



**Ambitious
about Autism**



**Autism
Education
Trust**

Toolkit for employers

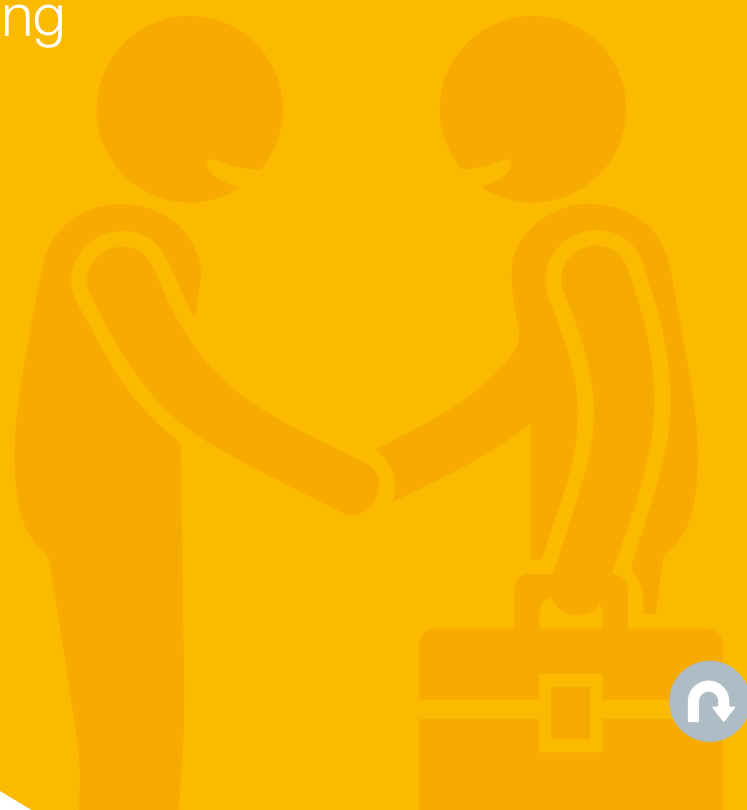
Transition to employment

A toolkit to support autistic young people
into their first experiences of employment,
further education or training

Supported by:



**Department
for Education**



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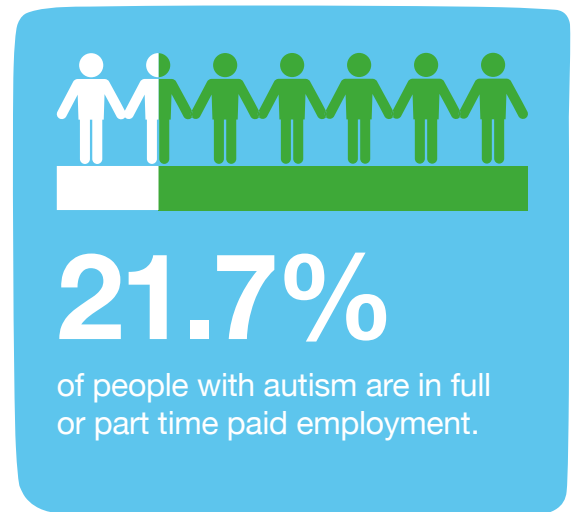
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Introduction

When they finish school, few autistic young people move on to college, further training or the workplace. Only 21.7% of autistic individuals are in full or part-time employment (Office for National Statistics, 2020). We want to change this. We want to enable more autistic young people to reach their potential by equipping those who support them with the skills and knowledge to understand their needs. Just 19% of young people with autism say they have had good careers advice and a quarter of young people with autism have had no access to work experience (Ambitious about Autism, 2016).



These resources provide the tools to help autistic young people prepare for work experience, employment or further training.

Ensuring that autistic young people can reach their potential in further education, training or employment is a collaborative effort. These resources aim to help young people entering the workplace, to reduce the anxiety associated with a new role and enable all candidates to demonstrate their experience with confidence.

About us

Ambitious about Autism is the national charity for children and young people with autism. We run Employ Autism, a national programme that helps autistic individuals join the workforce by breaking down barriers and increasing the confidence of employers to recruit people with autism and neurodiversity. The programme provides training, resources and ongoing mentorship to a wide range of partners across the UK, including employers, careers professionals, parents and young people.

