

HOST

Trainer's Guide

Module 1: General Information about the Autism Spectrum

Project Number: 2022-1-CY01-KA220-VET-000086365

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Using the HOST Trainer's Guide

The HOST Trainer's Guide has been designed specifically to support and streamline the delivery of the Vocational Education Curriculum developed in the context of the HOST project. The Curriculum constitutes a 2-day course, a total of 18 hours of training.

Slide 1: Introduction

The slide features a large blue 'HOST' logo in the center. Below it, the title 'The Spectrum of Hospitality' is written in a black sans-serif font. Underneath the title is the project number 'Project Number: 2022-1-CY01-KA220-VET-000086365'. In the bottom left corner, there is a small Erasmus+ logo. The slide is decorated with abstract geometric shapes: a red triangle with a dotted pattern on the left, a blue zigzag line at the bottom, and a red triangle with a dotted pattern on the right. A blue vertical bar is on the far right.

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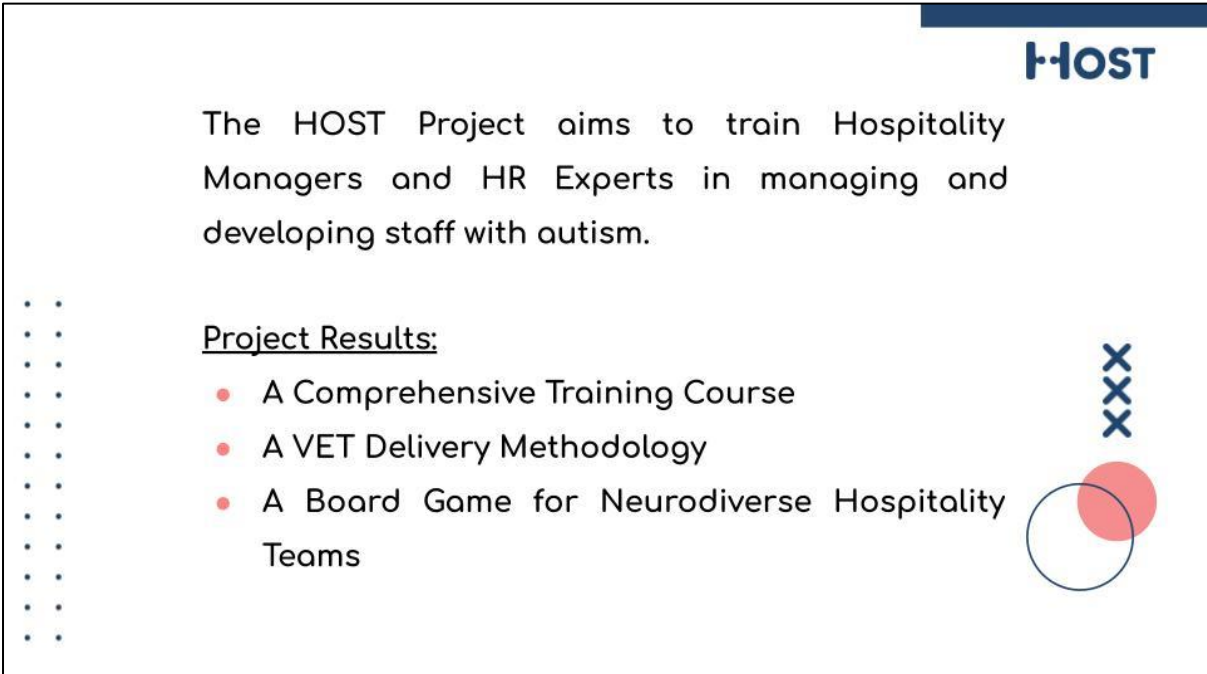
The Spectrum of Hospitality

Project Number: 2022-1-CY01-KA220-VET-000086365



Introduce yourself and the project. Get to know the learners and their expectations from the course.

Slide 2: About the Project/Course

The slide has a blue 'HOST' logo in the top right corner. The main text describes the project's aim: 'The HOST Project aims to train Hospitality Managers and HR Experts in managing and developing staff with autism.' Below this, the section 'Project Results:' is followed by a bulleted list of three items. The slide is decorated with abstract geometric shapes: a blue zigzag line on the left, a red circle with a dotted pattern on the right, and a blue vertical bar on the far right.

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The HOST Project aims to train Hospitality Managers and HR Experts in managing and developing staff with autism.

Project Results:

- A Comprehensive Training Course
- A VET Delivery Methodology
- A Board Game for Neurodiverse Hospitality Teams

Explain the learning goals and objectives of the project and the course.


The course aims to:

- Contribute to the professional development of Hospitality HR and Managers, who shall

become better equipped to accommodate staff with autism into their organisations;

- Contribute to the enhancement of the quality of life in the workspace and the job retention rate of the Hospitality staff with autism;
- Contribute to the elimination of exclusion of people with autism in the workplace;
- Enhance the role of VET in the career development of staff with autism in the Hospitality sector;
- Contribute to the sustainable growth of European Hospitality through increased productivity and employment levels of people with autism.

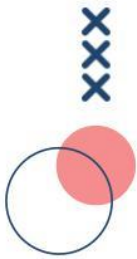
Slide 3: About Module 1



Module 1 aims to educate learners about autism, its impacts on staff, and the responsibilities of employers in creating an inclusive and supportive work environment.

Learning Outcomes:

- Gain a comprehensive understanding of autism
- Recognise and appreciate the benefits and strengths that employees with autism bring to the workplace
- Develop skills to implement and improve inclusive workplace policies



Introduce Module 1.

The module aims to:

- Inform learners about autism;
- Help identify the typical needs of staff with autism;
- Promote understanding and effective support among colleagues and employees;
- Clarify any legal and social responsibilities of the employers in accommodating staff with autism;
- Help organisations learn how to adapt and incorporate social responsibility policies aimed at creating a more inclusive work environment for staff with autism.

The module explores the typical needs of staff with autism, emphasising the importance of

empathy, support, and effective communication. It also discusses employers' legal and social responsibilities when involving staff with autism and provides practical recommendations for integrating these considerations into the company's social responsibility policy.

Learning outcomes: gain a comprehensive understanding of autism in the workplace.

Slide 4: Module Content



Content:

- What is Autism
- Understanding Autism
- Myths & Misconceptions
- Challenges in the Workplace
- Reasonable Accommodations
- An Inclusive Workplace
- Social Responsibility Policy

Outline the contents of the module.

This module will cover:

- What is autism & more about understanding autism;
- Common myths & misconceptions regarding autism;
- Challenges autistic people experience in the workplace;
- Legal & social responsibilities of the employer: reasonable accommodations, promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion in the workplace;
- Benefits of having an inclusive workplace;
- Social Responsibility Policy.

