

Tab 1



MORE THAN INCLUSION

A DATA-INFORMED
TOOLKIT FOR
INTERSECTIONAL
WORKPLACE
SUPPORT

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1. Introduction

Purpose and Audience

This toolkit aims to promote workplace inclusion for individuals identifying as both autistic and LGBTQ+. Despite growing awareness, many workplaces still overlook the unique challenges faced by those at this intersection. This resource provides practical tools, self-assessments,

evidence-based strategies, and policy guidance to foster inclusive workplace environments effectively.

Who Should Use This Toolkit?

This resource is designed for:

- Human Resources professionals
- Disability employment specialists
- Inclusive hiring teams
- Workplace leaders
- Inclusion committees

While developed with a focus on Northeast Ohio's public and nonprofit sectors, its strategies and insights can benefit any organization striving to strengthen workplace equity and belonging nationwide.

About the Creator

Tiffany Jones brings over 26 years of experience in developmental disabilities, encompassing residential services, day programming, and community inclusion. Currently, Tiffany serves as the Community Employment Coordinator for the Portage County Board of Developmental Disabilities, facilitating meaningful, sustainable employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities.

Tiffany's undergraduate research at Kent State University examined the intersection of autism and LGBTQ+ identity in workplace settings, a focus that will continue into her Master of Public Administration (MPA) program starting Fall 2025. She actively collaborates with businesses, employment support agencies, and professional groups, including SHRM, to champion workplace accessibility and intersectional inclusion.

Tiffany is a dedicated member of APSE, having completed their Emerging Leaders Program, and serves on the Ohio APSE Board of Directors. She is a strong proponent of Employment First and advocates vigorously for employment equity.

This toolkit combines rigorous academic research, practical field knowledge, and community collaboration, designed as an evolving resource continually enhanced by feedback, new insights, and updated practices.

Self-Assessment: Inclusion Pulse Check (Pre/Post)

This self-assessment is meant to be completed twice:

- Before using the toolkit, to reflect on your current practices and knowledge
- After reviewing the toolkit, to assess growth and identify areas for continued focus

This tool is for self-reflection not evaluation. If you're working as part of a team, comparing results can spark deeper conversations and guide shared improvements

Assessment

Why Intersectionality Matters

Intersectionality acknowledges how overlapping identities such as being autistic and LGBTQ+ can amplify discrimination. Recognizing intersectionality helps avoid the unintended exclusion that may occur when diversity programs consider identities separately rather than collectively.

Supporting Data:

Research shows that LGBTQ+ autistic individuals experience higher levels of workplace discrimination, anxiety, and burnout, largely due to masking, dual closeting, and lack of representation (Jones, 2024; Schmidt et al., 2024).

Research also shows that when support is missing, people at this intersection are less likely to stay employed, more likely to be passed over for promotions, and more vulnerable to mental health challenges (Doyle et al. (2022),

Definitions and Key Terms

Understanding shared language is a key step toward building inclusive practices. Below are brief definitions of terms used throughout this toolkit:

- **Autistic / Autism Spectrum:** A neurodevelopmental condition impacting communication, behavior, and sensory processing.
- **LGBTQ+:** Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning, Intersex, Asexual, and other identities.
- **Intersectionality:** Framework highlighting how overlapping identities create unique experiences of discrimination.
- **Minority Stress:** Chronic social stress affecting marginalized identities, often resulting in mental health disparities.
- **Masking:** Suppressing natural behaviors or identity traits to conform, often causing exhaustion and burnout.
- **Dual Closeting:** Concealing both autistic and LGBTQ+ identities due to fear of stigma or discrimination.

Suggested Resources:

- [Intersectionality Explained \(Britannica\)](#)
- [Autism and Masking \(National Autistic Society\)](#)
- [Importance of Representation \(Psychology Today\)](#)

For a deeper dive into language: [Inclusive language](#)

How to Use This Toolkit

*This toolkit was created to be **flexible and user-friendly**, designed for a wide range of users and purposes. You can explore it in a way that fits your role, interests, or current needs whether you're reading it start to finish or jumping into specific sections.*

*Throughout the toolkit, you'll find **many links** that allow you to:*

- *Dive deeper into topics that interest you*
- *Watch relevant videos or presentations*
- *Explore tools, templates, and further reading*
- *Access local, national, and global resources*

*This is a **living document**, meant to grow and evolve as new ideas, resources, and policies emerge. If you come across a broken link or know of a resource that should be added, please share it with **Tiffany Jones***

Please note:

- *While all resources have been reviewed, no source is perfect or fully inclusive.*
- *The inclusion of a source does not reflect the personal views of the toolkit administrator.*
- *Local resource links currently focus on **Northeast Ohio**, but many supports are available in other regions, and global resources have been included wherever possible. As the project expands, additional state and regional information may be added.*

2. Understanding the Intersection

Prevalence of LGBTQ+ Identity Among Autistic Individuals

People who are both LGBTQ+ and autistic often face overlapping, and frequently misunderstood, challenges in the workplace. Many experience higher rates of isolation, discrimination, and mental health concerns due to compounding factors like masking, limited accommodations, and a general lack of understanding about their identities.