The **Autism Education Trust (AET)** is a not for-profit programme led by two national autism charities: the National Autistic Society and Ambitious about Autism. Established and supported by the Department for Education, the AET promotes and supports partnerships throughout the education system to improve educational access, experience and outcomes for children and young people with autism. Underpinned by current research into good education practice, the AET programme is structured around the three education phases: early years, school and post-16. The programme's core values are person-centred, outcomes and process-focused, inclusive and accessible, evidence-based, high quality and working in partnership.



About autism

Information about autism



What is autism?

Autism is a lifelong developmental disability that affects one person in 100 in the UK. It affects the way a person communicates and how they experience the world around them.



Autism is considered a spectrum condition because while autistic people share some similar characteristics, they are also all different from each other. The autism spectrum is not linear, from high to low, but varies in every way that one person might vary from another.

Many autistic people also have co-occurring conditions which can make their needs more complex. These could include attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), anxiety disorders, learning disabilities, physical health conditions and communication difficulties.

Officially autism is considered a disability, but some people do not identify in this way. Autism may be viewed as a disability or disabling because of the impact of autism and co-occurring conditions on daily life.

Autistic people have many strengths that balance the challenges and difficulties they may face. Some of these strengths may include, for example, exceptional attention to detail, an increased interest in topics that bring them joy and the ability to offer different perspectives to questions.

Sadly, owing to lack of understanding and support, many autistic young people face exclusion from school and struggle to access social activities with their peers. They also miss opportunities to advance to further education or find meaningful employment.

Supporting autistic young people to access inclusive work experience can transform their employment prospects, giving them the opportunity to experience a working environment, learn new skills and develop independence.

Terms to describe an autistic individual

“autistic person”

“person with autism”

“I have Asperger’s”

“on the spectrum”

“autism spectrum disorder”

“autism spectrum condition”

“verbal”

“non-verbal”

“speaks few or no words”

How do we talk about autism?

Autistic people describe themselves and autism in different ways, so it is always best to ask the individual about their preference. When you meet an autistic person, they may use different terms to describe themselves.

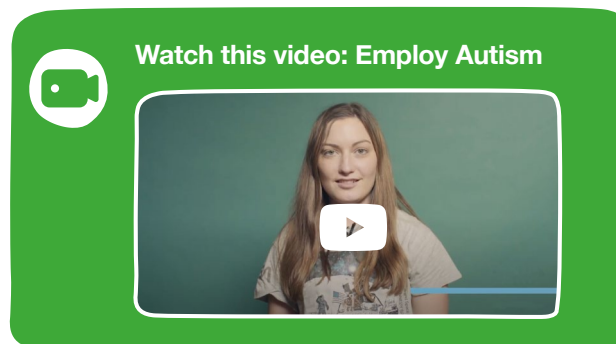
There are also different labels used when talking about an autism diagnosis; some are no longer used, and some are new. Some autistic people may have been diagnosed with Asperger’s syndrome, autism spectrum condition or disorder, pathological demand avoidance ([see glossary of terms](#)), atypical autism, pervasive developmental disorder or high-functioning autism. These are all autism but have different labels and have been used to mean slightly different profiles of autism.

Talking positively about autism

- When talking about autism, don’t use terms such as ‘suffer’ or ‘disease’. Autism is not a mental health condition or a disease: it is a different way of experiencing and processing the world around you. You could instead describe adjustments that can reduce challenges and lessen anxiety, and focus on the strengths they have.
- When discussing autism, encourage use of the term ‘neurodiversity’ ([see glossary of terms](#)), which encompasses ‘neurotypical’ and ‘neurodivergent’ individuals. An autistic young person could identify as neurodivergent. The purpose of this toolkit is to help employers create more inclusive workplaces where neurodivergent individuals can thrive, through reviewing and adjusting hiring processes, management practices and workspaces that have been designed only with having a neurotypical people in mind. The benefit of neurodiverse workforce can include different ways of thinking. Neurodivergent individuals can make a significant contribution, including creativity, high ability and consistency in tasks.



- Try not to use 'high-functioning' or 'low-functioning'. Instead, you could describe a person's support needs. Some autistic people may need higher levels of support in a situation that they find difficult, while others may have low support needs, because they can deploy strategies to manage a situation by themselves or with less outside support.
- Try not to assume what someone may be like because they are autistic. Instead, ask them or someone who knows them well about their strengths and difficulties, likes and dislikes. It is better not to make a presumption about a person or their abilities before you meet them, as this may influence how we treat them.



What are meltdowns and shutdowns?