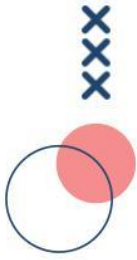
Slide 5: What is Autism

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Autism, formally called **autism spectrum disorder**, is a behaviourally defined neurodevelopmental disorder which affects the way a person experiences the world and communicates with others. Around 1-2% of the world's population is on the autism spectrum. ~7 million autistic people in Europe. (Autism Europe, 2020)

Persistent deficits
in social
communication
and interaction
across multiple
contexts

Restrictive and
repetitive
patterns of
behaviour,
interests, or
activities



Define autism. Explain the core characteristics.

Autism, formally called **autism spectrum disorder**, is a behaviourally defined neurodevelopmental disorder which affects the way a person experiences the world and communicates with others.

Main characteristics:

- Social and communication difficulties;
- Repetitive behaviours;
- Sensory hyper- or hyposensitivities.

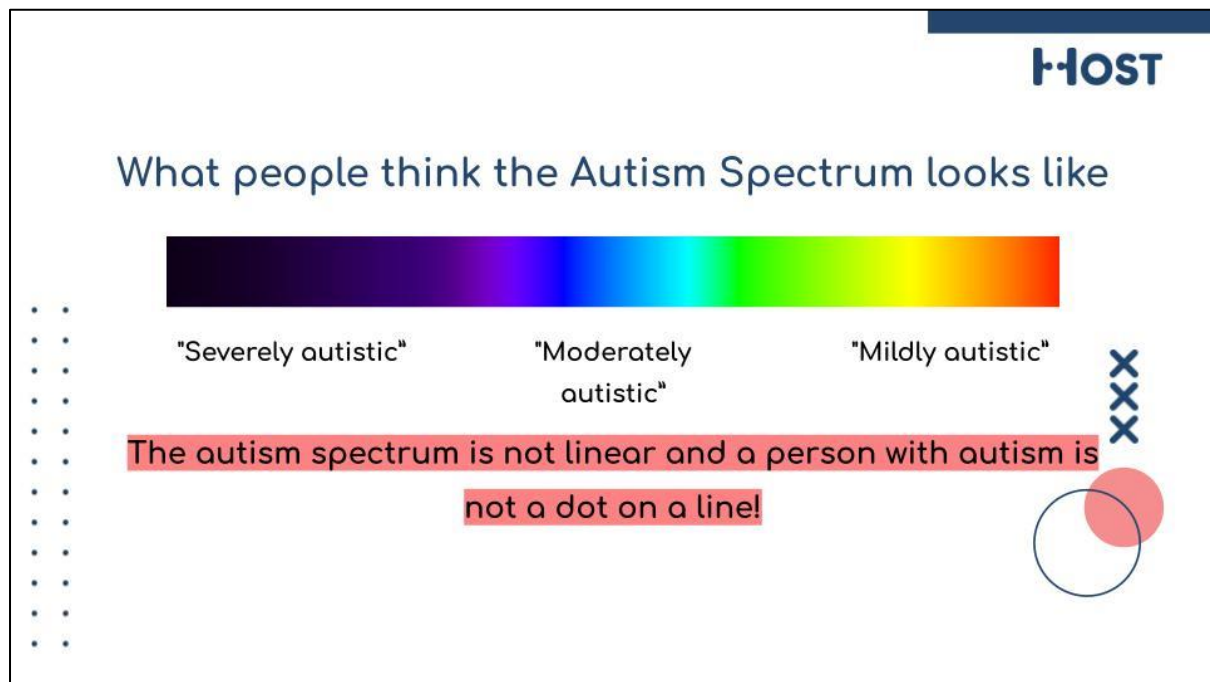
Autism is usually diagnosed in early childhood but it can be identified at any age. People on the autism spectrum have varying language and intellectual capabilities, ranging from profound intellectual disability to superior levels.

It is estimated that around 1-2% of the world's population is on the autism spectrum. There are approximately 7 million autistic people in Europe.

“Spectrum disorder” means that each affected person is different, and autism advocate Dr Stephen Shore famously said:

“If you have met one person with autism, you have met one person with autism”.

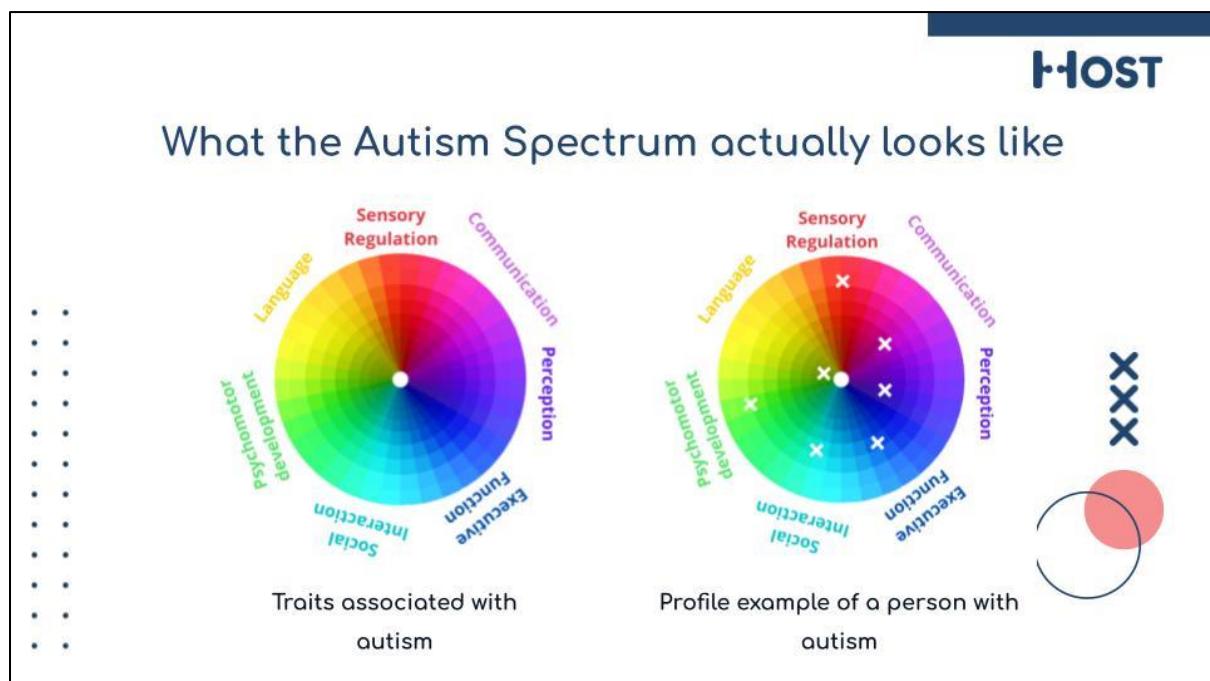
Slide 6: What People Think the Autism Spectrum Looks Like



Explain that the autism spectrum is not linear.

A widespread myth surrounding autism is that it ranges from “severely autistic” to “mildly autistic”.

Slide 7: What the Autism Spectrum Actually Looks Like



Explain what the autism spectrum looks like. The autism spectrum consists of a wide range of diverse traits which manifest differently in each affected individual.

Specify the diverse traits that are commonly associated with autism.