LGBTQ+ autistic individuals often feel pressure to "pass", whether as neurotypical or cisgender/heterosexual, in order to be accepted. This pressure can lead to anxiety, burnout, and high turnover. Dual marginalization also makes it harder to feel safe being out or requesting support, especially in environments where neither LGBTQ+ nor disability inclusion is fully understood.

It's also important to recognize that LGBTQ+ identities are significantly more common among autistic individuals than among the general population. Yet, most workplace inclusion strategies treat these identities as separate issues, leaving individuals at this intersection under-supported and underrepresented.

Supporting Data

- Autistic individuals are statistically more likely than the general population to identify as LGBTQ+.
([Gallup Polls \(2023\)](#)) reported that nearly 7.2% of U.S. adults identify as LGBTQ+ , while [McQuaid et al. \(2023\)](#) found that over 41% of autistic adults identify as a sexual minority.
- LGBTQ+ autistic people are overrepresented in data related to mental health crises, workplace exclusion, and community isolation.
Sources: [Jones \(2024\)](#); [Trevor Project \(2020\)](#)

This overlap is essential, but often overlooked, when discussing inclusive employment practices. Many individuals remain under-supported due to limited awareness and poor integration of inclusive approaches across both LGBTQ+ and disability support systems.

Note from the creator: In conducting my undergraduate research, I identified not only a gap in awareness among professionals, but also a significant lack of available research specific to this intersection in employment contexts. To help address this, I developed both this toolkit and a companion survey, which is currently open to employment professionals and HR representatives in Northeast Ohio.

Mental Health and Minority Stress Impacts

Individuals who are both autistic and part of the LGBTQ+ community often face unique and serious mental health challenges. These challenges aren't because of who they are, but because of how society responds to them

Minority Stress Theory (Meyer, 2003), helps us understand that many mental health concerns come from living in environments where people experience frequent discrimination, feel pressure to hide parts of who they are, or don't see themselves reflected in leadership or culture.

People at this intersection often report:

- Higher rates of anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation
- Lower levels of support, belonging, and inclusion
- Increased burnout caused by masking and closeting

Masking refers to autistic individuals hiding or minimizing traits in order to fit in.

Closeting means concealing one's LGBTQ+ identity to stay safe or feel accepted.

When a person does both, what we call **dual closeting**, it can cause overwhelming stress and exhaustion.

Supporting Research:

- A 2023 study found that **41.2% of autistic adults identify as LGBTQ+**, and those individuals experience significantly more anxiety, depression, and lower quality of life than their heterosexual autistic peers.
View study: [McQuaid et al.](#)
- Data from The Trevor Project shows that LGBTQ+ youth with autism have **50% higher odds of attempting suicide** compared to LGBTQ+ youth without autism, highlighting the mental health risks that come with this intersection.
View brief: [The Trevor Project](#)
- Other studies show that internalized stigma, discrimination, and the need to hide one's identity are all linked to poorer mental health outcomes in autistic adults.
View study: [Botha & Frost](#)

These issues are real, but they're also preventable. Inclusive workplaces, affirming practices, and supportive relationships can help reduce these risks.

What You Can Do

- Make inclusion visible and ongoing, share pronouns, avoid assumptions, and use inclusive language.
- Build trust by letting people know it's safe to be themselves. Normalize disclosure by offering support and asking about needs early and respectfully.
- Offer flexibility and check-ins. Masking and hiding can be exhausting, supportive environments can reduce burnout.
- Train staff and supervisors on trauma-informed approaches and respectful communication. Small changes can have a big impact on mental health.

Suggested Tools

- **PRIDES Trauma-Informed Guide** – outlines systemic harm and microaggressions experienced by LGBTQ+ people with disabilities
- **Supporting LGBTQ+ Individuals with I/DD – Cheat Sheet (PDF)** – a practical, quick-start tool for inclusive support

Employment Barriers and Dual Closeting

Autistic LGBTQ+ individuals often face overlapping barriers in the workplace, both in being hired and in staying employed long term. These challenges include misunderstanding, bias, and environments that require constant masking or that lack identity-affirming support.

The concept of **dual closeting** is especially relevant here. Autistic LGBTQ+ individuals may feel pressure to hide both their neurodivergent traits and their sexual or gender identity in order to be accepted. This increases stress, emotional exhaustion, and the likelihood of job dissatisfaction or departure.

