on how much you earn. It is not a simple sliding scale; the amount you are entitled to will be calculated when you apply.

Working tax credit does not count as income or savings for other Income Related benefits (See the separate note on income related benefits at the end of this chapter.)

Here is a web link with further details:

<https://www.gov.uk/working-tax-credit/overview>

Notes

National Insurance contributions

An amount of money 'credited' to your National Insurance record when you are in paid work or receiving certain benefits.

National Insurance contributions might:

- allow you to receive a state pension when you reach a certain age
- allow you to receive certain benefits

Usually, your National Insurance contributions are paid through your wage or benefit. Self-employed people can choose to pay a voluntary contribution.

There are different types of National Insurance credit.

Here is a web link with further information

www.hmrc.gov.uk/ni/intro/credits.htm

Income related benefits

You might receive Income Related benefits if:

- You have not paid sufficient National Insurance contributions in the last 2 tax years
- You have extra financial responsibilities, such as children or a dependant partner and cannot manage financially
- You have claimed the full entitlement of your contribution related benefit and have no income, or very low income coming into your household and have no savings or very low savings

Income related benefits are affected by savings and other income coming into your household. At February 2014 if you have more than £6,000 savings, your income related benefit might be affected.

Here is a web link with further information

www.debtadvicefoundation.org/benefit

Work Capability Assessments

When you claim EMPLOYMENT AND SUPPORT ALLOWANCE your work capability will be assessed at regular intervals. Currently, this assessment is carried out by an agency on behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP).

The rules for these assessments are complex, so the following information is intended as very basic guidance. If you have been asked to complete a Work Capability Assessment and have any worries you should seek advice from The Citizen's Advice Bureau.

The assessment has two parts:

- a questionnaire, asking you to explain how your symptoms affect you
- a face-to-face assessment, where you can be medically examined or asked questions about your symptoms

There are three possible outcomes, with different consequences:

Outcomes

1. You will be considered capable of working without significant restrictions
2. You will be considered to have a limited capability for work but capable of work-related activity
3. You will be considered to have a limited capability for work-related activity

Consequences

1. You will not be able to continue claiming ESA.
2. You will continue to claim ESA. You will be allocated to a category called the Work-Related Activity Group. You will be expected to attend Work Support interviews and complete appropriate activities to enhance your prospects of finding work in the future. Examples of these activities: voluntary work, training, Permitted Work, internships.
3. You will continue to claim ESA. You will be allocated to a category called the Support Group. You will not be expected to complete work-related activity **but** you *are* allowed to complete work-related activity if you choose to.

If you feel that you have been allocated to the wrong category or feel the assessment did not take into consideration important information about your health or symptoms, you can appeal.

More detailed information is available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/esa214-a-guide-to-employment-and-support-allowance-the-work-capability-assessment>

DASH services include

An Information and Advice Service for everyone on the autistic spectrum of all ages and their families as well those employing, working with or supporting people on the autistic spectrum

Supporting people to apply for the **AUTISM ALERT CARD**

Various social groups for adults that include activities such as sport, wildflower cultivation, arts & crafts, sewing, gardening, cooking and woodworking.

How to contact us:

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D.A.S.H.

Discovering **A**utistic **S**pectrum **H**appiness

Registered charity no: 1116852

DASH Employment Toolkit

First printed June 2014