- Differences in social understanding and social behaviour,
- Communication differences which may include a complete absence of spoken language, as well as atypical speech patterns and differences in nonverbal communication,
- Repetitive behaviours which may include repetitive body movements as well as narrow interests and a limited range of activities,
- Inflexibility and a need for control and predictability,
- Sensory processing differences,
- Executive dysfunction,
- Differences in information processing, attention and focus,
- Difficulties with abstract thinking,
- A “spiky” cognitive profile with an unusual disparity between strengths and weaknesses,
- Abnormal motor skills, posture and gait,
- Alexithymia,
- Impaired proprioception and interoception,
- “Meltdowns” and “shutdowns” in response to overwhelming situations.

The traits can manifest differently in each individual and not everyone has all the traits, but all autistic people experience social and communication difficulties, engage in repetitive behaviours and have some sensory processing differences. (Those are also the requirements for a clinical diagnosis.)


Explain the given profile example. This autistic person has rather good language skills, struggles with sensory regulation a lot, experiences some communication and perception difficulties, has impairments in executive functioning, finds social interactions challenging, and has many psychomotor deficits.

Slide 8: Social & Communication Difficulties

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Social & communication difficulties

- Deficits in social awareness
- Deficits in social-emotional reciprocity
- Deficits in developing, maintaining, and understanding relationships
- Differences in nonverbal communicative behaviours
- Atypical use of language, ranging from a complete absence of spoken language to atypical speech patterns



Outline what social and communication difficulties in autism mean.

Autistic people have lifelong difficulties initiating and sustaining social communication and reciprocal social interactions. These difficulties can manifest very differently from individual to individual.

Common features:

- Deficits in social awareness and understanding leading to difficulties modifying behaviour according to context
- Deficits in social-emotional reciprocity
- Deficits in developing, maintaining, and understanding relationships
- Differences in nonverbal communicative behaviours (using eye contact, gestures, facial expressions, and body language)
- Difficulties understanding others' thoughts, emotions, and perspectives
- Difficulties understanding others' nonverbal cues
- A literal interpretation of language
- Atypical use of language, ranging from a complete absence of spoken language to atypical speech patterns

Be ready to answer some questions or give examples.

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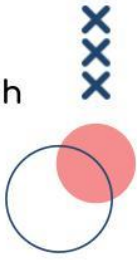
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Repetitive behaviours

- Repetitive and stereotyped body movements
- A narrow focus on one or more special interests
- An unusual obsession with objects or parts of objects, or particular kinds of sensory stimuli
- A lack of adaptability to new experiences, which provoke distress
- Extreme behavioural rigidity



Explain what repetitive behaviours are. Repetitive behaviours can take different forms, including repetitive and stereotyped body movements, a narrow focus on one or more special interests, and an unusual obsession with objects or parts of objects, or particular kinds of sensory stimuli.


In a broader sense, repetitive behaviours also include a lack of adaptability to new experiences, which provoke distress, and behavioural rigidity. This can manifest as strict adherence to routines and rules, inflexibility of thought, as well as excessive stubbornness.

Some examples of repetitive behaviours:

- Stereotyped motor movements: pacing, rocking, finger flicking, hand-flapping. These movements can also be more subtle: leg bouncing, hair twirling, tapping;
- Repeating the same sounds or listening to the same music over and over;
- Repetitively manipulating objects: spinning, flipping, organising, lining them up;
- Following strict routines, e.g. adherence to specific schedules or having a certain ritual around bedtime;
- Being excessively rule-bound;
- Having narrow or fixated interests.


In this context, you can also mention how narrow interests have benefited many individuals on the autism spectrum, making them knowledgeable and leading to innovations or fighting for a cause. Mention some famous people. For example, Greta Thunberg (protecting the environment, fighting climate change).

Slide 10: Sensory Processing Differences



A lifelong hypersensitivity and/or hyposensitivity to various stimuli:

- Lights
- Sounds & noises
- Textures
- Odours
- Tastes
- Temperatures
- Movement and balance
- Internal stimuli



To conclude with the core features, explain sensory hypersensitivity and hyposensitivity in autistic people.

Hyper- and hyposensitivity apply to various stimuli: lights, sounds and noises, textures, odours, tastes, temperatures, motion, balance, as well as internal stimuli (pain, hunger, thirst, etc.). Consequently, people on the autism spectrum can have atypical reactions when exposed to ordinary stimuli.

Some examples of things that can be overwhelming for an autistic person:

- Flickering lights;
- Daylight light bulbs;
- Loud noises (motorbikes, vacuum cleaners, etc.), particularly many noises at once;
- Clothing tags and fabrics;
- Being touched;
- Strong perfumes;
- Specific foods;
- Visual clutter;
- Bold colours;
- Climbing stairs or driving in a car;
- Hot or cold weather.

Mention that many autistic people also experience sensory hyposensitivity and seek out additional sensory input and give examples of how it can manifest:

- A fascination with lights, patterns and reflections;
- Enjoyment of loud music and other sounds;
- Rubbing against fabrics and materials;
- Squeezing into tight spaces;
- Sniffing things and people;
- A preference for strong flavours and spicy foods, and even tasting and eating inedible objects;
- A high pain tolerance;
- Excessive jumping, swinging, and rocking.

It is common for an autistic person to experience both hypersensitivity and hyposensitivity towards various stimuli, and a person's sensitivity can vary from day to day.

Slide 11: Executive Dysfunction, Information Processing, Attention & Focus

Challenges with executive functions:

planning, flexibility, organising, prioritising, time management, working memory, emotional regulation, impulse control, understanding complex concepts

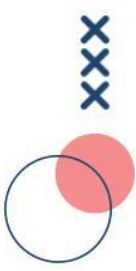

NB! Executive dysfunction is not laziness or a lack of self-discipline!

Differences in information processing, attention and focus

- “Bottom-up” processing, “details-before-concept”
- Monotropism — a narrow field of attention
- Intense focus (also called hyperfocus)
- Difficulties switching attention

⇒ Experts of matters they are interested in

⇒ Difficulties seeing “the big picture”



Explain what executive functioning refers to. Executive functioning refers to skills such as planning, organisation, working memory, inhibition and impulse control, emotional regulation, flexibility, and others. For an autistic person, executive functioning is compromised which can make it difficult to handle daily tasks.

Give examples. An autistic person may struggle to plan their day or week, organise activities, move

from one task to the next, initiate doing something, stop doing something, manage emotions and behaviour and adapt to new experiences.

Seek to explain thinking styles and information processing, as well as attention and focus in autistic individuals. Note that autistic people are not a monolith group, so, although there are commonalities, not every autistic person processes information in the same way.

Attention to detail. Autistic people might pick up on nuanced details, intricate patterns, or specific aspects of a matter.

- + This eye for detail can be a considerable advantage in job positions which require meticulous precision.
- Conversely, because the autistic brain is constantly taking in so many tiny nuances, it can struggle to sort and integrate the information, leading to sensory overload. It can also be harder for an autistic person to see “the big picture”.

Monotropism — an intense “flow state” or “tunnel vision”. Rather than being spread widely, attention is intensely focused on a narrow subject.