Data from [Taylor et al. \(2015\)](#) highlights long-term challenges. While two-thirds of autistic adults with average-range IQ participated in competitive employment or postsecondary education at some point, fewer than 25 percent were able to maintain these opportunities over time. Autistic women, in particular, were significantly less likely to sustain long-term employment or education. These findings emphasize that inclusive hiring practices must be paired with ongoing workplace supports that address both identity and accessibility needs.

Although overall employment rates for people with disabilities are improving, autistic LGBTQ+ adults remain underrepresented in meaningful employment and overrepresented in:

- Underemployment
- Job precarity (unstable or part-time work)
- Low wages
- High turnover

Supporting Research:

- **Doyle et al. (2022):** Autistic workers, especially those who are also LGBTQ+, report **higher rates of exclusion** and **fewer promotion opportunities**. Formal accommodations alone were not enough to create inclusion.
- **Schmidt et al. (2024):** Discrimination and lack of cultural understanding often push LGBTQ+ autistic adults out of the workforce. What helped most was not paperwork, it was feeling seen, safe, and supported.

“Just getting a job isn’t enough. Many don’t feel safe or supported enough to stay.”

What You Can Do

- Make inclusion visible: share pronouns, offer flexible interview formats, and use welcoming language in materials.
- Don’t wait for disclosure, offer accommodations proactively and normalize them in onboarding and training.
- Invite employees to share communication preferences or support needs in low-pressure ways.
- Train staff to focus on strengths rather than assumptions, and to recognize how masking and closeting impact retention.
- Set up peer supports or buddy systems so new hires have someone to turn to, especially important for individuals who may feel isolated.

Suggested Tools

Gender and Sexual Identities Handout – helps introduce key terms and validate diverse identities

Rainbow Guidebook – community-created, easy-to-read source for people with

3. Creating Inclusive Workplaces

Workplace culture plays a major role in whether people feel safe, valued, and supported, especially individuals at the intersection of LGBTQ+ and autistic identities. Many of the most persistent challenges are not about getting accommodations, but about how inclusive the daily environment feels.

Inclusion doesn't happen by accident. It takes intentional policy, training, leadership, and follow-through. This section outlines ways to build intersectional inclusion across hiring, communication, policies, and support systems, with practical tools to help along the way.

Hiring & Onboarding

Inclusive hiring isn't just about who gets the job, it's about how every step of the process sends a message about belonging.

Best practices:

- Use inclusive, plain language in job postings and forms
- Let applicants self-identify name, pronouns, and communication preferences
- Normalize offering accommodations during interviews (e.g., alternative formats, visual supports, or presence of a support person)
- Provide information about mental health resources, LGBTQ+ supports, and how to disclose needs safely if desired

Suggested Tools:

- [Gender-Neutral Dress Code Guidelines](#)
- [MyPronouns.org](#)
- [Job Accommodation Network \(JAN\)](#)
- [Inclusive Onboarding Checklist](#)

Representation & Safety

Seeing yourself represented in leadership, training materials, or employee networks matters. For LGBTQ+ autistic employees, visible representation and psychological safety are often the difference between staying and leaving.

Best practices:

- Highlight LGBTQ+ and neurodivergent voices in leadership and decision-making roles
- Respect pronouns and chosen names across systems
- Use gender-inclusive language in forms, signage, and policies
- Design restrooms and facilities with privacy and inclusivity in mind
- Make representation in training meaningful, not token
- Ensure managers engage authentically in inclusion, and that all staff know how to respond supportively to disclosure

Supporting Research:

- Schmidt et al. (2024) found that LGBTQ+ autistic adults are more likely to remain in jobs where they feel seen, affirmed, and supported
- McQuaid et al. (2023) showed that safety in everyday experiences like transportation and workplace comfort directly affect quality of life

Suggested Tools:

- Representation Toolkit – Reflective Practice
- MyPronouns.org
- Gender-Inclusive Language Guidelines – UCSF
- Inclusive Restroom Toolkit – Out & Equal
- LGBTQ+ Autistic Inclusion Resource Collection – ASAN

Language & Communication

Language is one of the most powerful tools for inclusion. The way we communicate expectations, give feedback, and acknowledge identity can build trust, or erode it.

Best practices:

- Use clear, plain language in materials and conversations
- Avoid jargon, acronyms, and overly formal or coded speech
- Ask respectfully about identity, don't assume
- Stay current on inclusive language and terminology

Suggested Tools:

- [Pronouns 101](#)
- [APA Inclusive Language Guidelines](#)

Accommodations & Flexibility

Creating access shouldn't depend on a formal diagnosis or disclosure. Inclusive workplaces proactively build in options and invite conversation about support needs.

Best practices:

- Offer accommodations to everyone, not just after disclosure
- Design flexible work structures (e.g., sensory-friendly spaces, varied schedules, communication modes)
- Make name and pronoun changes easy and respectful across systems
- Train supervisors on what flexibility looks like and how to support it
- Normalize individual differences and avoid "one size fits all" approaches

Suggested Tools:

- Workplace Accommodation Toolkit – JAN
- HRC – Coming Out at Work
- National Autistic Society – Visual Supports

Red Flag / Green Flag Workplace Practices

The following framework is adapted from the study “Supports and Barriers to Inclusive Workplaces for LGBTQIA+ Autistic Adults in the United States” by Schmidt et al. (2024).