Meltdowns are often the result of situations that are highly stimulating or create high levels of anxiety, situations from which it feels as though there is no escape.

When in extreme distress like this, the flight, fight or freeze response is a natural reaction. If the person cannot escape, that leaves two options: fight or freeze. Meltdowns are similar to the fight response and shutdowns are similar to the freeze response.

The resources in this toolkit help autistic young people to communicate effectively and share their individual needs, with a view to reducing the chance of being in scenarios and situations that can cause them anxiety, thereby avoiding the occurrence of meltdowns and shutdowns. The workplace adjustments identified in the toolkit templates and implemented by an employer should help reduce anxiety. It is important, however, for an employer and a post-16 professional to understand why meltdowns and shutdowns occur and how to support the young person if they do.



Meltdowns

When an autistic individual is having a meltdown, they often have increased levels of anxiety and distress, which may be interpreted as frustration, a 'tantrum' or an aggressive panic attack. It's important to understand that a meltdown is not a tantrum: it is a reaction to a highly distressing or overwhelming situation or environment.

While in a meltdown the person can be injurious to others or themselves because of their extreme state of anxiety. To try and avoid a meltdown, put in place pre-emptive planning to mitigate triggers. This could include, for example, reducing anxiety related to uncertainty by providing information and agendas before meetings and sticking to them, and reducing unexpected changes to tasks and routines. Another way to reduce the likelihood of a meltdown is to create enabling environments that don't overwhelm the senses. There are some top tips later in this toolkit to help achieve this.



Shutdowns

Shutdowns are often the result of situations with high demand in one or more of the following areas: social situations, situations that require a lot of thinking, lack of sleep, very emotional situations and those that are very active or physical.

To use an analogy, a shutdown is like a computer trying to turn on, but it can't because there isn't enough power to do so. During a shutdown, an autistic individual may not seem themselves because they're so overwhelmed that their focus has shifted to the basic functions. With a reduced ability to process what is going on, they may struggle to communicate as they normally do, which can mean that they are mute or have great difficulty forming coherent sentences.

The best remedy during a shutdown is giving the person the space to rest, recuperate and recover without placing additional demands on them. A shutdown can be like a reset for an autistic person.



Watch these videos where young autistic people describe shutdowns and meltdowns:

Shutdowns



Meltdowns



“Some autistic people feel as though they need to camouflage themselves to fit in.”



Masking and camouflaging

Some autistic people can appear at ease in social situations, so much so that it may be difficult to ‘see’ that they are autistic. While most people tend to perform socially in a given situation to appear their ‘best self’, an autistic individual may mask some behaviours deemed visibly autistic.

This means that an autistic person can appear to be fine and coping or excelling in a social situation, but the repercussions and effects of performing often become evident afterwards. In the school context, young people often mask during the day, but once they get home, they may have a meltdown or be fatigued.

To support an autistic person, you can encourage them to be themselves as much as is comfortable for them. They may not realise that they are masking or camouflaging or understand the detrimental effects. By creating a welcoming environment where self-stimulatory behaviour (‘stimming’), different communication styles and sensory needs are accepted, you can reduce someone’s ‘need’ to mask. Through reducing the perceived consequences of being visibly autistic and allowing for difference, an autistic person may be encouraged not to mask or to mask less often, which is beneficial for all involved.



Watch video of our Youth Patron Bella reading a poem she wrote about her experiences in education.



Employer
toolkit

Toolkit for employers



Toolkit for employers

This toolkit contains top tips and resources for employers, including HR professionals and managers who are supporting an autistic young person in the workplace.

Having support from inclusive colleagues who understand their needs is crucial if autistic young people are to thrive in the workplace. Employers can benefit from the special talent and perspective that autistic young people can bring to an organisation, and from having a diverse and inclusive work environment.

How to use this toolkit

The resources in this section can be used alongside the employee profile to equip the people in your workplace with more understanding of autism and how to support autistic young people. They include templates that can be shared with young people to help them prepare for the work environment.

Invitation to interview



Use this template to prepare an autistic young person for an interview at your workplace.



One-page profile



Use this template to give the young person details of the people they will meet during the interview and in the workplace. A one-page profile captures all the important information about a person on a single sheet of paper under three simple headings, and this can be shared with colleagues:

- What people appreciate about me
- What's important to me
- How best to support me.

A one-page profile is a great tool to start conversations between colleagues, building the foundations of friendship. They can contribute to more person-centred teams, where individuals' strengths are recognised, and different ways of working are taken into account and supported.