- + Thanks to their passionate interests and intense focus, many autistic people are autodidacts and have an extensive knowledge of the subjects they are interested in.
- Autistic people may struggle to direct their attention to other matters or to switch tasks and attention.

Some autistic people may also have superior long-term memory or be able to recall certain facts, events, or sequences, but other forms of memory or learning may be more difficult.

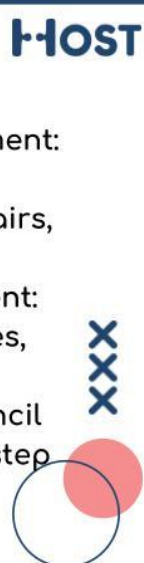
Slide 12: Uneven Cognitive Development & Impaired Motor Skills, “Odd” Posture and Gait

Uneven cognitive development (“spiky” cognitive profile)

- Individuals with ASD often show distinct, uneven strengths and weaknesses, i.e., they are good at some things and bad at others
- ⇒ uneven functioning in different areas of life
- ⇒ pre-made judgements about a person’s capabilities may be inaccurate

Impaired motor skills, “odd” posture and gait

- Gross motor skill impairment: difficulties with balance, riding a bike, climbing stairs, posture
- Fine motor skill impairment: difficulties tying shoelaces, buttoning shirts, using scissors, or holding a pencil
- An “odd” gait — unusual step length, speed, or other walking patterns



Explain how autism can affect cognitive development, causing notable strengths and weaknesses.

Strengths are also called splinter skills. E.g. remarkable memory of factual data, above-average reading speed, excellent maths abilities or technological understanding, remarkable talents in music, drawing, or painting.

Be sure to explain that “spiky” cognitive profiles can be confusing. It is essential to recognise that an autistic person's abilities vary from domain to domain. For example, a highly verbal and intelligent person may still experience a lot of struggles with organisation and planning, be very sensitive to loud noises, or have a specific learning disability such as dyslexia.

Mention savant syndrome. It is a rare condition wherein a person shows truly exceptional abilities in a particular area, e.g. memorization, computation, music, art, or spatial orientation. Such skills go far above what is considered normal for their overall level of cognitive functioning. “Rain Man” is a well-known example.

Make sure to say that savant syndrome is rare and most autistic people are not like Rain Man!


Give information on gross and large motor skill impairment and differences in posture and gait.

There may be atypicalities in how people on the autism spectrum move. They can also experience difficulties with coordination. Both gross motor skills can be affected, causing clumsiness

and difficulties performing certain tasks which require balance skills and postural stability, as well as fine motor skills.

Furthermore, autistic people can exhibit an “odd” gait, which can look differently from individual to individual. Step width can be unusually short or long, the person may have a “bouncy” walk, stepping on tiptoes, have a jerky walking speed, and suddenly run, skip and jump.

Slide 13: Alexithymia, Proprioception and Interoception



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Alexithymia, proprioception & interoception

- Difficulties recognising one's own or another's emotions
- Difficulties perceiving the location, actions and movements of the body
- Difficulties identifying and responding to internal sensations: pain, thirst, hunger, physical manifestations of strong emotions, etc.

Many people on the autism spectrum experience alexithymia. According to various sources, this rate can be as high as 50%. Alexithymia is the inability to recognise one's own or another's feelings, as well as to express emotions.

Additionally, individuals on the autism spectrum may have impaired proprioception and experience difficulty processing and integrating sensory input related to their bodies' outward position and movement.

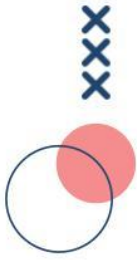
Interoception, on the contrary, refers to internal sensations and signals — physical and emotional. An autistic person who struggles with interoception may not recognise when they are hungry, thirsty, tired, need to go to the bathroom or feel a strong emotion (for example, anger or fear). Interoception commonly co-occurs with alexithymia.

Slide 14: “Meltdowns” & “Shutdowns”

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Meltdowns & Shutdowns — extreme reactions that autistic people may display in reaction to overwhelming experiences

- Meltdown — an intense emotional and behavioural outburst
- Shutdown — withdrawing, “switching off”
- Triggers: stress, sensory overload, changes in routine, excessive demands, communication difficulties
- Best solution: prevention — avoiding the triggers
- How to help: peace, calm environment, predictability



Introduce the listener to meltdowns and shutdowns.

Meltdowns and shutdowns are two different kinds of extreme reactions that autistic people may display in reaction to overwhelming experiences. While there are similarities between meltdowns and shutdowns, their external manifestations and internal processes make them distinct.

An autistic meltdown — an intense emotional outburst which can involve panicking, screaming, crying, and self-injurious behaviours. Meltdowns typically end once the triggering stimuli/stressors are no longer present.

During a shutdown, the autistic person may become unresponsive, withdrawn, immobile or appear mentally and emotionally “switched off.” It can take a longer time to emerge from a shutdown.

Explain the triggers: stress, sensory overload, changes in routine, excessive demands, and communication difficulties.

What to do?

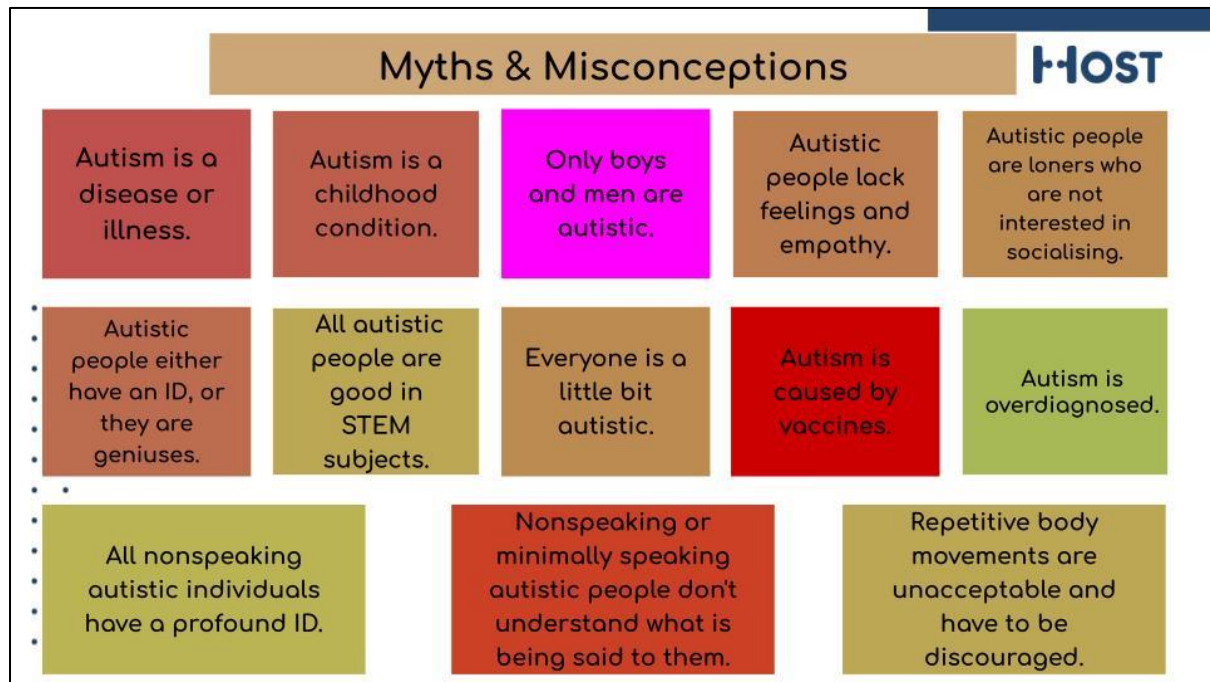
The best solution for meltdowns and shutdowns is prevention — helping the individual to reduce stress and overwhelm.