This printable tool can help supervisors, HR teams, and employment professionals identify practices that may unintentionally harm LGBTQ+ autistic employees, and adopt affirming strategies that promote inclusion and belonging. Each item includes a brief explanation to support reflection and training.

Potential Red Flags (Harmful Practices)

- **Dress codes that use gendered language or reinforce binary norms**
These often assume everyone is either male or female, which invalidates nonbinary and gender-diverse employees and can increase dysphoria.
- **Asking “Are you a boy or girl?” on forms or in conversation**
Binary framing is harmful to those who do not identify within that framework. It can feel invasive, unsafe, or alienating.
- **Requiring all employees to communicate the same way**
Communication preferences vary. Autistic employees may need different formats or time to process, and rigid expectations create barriers.
- **Policies that require a formal diagnosis for accommodations**
Many individuals, particularly in marginalized communities, lack access to diagnosis. Requiring one excludes people who still need support.
- **Assuming LGBTQ+ employees are comfortable being out**
Disclosure involves risk. Assuming openness can result in pressure, outing, or emotional harm. For many, being out at work is tied to concerns about safety, healthcare access, and basic needs like transportation.
- **Assuming all autistic people want or need the same type of support**
A one-size-fits-all approach often fails. Support needs are individual and vary widely, even among people with the same diagnosis.

- **Ignoring or dismissing feedback from LGBTQ+ or neurodivergent employees**
When concerns are not taken seriously, trust is eroded and inclusion efforts appear performative.
 - **Using inclusive-sounding language without following through in practice**
Words like “diversity” or “inclusive” ring hollow when policies, staff behavior, and culture do not align.
 - **Avoiding gender, disability, or LGBTQ+ topics in training**
Avoidance sends a message that these identities are off-limits, irrelevant, or shameful. This contributes to erasure and fear.
 - **Relying on one-time trainings without follow-up**
Lasting change requires repetition and accountability. Single sessions often fail to shift culture or behavior.
 - **Expecting employees to disclose identity or diagnosis in order to access support**
This assumes trust that may not exist. Disclosure should always be optional and safe, never a precondition for inclusion.
 - **Failing to train managers on how to respond to disclosure or accommodation requests**
Research shows managers often feel unprepared to support autistic employees. This leads to awkward conversations, unmet needs, and inconsistent support.
-

Affirming Green Flags (Inclusive Practices)

- **Allowing employees to self-identify name, pronouns, and communication preferences**
This validates identity and removes pressure to conform to assumptions about gender or communication style.
- **Offering accommodations without requiring formal disclosure**
Builds access for all, especially those who are undiagnosed, questioning, or not ready to disclose.
- **Using both identity-first and person-first language, based on individual preference**
Shows responsiveness and respect for how people describe themselves.
- **Using open-ended form fields for gender, pronouns, and preferred name**
Allows people to be seen authentically, rather than forced into limiting boxes.
- **Providing intersectional training on autism and LGBTQ+ inclusion together**
Supports a more realistic and holistic understanding of employee experiences, instead of treating identities as separate.
- **Including people with lived experience in policy and training design**
Leads to more relevant, thoughtful, and effective practices. Also fosters equity in leadership.

- **Offering anonymous and accessible ways to give feedback**
Encourages honesty and allows people to share concerns without fear of retaliation.
- **Embedding inclusive language and values into all communication**
Culture is shaped by daily language, not just mission statements. Inclusion should be visible and consistent.
- **Normalizing pronoun sharing while keeping it optional**
Makes space for gender identity while respecting personal safety and readiness to share.
- **Recognizing that support must be flexible and individualized**
What supports one person may burden another. Adaptability is key to equitable workplaces.
- **Creating a culture where disclosure is welcomed but never expected**
Employees should feel safe choosing whether to disclose. Safety must come before self-disclosure.
- **Hiring and promoting LGBTQ+ and neurodivergent individuals into visible roles**
Representation fosters a sense of belonging and reduces feelings of isolation or tokenism.
- **Pairing accommodations with inclusive culture and peer support**
Formal supports alone are not enough. Affirming relationships and safe supervision matter just as much.
- **Naming barriers explicitly in policies and trainings**
Inclusive environments are more effective when they acknowledge the real barriers LGBTQ+ autistic employees face, instead of relying on general language about diversity.
- **Tracking equity outcomes across identity groups**
Autistic LGBTQ+ workers report lower rates of promotion and advancement. Organizations should regularly evaluate equity in hiring, pay, and leadership development.