Travelling to the interview and the workplace



Use this template to give the young person details of how to get to work and what the work environment will look and feel like.



Information about autism



This section has plenty of information about autism and links to further resources.



Top tips from autistic young people



Read top tips from autistic young people themselves about how you can support them in the workplace.



Research shows that diversity improves productivity and morale. Hear from employers who have employed autistic young people:



Invitation to interview

Use this template to invite an autistic candidate to interview. Ensure you adapt the template accordingly, following the guidance included. This is good practice for all interviewees as it reduces anxiety and helps all candidates to demonstrate their experiences.



If the interview is taking place virtually or over the phone, adapt the content of the form and include relevant information eg how the individual will receive the meeting invite and link, including any passwords, and what will happen in case of the internet connection causing disruption or ending the interview.

Interview details

Interviewee's name:

Date of interview:

You may wish to avoid booking an appointment when fire alarm testing is scheduled.

Time of interview:

12-hour clock

24-hour clock

You will meet:

(Include a photograph for each interviewer and the interviewers' one-page profiles.)

Building where the meeting will be:

If adding photos of where you will meet, ensure that this venue doesn't change.

If the interview is taking place virtually or over the phone include relevant information here, eg meeting invite and link, including any passwords:

A link to any photos, maps or directions of how to find the workplace building are really useful and can help minimise anxiety.

Room where the meeting will be:

If adding photos of where you will meet, ensure that the allocated room doesn't change.





Invitation to interview (continued 2/2)



What we will talk about in the interview:

What the interview will involve:

Outline details of the interview format, including a schedule of the interview (if applicable). Will there be any tasks or assessments for the individual to complete, eg panel interview, one-to-one interview, presentation, in-tray exercise, case studies and numerical and verbal reasoning tests?

Please let me know if I can do anything to help you participate in the interview.

For example, tell me if you have a preferred way of communicating or sensory requirements.

If you need any help on the day of the interview, please call:

Include the name and contact details of a friendly individual (you, your receptionist or a colleague) who will be available to speak to the interviewee before the interview, eg about difficulties getting to the building, so that the interviewee does not feel alone or overwhelmed.



One-page profile



Your name:

Occupation:



What people appreciate about me

What is important to me

How to support me



Travelling to the interview and workplace

Use this template to help the young person plan their route to the interview and your workplace and know what to expect when they arrive. This is good practice for all interviewees as it reduces anxiety and helps all candidates to demonstrate their experiences.



Amend or complete the relevant detail in words and visuals; ideally include photographs and relevant website links which may be helpful.

This guide covers five main areas:

- 1 How to get to your interview and place of work
- 2 What to do when you get to reception
- 3 What the waiting area looks like
- 4 The interview room and the place of work
- 5 Leaving the place of work

1 How to get to the building where your interview will take place



Using the train or underground/railway:

There are two stations that are close



Using the bus:

Route

from

to



Travelling to the interview and workplace (continued 2/5)



Using the car:

Allocated visitor parking space

The nearest car parks

The cost of the car parks

The nearest car drop-off point

Describe the route



Travelling to the interview and workplace (continued 3/5)

In order for the interview to be an enjoyable experience, the young person will have received the questions in advance. These are things to consider providing before the young person arrives to reduce unpredictability and alleviate anxiety. This is good practice for all interviewees as it reduces anxiety and helps all candidates to demonstrate their experiences.



2 Arriving for the interview

(add photos, visuals or weblinks):

Describe the outside of the building and entrance process. Is there an intercom, automatic doors or other access requirement?

Describe entrance, lobby or reception area. Is there a café, open plan work space, direction to the lifts or just one reception desk?



Travelling to the interview and workplace (continued 4/5)



Describe who the young person should say hello to: security staff or the person behind the desk.

Describe what the expected conversation will be: "My name is xxx and I am required to go to floor four to speak with xxx."

Describe the check-in or sign-in process. Is it computerised, does one have to wear a lanyard, are there sensory adjustments?



Travelling to the interview and workplace (continued 5/5)



Describe the waiting area. Are there sofas, chairs, toilets, water cooler, etc? Is the environment busy, quiet or noisy? Is there an opportunity to wait outside if it is too busy?

Describe the route to the interview room. Are there security barriers, lifts, stairs, noisy or smelly areas on the way?

Describe the interview room or space. Is it in an open plan office, can it be cold or warm, dark or bright, is there a heater or air conditioner that is noisy?