In the case of a meltdown/shutdown, it is best to provide a calm environment for the individual to recover.

- Reduce demands and sensory stimuli;

- Speak in a slow, quiet voice;
- Explain what is going to happen next;
- Do not touch the person or try to reason and argue.

Slide 15: Myths & Misconceptions



Read and debunk the myths.

~~Autism is a disease or illness.~~

Autism is neither a disease nor an illness, but a neurodivergence. The autistic brain works differently from a non-autistic brain. Researchers have also identified structural differences in the brains of autistic people. (source needed) It can be said that autistic people have a different operating system.

Some autistic people view their autism merely as a difference, and many others identify as disabled. It is up to each autistic person to define how they experience their condition.

~~Autism is a childhood condition.~~

Autism is a lifelong condition, but the characteristic features emerge in the developmental period, henceforth usually warranting a diagnosis in childhood. A diagnosis can also be made in adolescence or adulthood. Some behavioural manifestations of autism tend to become less pronounced as an individual ages, or they can be “masked” or compensated for with learned behaviours.

~~Only boys and men are autistic.~~

For a long time, it was thought that mainly boys were autistic and autism in girls was very rare. However, that is not true. Autistic girls and women, particularly those without an intellectual disability, often do not fit autism stereotypes and go undiagnosed. The latest estimated autistic male-to-female ratio is 3:1.

~~Autistic people lack feelings and empathy.~~

Autistic people experience the same emotions as non-autistic people do. However, they can express their feelings differently, or their mimics and gestures might not correspond to the feelings (e.g. an autistic person can smile or laugh when sad or frightened). Additionally, a large percentage of autistic people have co-occurring alexithymia which makes it difficult for them to identify and name their emotions.

~~Autistic people are loners who are not interested in socialising.~~

Socialising and making friends can be a lot harder on the autism spectrum, but most autistic people do want friends, relationships, and even their own families and children. Many admit they're feeling lonely.

~~Autistic people either have an intellectual disability, or they are geniuses.~~

People on the autism spectrum exhibit a full range of intellectual abilities.

~~All autistic people are good in mathematics and other STEM subjects.~~

Just like non-autistic people, autistic people can have their talents, strengths, and passions. While some autistic people are truly fascinated by maths and numbers, many others can be bad at maths but excel in arts, literature, or any other discipline.

~~Autism is caused by vaccines.~~

Numerous researches have been conducted, and the idea that autism is caused by vaccines has been scientifically debunked. What is more, it has been discovered that the paper originally promoting the idea was deliberately based on faulty data. A clear cause of autism has not been identified, but it is believed to be a combination of genetic and environmental factors.

~~Autism is overdiagnosed.~~

When autism was first described in 1943, it was considered to be a rare condition. Currently, it is estimated that 1-2% of people are on the autism spectrum. The increase in diagnoses is caused by a better understanding and recognition of autism and broadened diagnostic criteria.

~~Everyone is a little bit autistic.~~

Some behaviours and traits that are more prevalent among autistic people can also be observed, in varied degrees, in the general population. But having some of those traits (e.g. disliking social chit-chat or having a passion for a narrow subject) does not make a person “a little bit autistic”. A thorough evaluation is required to make an autism diagnosis, and those who meet the requirements have specific difficulties that have a big influence on their day-to-day functioning. Saying that “everyone is a little bit autistic” trivialises the unique experiences of autistic people and belittles their struggles.

~~All nonspeaking autistic individuals have a profound intellectual disability.~~

While it is more common for nonspeaking autistic people to have a co-occurring intellectual disability, it is important to not underestimate a nonspeaking person's capabilities and to explore various alternative methods of communication which can include sign language, picture cards, text-to-speech devices, and various AAC devices. Nonspeaking autism advocates emphasise that their lack of speech is caused by a neuromotor impairment, rather than a cognitive one. Given the right tools, a nonspeaking person can express their needs and desires and fully reach their potential. Additionally, nonspeaking does not always mean nonverbal. Many nonspeaking autistic individuals do communicate using words — they learn to read, write or type, use the computer and in some cases even show great academic success.

~~Nonspeaking or minimally speaking autistic people don't understand what is being said to them.~~


Just because someone is nonspeaking or has limited speech does not mean that they lack comprehension. Many nonspeaking autistic individuals have intact receptive language skills, meaning they can understand spoken language.

~~Repetitive body movements are unacceptable and have to be discouraged.~~

Repetitive behaviours are a hallmark feature of autism. They serve important functions, for example, self-soothing and self-regulation, and thus do not need to be discouraged. However,


repetitive behaviours may sometimes be harmful. In this case, it is best to find the source of the distressed behaviour, eliminate it and/or direct the individual's attention to something else.

Slide 16: Challenges in the Workplace: Lack of Access to Employment



Less than 10% of autistic people in the EU are employed. (Autism Europe, 2020)

- Hiring bias
- No opportunities for career growth
- Unjust performance evaluations
- Being denied accommodations
- A lack of autism awareness and support



It is estimated that less than 10% of autistic people in the European Union are employed. (Autism Europe, 2020)

This is an alarmingly low rate. Autistic people face many barriers to employment:

- Hiring bias. Even though many autistic people have thorough expertise and skills required for a job, they may lack communication and persuasion skills and not be “team players”, thus not fitting the stereotypical idea of a “good employee” and getting overlooked by recruiters;
- No opportunities for career advancement despite their contributions and qualifications;
- Unjust performance evaluations that fail to take into account their challenges in the workplace;
- Being denied essential accommodations and a lack of autism awareness and support in the workplace;
- Some companies hire autistic individuals only to fill quotas for employing people with disabilities and do not offer realistic career prospects or necessary adjustments.

⇒ Feelings of worthlessness & a lack of independence!

Slide 17: Challenges in the Workplace: Communication & Social Interaction Challenges, Sensory Considerations

Challenges in the workplace



Social & communication challenges

- Job interviews
- Understanding unwritten rules & expectations
- Making sense of business hierarchy & authority
- Communicating with clients & customers
- Navigating relationships with colleagues
- Small talk & social chit-chat

Sensory considerations

- Overwhelming, inaccessible environments ⇒
Sensory overload



Explain what social and communication difficulties autistic people might have in the workplace.