4. Workplace Practices and Policy

Policy Review Guidance

Workplace policies are often written with good intentions but may unintentionally exclude or overlook the needs of LGBTQ+ and neurodivergent individuals, especially when those identities intersect.

This section is designed to help you review your existing policies and practices through an intersectional lens. The goal is not just compliance, but creating a culture of belonging. As you review your organization's policies, such as non-discrimination statements, onboarding forms, accommodations, dress codes, or complaint procedures, consider:

- Who is this policy written for?
- Who is unintentionally left out?
- What assumptions about gender, disability, or communication are embedded in this language?
- Are policies applied equitably, even when needs differ?

The following checklist will guide you through key components to evaluate: 
[Intersectional Inclusion Policy Audit Checklist \(PDF\)](#)

This review should be collaborative and ongoing, involving HR, direct support staff, and people with lived experience. Even small changes can create big shifts in workplace culture.

Red Flag Practices to Avoid (Policy Specific)

Some well-meaning policies can unintentionally reinforce exclusion when viewed through an intersectional lens. Avoid:

- Binary gender language on forms or in dress codes
- Diagnosis-dependent accommodations that exclude those without formal evaluations
- “Don’t ask, don’t tell” approaches to identity or neurodivergence
- DEI programs that separate autism and LGBTQ+ support rather than integrating them

See also: Section 3 – [*Red Flag / Green Flag Workplace Practices*](#) for additional examples tied to day-to-day culture.

Jones (2024) and Schmidt et al. (2024) found that environments ignoring intersecting identities lead to increased burnout, job exits, and identity concealment.

Sample Inclusive Practices

These examples support LGBTQ+ and autistic employees across different stages of the workplace experience. Start with what fits your organization and build over time.

Onboarding and Orientation

- Use open-ended fields for name, pronouns, and gender on forms and ID badges
- Share mental health, pronoun, and accommodation resources early
- Offer orientation in multiple formats (visual, written, sensory-friendly)

Optional metric: Track which onboarding materials are accessed or completed most frequently.

Workplace Environment

- Display visual signs of inclusion (e.g., policies, symbols, shared values)
- Clarify communication expectations (camera use, tone, small talk)
- Respect sensory needs with low-stimulation spaces and optional tools

Optional metric: Collect feedback on workspace comfort and clarity of communication norms.

Training and Supervision

- Normalize pronoun use in intros, encouraged, but not required
- Train supervisors on affirming feedback and flexible supports
- Refresh training annually with updates from staff feedback

Optional metric: Measure training participation and changes in confidence or language use.

Culture and Feedback

- Use anonymous forms, short surveys, or check-ins to gather input
- Celebrate diverse leadership and include LGBTQ+/neurodivergent staff in hiring panels
- Clearly identify staff who are safe points of contact

Optional metric: Include belonging and safety questions in annual climate surveys.

Policy & Template Resources

Here are useful tools for updating policies and procedures:

- [Autistic Self Advocacy Network \(ASAN\) – Employment Toolkit](#)
- [Intersectional Inclusion Policy Audit Checklist \(PDF\)](#)
- [Inclusive Hiring and Onboarding Checklists](#)
- [Gender-Neutral Dress Code Guidelines – PowerToFly](#)

Trauma-Informed and Strengths-Based Approaches

Trauma-informed practice means recognizing that many LGBTQ+ autistic individuals carry complex trauma, from personal experiences and from systemic exclusion, misdiagnosis, abuse, or isolation.

What this looks like in the workplace:

- Consent-based interactions (e.g., never forcing icebreakers or eye contact)
- Avoiding shaming language like “That’s not appropriate here”
- Understanding shutdowns or burnout as stress responses, not behavior issues

- Peer support or mentorship systems in addition to HR oversight
Peer-based mentorship programs can reduce isolation and increase retention for autistic LGBTQ+ staff.

 [PRIDES Trauma-Informed Handout \(PDF\)](#)

Inclusive Onboarding and Peer Supports

First impressions matter. Many autistic LGBTQ+ individuals decide early whether they can be themselves, or if they must begin masking immediately. Affirming practices include:

- A welcome video featuring LGBTQ+ or neurodivergent staff
- Quiet, self-paced onboarding options
- Mentorship by peers with lived experience who model authenticity and safety

Suggested tools:

- [Download a sample Inclusive Onboarding Checklist](#) or [this one](#)
- **More on gender neutral Dress Codes**
- **More on why Autism goes undiagnosed, especially in women**
- **More on pronouns and why they matter**

5. Suggested Tools and Resources:

This section compiles visual aids, handouts, videos, curriculum tools, and advocacy materials you can use to train staff, engage employers, and support individuals. These are especially helpful for busy teams looking to act quickly with vetted, ready-to-use tools.

