

NATURAL SUPPORTS IN THE WORKPLACE

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

There is a misperception that it is costly and labor-intensive to provide accommodations for employees with autism and other disabilities. We have found, however, that using existing resources as a part of your accommodations strategy is not only cost-effective, it also promotes inclusivity and high morale.

What is a Natural Support?

A natural support is support and assistance that naturally flows from the associations and relationships typically developed within the company. Most companies already have natural supports within departments. A natural support is not a direct supervisor of an employee with autism or disability, but a colleague who can give guidance and support when needed. They are usually peers who are interested in helping out in a mentorship or friendly capacity.

Why are Natural Supports Valuable?

Natural supports provide extra guidance and instruction, especially to a new employee with autism, to help promote independence. Most new hires require coaching to get started. A natural support extends that coaching. This can be particularly important for an employee with autism who may have questions that other employees may just naturally know the answers to. A natural support provides employees with autism an easily accessible support. Natural support personnel can also be paired with current employees, to act as their mentors and internal support system in the company.

How Does This Help My Company?

Though applied here in the disability context, natural supports can be universally adopted throughout companies to benefit the entire workforce in these areas:

- **Sustainability & Scale** – Natural supports are an organic approach that can be scaled to your companies needs using existing resources.
- **Retention** - Employees who feel supported will stay longer and contribute positively.
- **Productivity** – Cooperation, not competition, among employees is proven to boost results and help everyone feel invested in the company's progress.
- **Community** - We've found that a culture of mutual respect and empathy arises when companies enlist their employees to support their colleagues. Employees begin to feel that the success of their differently abled colleagues is everyone's success.

How Do You Recruit Natural Support Personnel?

- **Create a mentorship or welcome-guide program within your company.** This can be casual or formal depending on your company's capacity. The importance of calling it a program is to provide structure and excitement for recruiting natural supporters.
- **Provide basic education about autism and disabilities** to familiarize employees about the conditions that their colleagues may be living with. This paves the way for empathy.
- **Emphasize the reward and empowerment** that arise from being acknowledged as mentors whose expertise and commitment led them to be considered as natural supports.