Autistic people frequently report difficulties with having to participate in team building and other social activities, navigating relationships with colleagues, understanding unwritten rules and expectations, making sense of business hierarchy and authority, participating in group events, communicating with clients and customers, doing small talk and social chit-chat, and having to take and do phone calls.

Explain sensory considerations in the HoReCa industry. Difficulties in processing sensory information can make many environments intolerable and inaccessible for an autistic person. In such environments, people with autism experience an inability to focus on work tasks, distress, sensory overload, and even physical pain. This can cause a meltdown or shutdown.

In the hospitality sector, all sensory systems may receive a lot of information at once.

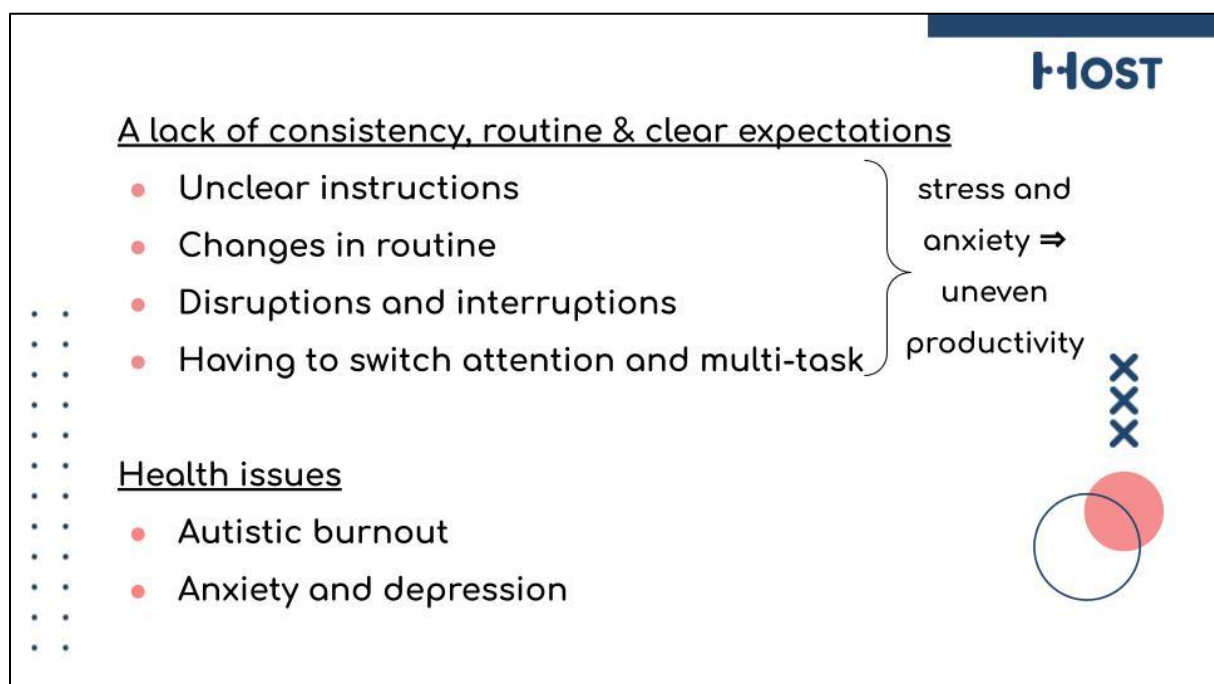
Give an example. Let's imagine a café. There are many sounds, sights, smells, lighting devices, tastes, and textures:

- Background music playing, glasses and cutlery clinking, people chattering, a coffee machine whirring, ventilation buzzing;
- Patterned tiles on the floor, coloured dishes, flower pots and posters, jumbled letters forming the menu on a chalkboard;

- Flickering lights above the tables and candle flames trembling in the ventilation's breeze;
- The whole place smells of freshly brewed coffee, with aromas of vegetable soup and Thai curry from the lunch menu in between;
- It feels strange to touch the cups, which are still wet from the outside, or the cutlery — some forks are unbearably hot, straight from the dishwasher, others metallic and cold;
- In addition, it may be required to engage socially with customers or colleagues, adding social information, too, and an additional cognitive strain.

Ask the listeners how they feel in such an environment. How could an autistic person feel?

Slide 18: Challenges in the Workplace: A Lack of Consistency, Routine and Clear Expectations & Health Issues



Explain how people on the autism spectrum can feel very anxious and confused in their jobs (without necessary accommodations), leading to exhaustion and lack of productivity.

It can be difficult for people on the autism spectrum to fit into a typical working rhythm, as well as to understand what is expected of them. Unclear instructions may cause anxiety and confusion. Changes in routine can provoke distress.

Additionally, disruptions and interruptions may be frustrating, as it is difficult to get back to the task. Because of their narrow attention tunnel, autistic people struggle with switching attention and with multi-tasking.

Because of all the daily stressors, autistic people may also have varying energy levels and tolerance towards sensory stimuli, which might cause stress, anxiety, and difficulties in being consistent with productivity.

Introduce the listeners to the concepts of masking and autistic burnout. Mention anxiety and depression. For autistic people, it can be very tiring to try to keep up with typical expectations. The demands of daily life can be overwhelming, and many autistic people struggle to stay on top of things. As a result, autistic people often report feeling completely exhausted after doing “ordinary things”.

Moreover, many people on the autism spectrum, particularly those without an intellectual disability, feel compelled to “mask” and hide their differences by trying to imitate non-autistic behaviour. Over time, the strain of the demands of daily life and masking can lead to autistic burnout.

“Autistic burnout is a syndrome conceptualised as resulting from chronic life stress and a mismatch of expectations and abilities without adequate support. It is characterised by pervasive, long-term (typically 3+ months) exhaustion, loss of function, and reduced tolerance to stimulus.” (The National Autistic Society, 2022)

Additionally, many autistic people develop mental health problems, the most common being anxiety disorders and depressive disorders.

Slide 19: Challenges in the Workplace: Ableism & Discrimination



Ableism & discrimination

- Autism is surrounded by myths and stereotypes
- The general public lacks autism awareness
- Autistic behaviours are stigmatised
- Autistic people feel pressured to “mask”
- Microaggression and teasing
- Assumptions about autistic people as incompetent
- Isolation and exclusion




Speak of ableism and discrimination which people with autism face in the workplace.

Despite significant advances in scientific understanding, there remains much to learn about autism spectrum disorder, as the condition is still relatively poorly understood and surrounded by myths and stereotypes. There are significant gaps in autism awareness in the general public, and many autistic people confront bullying, ableism, and discrimination, including in the workplace. It is common for autistic individuals to not disclose their diagnosis out of fear of rejection and to try to appear as non-autistic as possible, which is damaging in the long term.

For example, many behaviours are deemed unacceptable and heavily stigmatised in the public realm. Autistic people might be targets of intimidation, harassment, or mockery in the office as a result of their behaviour and communication style. Many individuals feel pressured to suppress repetitive behaviours, particularly repetitive body movements, and other “odd” mannerisms. In fact, repetitive body movements help an autistic individual to regulate their nervous system, maintain attention and focus and reduce sensory overload.