Workplace-Focused Resources

Designed for HR professionals, employment specialists, and organizational leaders:

- [ASAN Employment Toolkit – Inclusive hiring practices, workplace supports, and policy templates](#)
- [APSE.org – Association of People Supporting Employment First](#)
- [Autism at work Playbook](#)
- [Best Practices for LGBTQ+ Inclusive Restrooms \(PDF\) – Out & Equal](#)
- [Disability:IN – Corporate inclusion benchmarking and toolkits](#)
- [Diversity Inclusion toolkit](#)
- [Gender-Neutral Dress Code Guidelines – PowerToFly](#)
- [HRC LGBTQ+ at Work Toolkit](#)
- [Inclusive Onboarding Checklist](#)
- [Inclusive workplace Discussion toolkit for autism](#)
- [Intersectional Inclusion Policy Audit Checklist \(PDF\)](#)
- [Job Accommodation Network \(JAN\)](#)
- [Out & Equal Workplace Advocates](#)
- [Resources for inclusive Hiring](#)
- [SHRM BEAM Framework for Inclusion](#)
- [What Managers Should Know About Stimming](#)
- [Zippia LGBTQ+ Workplace Guide](#)

Tools & General Websites

- [ADA National Network](#)
- [APA Inclusive Language Guidelines](#)
- [Bridges to Work](#)
- [Disability:IN](#)
- [Diversability – Top 10 Workplace Accommodations](#)
- [LGBTQ+ Pride Flags – HRC](#)
- [MyPronouns.org](#)
- [Neurodiversity Symbols – Library](#)
- [National Organization on Disability \(NOD\)](#)
- [Open Future Learning](#)
- [PlainLanguage.gov](#)
- [Pronouns 101 – UCSF](#)
- [Reflective Practice Toolkit](#)
- [Safe Zone Project](#)
- [UN Gender-Inclusive Language Guidelines](#)

- [Visual Supports – National Autistic Society](#)

LGBTQ+ Identity-Specific Resources

- [Coming Out at Work – HRC](#)
- [Deloitte 2023 LGBTQ+ Inclusion at Work Report \(PDF\)](#)
- [Equality Ohio](#)
- [LGBTQ Ohio](#)
- [National LGBTQ Task Force](#)
- [National Queer and Trans Therapists of Color Network](#)
- [Pride at Work \(AFL-CIO\)](#)
- [Transgender Law Center – Disability Project](#)
- [Trevor Project – National LGBTQ Youth Survey](#)
- [Understanding Disabled LGBTQ+ People – HRC](#)

Disability/Autism Identity-Specific Resources

- [Autistic Self Advocacy Network \(ASAN\)](#)
- [Autistic Women & Nonbinary Network \(AWN\)](#)
- [Business Case for Disability Inclusion \(PDF\)](#)
- [Effective Job Coaching Supports \(PDF\)](#)
- [Ohio Interagency Workgroup on Autism \(PDF\)](#)
- [Why Autism Often Goes Undiagnosed – ASAN](#)

Intersectional Resources (LGBTQ+ and Autism/Disability)

- [Definitions and Beyond – Plain Language LGBTQ+ Glossary \(PDF\)](#)
- [Gender and Sexual Identities Handout – Rainbow Guidebook](#)
- [Gender, Sex, and Attraction Handout – Rainbow Guidebook](#)
- [PRIDES Trauma-Informed Guide \(PDF\)](#)
- [Supporting LGBTQ+ Individuals with I/DD Cheat Sheet \(PDF\)](#)

[Twainbow](#)

Northeast Ohio Local Resources

- [ADAMHS Board of Cuyahoga County – LGBTQ+ Services](#)
- [Autism Society of Greater Akron \(ASGA\)](#)
- [Autism Society of Greater Cleveland \(ASGC\)](#)
- [CANAPI – Akron LGBTQ+ Resources](#)
- [Cleveland Clinic LGBT Care](#)
- [Cleveland Mediation Center – LGBTQ+](#)
- [Colors+ Youth Center](#)
- [Kent Disabled Students Society](#)
- [Kent State Autism Initiative \(AIREO\)](#)
- [Kent State Developmental Disabilities Services](#)
- [Kent State LGBTQ+ Center](#)
- [Kent State LGBTQ+ – Community Resources](#)
- [Kent State LGBTQ+ – Resources Guide](#)
- [Kent State LGBTQ+ – Support Groups](#)

- LGBT Community Center of Greater Cleveland
- Margie's Hope
- MetroHealth LGBTQ+ Pride Network
- Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities (OOD)
- PFLAG Cleveland
- Plexus LGBTQ+ Chamber of Commerce

County DD Boards & Employment Collaboratives

- Ashtabula County DD
- Cuyahoga County DD
- Employment Collaborative of Cuyahoga County
- Geauga County DD
- Lake County DD
- Lake County Employment Collaborative
- Lorain County DD
- Mahoning County DD
- Medina County DD
- Portage County DD
- Stark County DD
- Summit County DD
- Summit Employment Collaborative
- Trumbull County DD

- Tuscarawas County DD
- Wayne County DD

Tip: Consider joining or starting a quarterly “Intersectional Inclusion Workgroup” to share feedback, set goals, and sustain collaboration across partners.