If not bullied directly, an autistic person can still experience microaggression from coworkers, e.g. insensitive remarks, jokes, or teasing. Many people on the autism spectrum struggle to “read between the lines” or understand jokes and might not understand that they are being ridiculed. Additionally, it can be very hard for an autistic person to defend themselves because of social and communication difficulties.

Non-autistic employers, managers or colleagues might also underestimate an autistic

individual's capabilities and not assign them tasks or projects, even though the individual would be capable of completing them. Moreover, non-autistic employees might presume that their autistic coworkers lack comprehension and not speak directly to them. This can lead to exclusion from crucial conversations and social interactions in the workplace, along with a lack of opportunities to share ideas and make decisions, resulting in sensations of isolation and disappointment.


Slide 20: Reasonable Accommodations: Accommodations for Social Interactions

Reasonable accommodations

A person-centred approach is essential!

Accommodations for social interactions

- A focus on the person's hard skills and experience
- Alternative communication methods
- Addressing the person directly
- More time for answers
- No open-ended questions & figurative speech
- No unexpected phone calls
- Social scripts
- Training for managers and colleagues



Explain that every autistic person is different. Taking a person-centred approach is essential! Not every autistic person will require the same accommodations. Two autistic people may require completely different accommodations. Have an open dialogue with the person about their strengths, challenges, and preferences in the workplace, and work together to develop a suitable accommodation plan.

Specifically, ask about their sensory processing challenges — which types of sounds, lights, textures, or smells cause distress or overwhelm. Ask about difficulties with social interactions — if the person struggles with understanding social cues or figurative language, if some types of interactions are particularly stressful. Ask about executive functioning challenges. Get to know the person by asking about their special interests.

Be mindful of the individual's limitations and recognise that some tasks or roles may be unfit. Find tasks that match the employee's strengths and interests. Autistic individuals might thrive in positions that demand meticulousness, reliability and adherence to protocols like handling documents and inventory, food preparation, or maintaining cleanliness standards.

Provide training and continuous support to help the employee feel self-assured in their role. Autistic people are usually highly anxious in new settings and may be slower with learning, but their loyalty, attention to detail and compliance with rules will ensure good quality work. Give them time to develop their skills gradually.

Remind that social and communication difficulties are a core part of autism. Give tips and solutions on how to communicate with an autistic person.

For individuals on the autism spectrum, talking to new people can be an overwhelming and anxiety-inducing experience. They may underrepresent themselves during a job interview. Ask clear questions about their previous experience, education, and expectations from the job. As a recruiter, focus on the candidate's hard skills and experience directly required for the job. Give the candidate more time to process their answers and allow for alternative communication methods, such as e-mail or instant messaging services.

Consider alternatives to traditional team meetings or group activities like providing written updates or conducting virtual check-ins if it would benefit the individual.

In your interactions, avoid open-ended questions, sarcasm and figurative speech. Do not imply anything, avoid vague statements, and make your message as clear as possible.

Address the person directly. If the person struggles with speaking, give them more time or encourage written communication. Be patient.

Offer to keep in touch via e-mail or messaging services instead of phone calls. An incoming phone call is unexpected, and it can be hard for an autistic person to switch attention and communicate effectively or to understand when is their turn to speak. Alternatively, schedule a fixed time for a phone call or video call.


Prepare social scripts for communication with clients and customers. Do not forget to include instructions for unexpected situations (e.g. who to contact in case of an emergency or when something is unclear).

Provide training and support for managers and colleagues on how to interact effectively with autistic employees.

Slide 21: Reasonable Accommodations: Structured Environment, Clear Communication and Feedback

Structured environment, clear communication and feedback

- Visual aids: schedules, checklists, calendars, apps
- Clear expectations
- Written instructions
- Breaking down complex tasks
- Consistent routine
- Fixed schedule with scheduled breaks
- Constructive feedback



Explain executive functioning challenges that a person on the autism spectrum might have, as well as the need for routine and predictability. Offer tips and solutions.


Individuals on the autism spectrum often find comfort in routine and predictability. Sudden changes can cause stress and be overwhelming. It is crucial to warn about changes promptly and explain what is going to happen. Visual aids may be helpful as they provide a clear understanding of the situation, and a structured work environment may help to alleviate anxiety and increase productivity. Develop a clear outline of your expectations from the employee and provide work instructions using written or visual aids such as visual schedules, checklists, calendars, and apps. It is important to help the individual to prioritise tasks and break them down into smaller steps. You can also break down complex information into smaller parts to enhance understanding. Be open to answering questions and providing clarification when needed.

Many autistic people struggle with time management and focus. Sometimes they have trouble switching attention and remain so deeply focused on their work that they forget to take a break. Others have co-occurring ADHD and need help staying on track. Having a schedule divided into fixed parts, including scheduled meetings and breaks, can be helpful. One popular time management technique is the Pomodoro Technique. Francesco Cirillo created this technique in the 1980s. Essentially, it is 25 minutes of focused work followed by a mandatory 5-minute break. After each four cycles of focused work, a longer break should be taken — 25-30 minutes. Scheduled breaks and visual

prompts may also help an autistic person who struggles with interoception to remember to go to the bathroom or drink water.

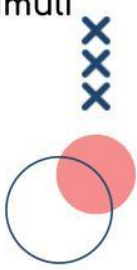

Finally, give constructive feedback on the employee's work, providing additional instructions if necessary.

Slide 22: Reasonable Accommodations: Sensory Considerations and Flexibility



Sensory considerations and flexibility

- Sensory aids
- Lighting: no flickering lights, no bright overhead lights, no flashing LEDs, no strobes
- A separate quiet room with minimal stimuli
- Sensory-friendly uniform
- Good ventilation, fragrance-free detergents
- Diverse menu options
- Additional breaks, reduced workload



Educate the learners on sensory accommodations which would help an autistic individual.

Given the countless sensory experiences in the HoReCa industry, it is extremely important to recognise and accommodate the sensory sensitivities the staff members might have to create a welcoming workplace for both the staff and customers.

Autistic people may be extremely sensitive to loud noises such as clattering dishes, kitchen appliances, or hand dryers in the bathroom. Moreover, rather than noise itself, it is more often complex noise coming from multiple sources which altogether causes sensory overload. Chatter, music playing in the background, cutlery clinking or other overlapping noises, which are frequent in cafés and restaurants, may be a great source of distress.

If necessary, encourage staff members to use sensory aids such as noise-cancelling earphones or earplugs and create a quiet space for them to take a break and decompress. Designate a secluded area with reduced visual and auditory stimuli.

Throughout the workplace, use natural light as much as possible. Provide multiple sources of artificial light. Consider installing dimmers. Make sure to avoid flickering lights, bright overhead lighting, flashing LED signs, strobes, and daylight light bulbs.

If employees are required to wear uniforms in your establishment, seek to provide comfortable garments in sensory-friendly fabrics with no tags or rough stitches or allow for reasonable swaps or modifications. Some autistic people struggle with thermoregulation and may be hyper- or hyposensitive to hot or cold temperatures. Ensure that the uniform can be adjustable to suit the individual's needs.