Supporting Research Materials

The following studies provide the foundation for the information, strategies, and recommendations in this toolkit. They explore the intersection of autism, LGBTQ+ identity, workplace inclusion, and mental health. These are valuable for professional development, advocacy, and continued research.

Peer-Reviewed Research

Peer-Reviewed Research

- Botha, M., & Frost, D. M. (2020). Extending the minority stress model to understand mental health problems experienced by autistic people. *Clinical Psychology Review*, 79, 101846. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cpr.2020.101846>
- Branicki, L. J., Sullivan-Taylor, B., & Stead, D. (2023). Factors shaping the employment outcomes of neurodivergent and neurotypical people: Exploring the role of flexible and homeworking practices. *Human Resource Management*. <https://doi.org/10.1002/hrm.22243>
- Doyle, N., & McDowall, A. (2022). Intersectional stigma and employment experiences of autistic people. *Disability & Society*, 37, 775–797.
- Gan, Y., & Qiu, J. (2023). Social anxiety mediates workplace incivility and work engagement among autistic employees. *Work & Stress*, 37, 33–51.
- Lewis, L. F. (2021). “Straight sex is complicated enough!”: The lived experiences of autistics who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, asexual, or other sexual orientations. *Sexuality and Disability*, 39, 79–98.
- McQuaid, G. A., & Zajicek, A. (2023). Sexual minority identities in autistic adults: Diversity and associations with mental health symptoms and subjective quality of life. *Autism*, 27, 1482–1497.

- Meyer, I. H. (2003). Prejudice, social stress, and mental health in lesbian, gay, and bisexual populations: Conceptual issues and research evidence. *Psychological Bulletin*, 129, 674–697.
- Rea, H. M., & Bishop, S. L. (2024). Gender diversity, gender dysphoria/incongruence, and the intersection with autism spectrum disorders: An updated scoping review. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*.
- Schmidt, E. A., Jones, T. N., & Parker, J. (2024). Supports and barriers to inclusive workplaces for LGBTQIA+ autistic adults in the United States. *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation*.
- Taylor, J. L., & Seltzer, M. M. (2015). Longitudinal patterns of employment and postsecondary education for adults with autism and average-range IQ. *Autism*, 19, 785–793.
- Waite, J., & Rodgers, J. (2022). Autistic girls but not boys show a strong association between internalizing symptoms and social motivation. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 63, 712–720.
- Whelpley, C. E., & McDaniel, M. A. (2023). Tensions on the spectrum: An inductive investigation of employee and manager experiences of autism. *Journal of Business and Psychology*, 38, 335–355.
- Wong, C. A. (2023). Supporting LGBTQ+ workers' mental health. *Harvard Business Review*.

Open access articles with links:

- Botha & Frost
[Extending the Minority Stress Model to Understand Mental Health Problems Experienced by the Autistic Population](#)
Explores how intersecting minority stress factors impact autistic individuals' mental health.
- Branicki
[Factors Shaping the Employment Outcomes of Neurodivergent and Neurotypical People: Exploring the Role of Flexible and Homeworking Practices](#)
Investigates how flexible work arrangements influence employment for neurodivergent individuals.
- Doyle
[Intersectional Stigma for Autistic People at Work](#)
Discusses how intersecting stigmas impact employment retention and identity

disclosure.

- Gan
Social Anxiety Mediates Workplace Incivility and Work Engagement
Analyzes the link between anxiety and workplace behavior among marginalized employees.
- Lewis
“Straight Sex is Complicated Enough!”: The Lived Experiences of Autistics Who Are Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Asexual, or Other Sexual Orientations
First-person narratives highlighting challenges of dual identities in relationships and social life.
- Meyer
Prejudice, Social Stress, and Mental Health in Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Populations: Conceptual Issues and Research Evidence
Foundational study introducing Minority Stress Theory, widely cited in LGBTQ+ mental health research.
- Rea
Gender Diversity, Gender Dysphoria/Incongruence, and the Intersection with Autism Spectrum Disorders: An Updated Scoping Review
Summarizes recent findings on the overlap between gender identity and autism.
- Taylor
Longitudinal Patterns of Employment and Postsecondary Education for Adults with Autism and Average-Range IQ
Tracks outcomes related to employment and education in autistic adults over time.
- Waite
Autistic Girls but Not Boys Show a Strong Association Between Internalizing Symptoms and Social Motivation
Discusses gendered differences in autistic mental health and social processing.

Project Contribution

- Jones, Tiffany (2024)
Capstone Paper – Intersection of Autism and LGBTQ+ Identity in the Workplace
Final undergraduate research paper, presented at the APSE National Conference, which served as the foundation for this toolkit.

6. Evaluation & Impact

Creating an inclusive workplace is not a one-time task. It requires regular reflection, tracking, and feedback to ensure that policies and practices are having a meaningful impact. This section provides tools to measure progress, evaluate outcomes, and guide continuous improvement for supporting LGBTQ+ autistic individuals in the workplace.

Whether you are an HR professional, supervisor, job coach, or inclusion committee member, these tools can be adapted to fit your setting and role.

Self-Assessment: Intersectional Awareness Survey

This pre/post self-assessment allows individuals or teams to reflect on their understanding before and after using the toolkit.

Sample Pre/Post Questions:

- I feel confident supporting someone who is both LGBTQ+ and autistic.
- Our workplace policies reflect the needs of people with intersecting identities.
- I know at least one best practice to reduce masking or dual closeting.
- I am aware of how trauma may impact LGBTQ+ neurodivergent individuals in the workplace.

Use the results to identify training needs, spark team conversations, and guide ongoing improvement.

Measuring Inclusion Outcomes

Inclusion should lead to meaningful changes in policy, culture, and retention. Below are sample outcome indicators organizations can track over time.

Category	Example Metrics
Awareness	% of staff who can define intersectionality, dual closeting, and masking
Practice Change	# of policies updated to reflect inclusive language or processes
Staff Confidence	Increase in self-reported ability to support intersecting identities
Belonging	% of LGBTQ+ and autistic staff who feel safe disclosing identities (from anonymous climate surveys)
Retention	Retention rate of neurodivergent and LGBTQ+ employees over time

Tip: Track outcomes at 30, 90, and 180 days to assess progress over time.

Sample Survey Questions

These questions can be used in training evaluations or workplace climate surveys. You may use a 5-point Likert scale (Strongly disagree to Strongly agree), anonymous comment boxes, or identity-optional demographic sections.

Belonging and Inclusion Sample Items:

- I know at least one way to support an employee who is both LGBTQ+ and autistic.
- I feel confident responding if a colleague shares a gender or sensory need with me.

- I feel our workplace allows people to be fully themselves without hiding.
- Our organization provides tools or policies that support multiple marginalized identities.
- I believe feedback from LGBTQ+ autistic staff is listened to and acted upon.

Building Feedback Loops

The most inclusive organizations are those that stay open to feedback and growth. Creating feedback loops allows for regular check-ins and updates to workplace culture.

Ways to Build Feedback Loops:

- Offer anonymous suggestion forms for staff.
- Hold quarterly “Inclusion Pulse Checks” to reflect on progress.
- Include autistic and LGBTQ+ voices on policy review teams.
- Revisit workplace practices and documents using the Policy Audit Tool.

Toolkit Tip: Add a recurring calendar reminder to review inclusion efforts twice a year. Small adjustments based on feedback can lead to lasting change.

7. References and Credits

Supporting Data

The following data points demonstrate the urgent need for inclusive workplace practices that address the intersection of LGBTQ+ identity and autism. Each source includes a link for those who want to explore further.

Mental Health and Workplace Discrimination

- LGBTQ+ autistic individuals experience higher levels of workplace discrimination, anxiety, and burnout, largely due to masking, dual closeting, and lack of representation.

Sources: Jones, 2024; Schmidt et al., 2024

- Fear of disclosure is a top barrier to inclusion, even more than the lack of formal accommodations.

Source: Schmidt et al., 2024

- Environments that ignore intersecting identities lead to burnout, job exits, and identity concealment.

Sources: Jones, 2024; Schmidt et al., 2024

Suicide Risk and Mental Health Outcomes

- LGBTQ+ autistic youth had 50% greater odds of attempting suicide compared to their non-autistic LGBTQ+ peers.

Source: The Trevor Project, 2020

- Minority stress compounds across identities, increasing risk for anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation.

Source: Meyer, 2003

Identity and Representation

- Over 41% of autistic adults identify as LGBTQ+, compared to 7.2% of the general U.S. population.

Sources: McQuaid et al., 2023; Gallup, 2023

Contributing Organizations

Special thanks to the following organizations and platforms whose work informed and enhanced this toolkit:

- SHRM Portage County – Workforce readiness and employer engagement partner
- Elevatus Training – Tools for inclusive education and staff development
- Plexus LGBTQ+ and Allied Chamber of Commerce – Community and business inclusion advocate

- Greater Cleveland LGBTQ Needs Assessment – Regional data highlighting lived experiences and community needs
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- APSE – for offering a national platform to share this work
- Portage County Board of Developmental Disabilities – for advancing inclusive employment
- Kent State University – for fostering research that makes a difference in real-world policy and practice

Questions, Suggestions, or Updates?

This toolkit is intended to be a living resource. If you come across a broken link, know of a resource we should include, or have feedback to share, please contact:

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