Additionally, autistic people may have an increased level of sensitivity to specific scents such as strong cooking aromas and cleaning items or detergents with a pungent odour. Install a good ventilation system and arrange a supply of fragrance-free washing liquids.

Many people on the autism spectrum also have a limited diet. Offer menu options for people with dietary sensitivities or preferences — it will not only serve the employees but also attract customers with particular dietary needs. Consider providing a selection of different flavours, textures, and presentation styles to fit varied sensory requirements.

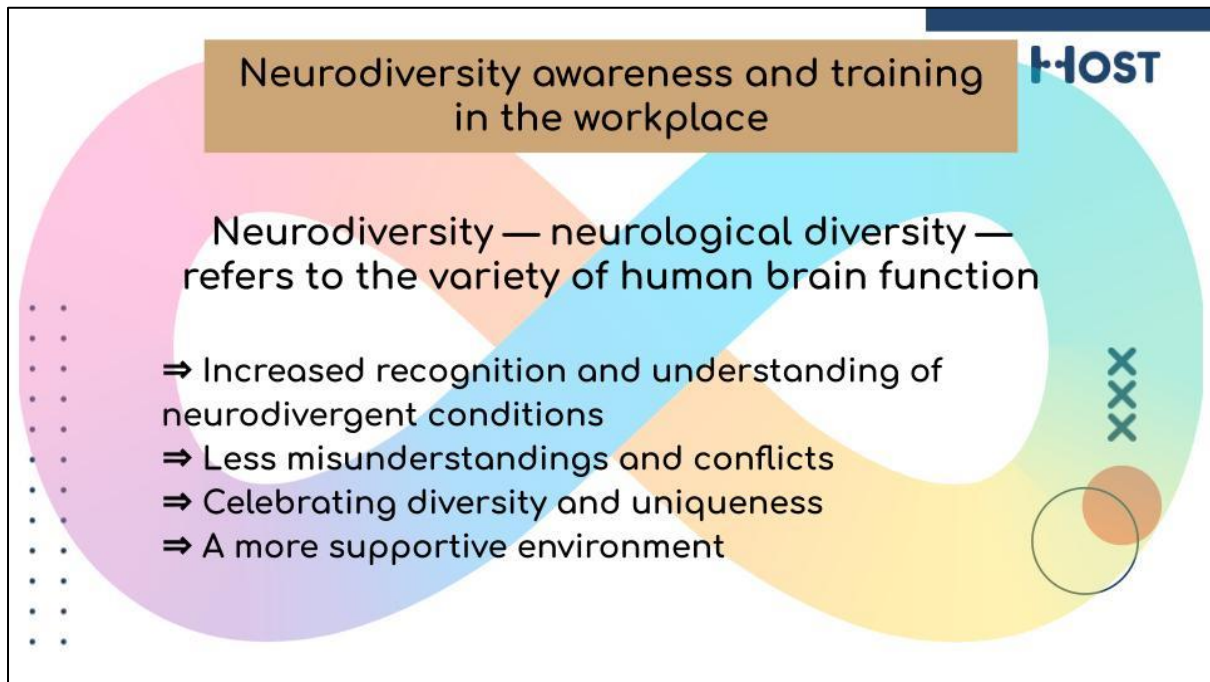
Make sure to provide training and support for managers and colleagues on how to create a sensory-friendly environment. Offer resources and guidance on recognising and responding to sensory overload.

Encourage the listeners to offer flexibility to their autistic colleagues or employees.

While scheduled breaks throughout the shift may help employees manage sensory overload, it is essential to allow for additional breaks and a flexible schedule if needed. In some cases, allowing the individual to work from home at their own pace would be beneficial (if possible). Reduced workload or working hours might also be useful in decreasing exhaustion and preventing burnout.

What is more, many autistic people enjoy repetitive work, but it is also important to provide opportunities for task variation, particularly for people with co-occurring ADHD to maintain interest and increase productivity.

Slide 23: Neurodiversity awareness and training in the workplace



Explain what neurodiversity is. Take special care to explain the difference between “neurodiverse” and “neurodivergent”, as those two terms often get mixed up. We are all neurodiverse (the term applies to a group of people), but not everyone is neurodivergent. In order to be -divergent, one has to diverge from something. In this case, from the “neurotypical”.

Neurodiversity refers to neurological diversity — the variety of human brain function. Within this framework, there is no “right” or “wrong” way of experiencing and interacting with the world, and all the experiences are equally valid and a natural part of human cognition. Nevertheless, being neurodivergent (diverging from the “neurotypical”) can be not only a difference but also a disability.

Speak of the importance of neurodiversity awareness and training in the workplace.

Neurodiversity training in the workplace can be an important step towards inclusivity. With 1-2% of the population being on the autism spectrum and many others having other types of neurodivergence, every bigger workplace likely features neurodivergent employees. Neurodiversity awareness and training would not only increase others' understanding of their neurodivergent counterparts and lessen misunderstandings and conflicts but also make the neurodivergent individuals feel seen, appreciated and valued for who they are. It is, however, essential to recognise that, while diversity is about celebrating the collective, each neurodivergent individual is unique. Everyone should be allowed to define themselves and share their story without any preconceived notions.

In addition, many neurodivergent individuals experience daily challenges and might benefit from others' support. Neurodiversity training would ensure that employees know how to help each other in times of need.

Slide 24: Benefits of Having an Inclusive Workplace



Outline the benefits of having an inclusive workplace. You can also use these ideas as a basis for a discussion.

A diverse staff with diverse perspectives can generate a wider range of ideas. Skilfully blended, these ideas can lead to creativity and innovation that benefits both the individual and the organisation.

"Sometimes the right mind can belong only to an autistic brain." (Temple Grandin)

Slide 25: Thank you!



Thank all the listeners and be ready to answer questions.

Exercise 1

Module 1; Quiz 1

Instructions: Read the following statements and circle the correct option:

1. Repetitive behaviours can take different forms, including:

- a) Repetitive and stereotyped body movements, a narrow focus on one or more special interests, and an unusual obsession with objects or parts of objects, or particular kinds of sensory stimuli
- b) Repetitive requests of a person to get what they want
- c) Sticking religiously to a routine and melting down when the routine breaks

2. People on the Autism Spectrum...

- a) Are highly verbal and intelligent but experience a lot of struggles with organisation and planning
- b) Are sensitive to loud noises, or have a specific learning disability such as dyslexia
- c) Each person is different, with or without autism

Exercise 2

Module 1; Quiz 2

Instructions: Read the following statements and circle the correct option:

1. What percentage of the population is on the Autism Spectrum?

- a) 8%
- b) 1 – 2%
- c) 10%

2. A good way to keep in touch with an autistic employee with social interaction difficulties is by...

- a) Exchanging e-mail or messages using apps
- b) Assigning them to work from home and having online calls everyday
- c) Having daily one-to-one meetings to make sure they are ok