Understanding autism

Talking to employers, managers and colleagues

Many autistic young people can be anxious about talking to their employers, managers and colleagues about being autistic or viewed as different.

Provided that the young person has consented to share their information, you will receive an employee profile, which will tell you more about their autism, the way it impacts them and how you can support them to work to their strengths in the workplace.

However, always ask the young person whether they are willing to disclose their diagnosis before you talk to other team members.



Information sheet about understanding autism

Autistic people are similar to those around them; they just have a few differences that you may not be able to see. There are four main areas of difference between an autistic person and someone who isn't autistic.



Social interaction

Autistic individuals may find social interactions difficult because they socialise differently from non-autistic people. While they don't lack the skills to interact with other people, some of these rules may be difficult to remember or confusing to them. They need more information and support to socialise with people.

Social interactions can be tiring for autistic people because they have to think about all the aspects of socialising in a way that other people probably don't. There are many rules that we use when talking to someone else, but these rules aren't always the same, and this is difficult for autistic people, who generally like rules.



Social communication

When you talk to another person, you listen to what they are saying, look at their facial expressions and body language and think of what to say in response. Autistic people may struggle to do all these things at the same time, so may communicate differently using words, sounds or gestures.



Routines and repetition

Autistic people really like to know what is going to happen and when. They normally have set routines for the activities they undertake, and everything may have to be in the right order. They may also have routines and repetition around the things they like, such as clothes, food, hobbies and conversations.



Sensory differences

Some autistic people have sensory differences in a range of areas. This can affect how they interact with the environment and their ability to interact with other people. Sounds, lights, touch and smells can be painful or very uncomfortable for an autistic person. By changing the environment or allowing someone to change the environment for themselves you can better include autistic people. People might wear sunglasses indoors, prefer a certain temperature, wear ear defenders, not like to be touched or eat only specific foods.



Tools for employers and line managers

Putting support in place

Autistic young people vary greatly when it comes to their individual needs; sometimes all they have in common is that they are autistic. This means that support and inclusion often has to take into account differing and sometimes competing needs. To make sure that everyone is included, there are some key steps to including autistic young people.

Each young person may communicate and process information differently. This means that while some young people understand verbal information and instructions, others may prefer written or visual information.

Ask the young person how they prefer information or instructions to be presented. This could be written, verbal, recorded, flow charts, diagrams etc.

Benefits for business

The advantages of a neurodiverse workforce are well evidenced.

Adopting a diverse approach to recruitment can benefit employers by:

- attracting new and different talent
- providing a competitive advantage in your market place
- enhancing corporate reputation
- improving productivity and morale.



Identifying adjustments

The following links can help employers and managers identify adjustments:

[DARE Adjustments Toolkit](#)



[STEPS: Sensory, Timely, Explicit, Predictable, Social. 10 STEPS to creating a neurodiverse inclusive environment:](#)



[Commitment to Inclusion in the Workplace – self-audit tool for employers](#)



[Mental health and inclusion toolkits co-produced with autistic young people:](#)





Top tips for employers from autistic young people

These are direct quotes from autistic young people about their experiences in the workplace regarding very important adjustments that would make a huge difference to them and a positive experience for everyone. Understanding these workplace adjustments and implementing the adaptations will enable a young person to perform better in their roles, which will ultimately benefit you, the employer.

- ✔ **“Give me regular feedback and ask me** how I would prefer it to be delivered.”
- ✔ **“Give me clear tasks and structure.** What am I doing? Why am I doing it? What do you want the result to be? When by? A sense of purpose can make boring tasks interesting!”
- ✔ **“Get to know me.** The more you understand about your employee and the more you adapt to their needs, the better they will perform. **Accept me for who I am!**”
- ✔ **“Make the time and space** to think about how we can work together.”
- ✔ **“Give me a chance** to ask questions and give me clear answers.”
- ✔ **“Explain the unwritten rules.** Tell me about the culture or protocols, for example, when I should have my lunch.”
- ✔ **“Provide a buddy or mentor,** someone that I can talk to openly, who understands.”
- ✔ **“Be consistent.** If you say you will do something, do it; for example, email me back.”
- ✔ **“Provide a thorough induction or support plan. Help me** get to know the building; where I might sit; who I will work with; what to expect; and different staff roles.”
- ✔ **“Find out from me** if I would like my **colleagues to know about my autism.**”
- ✔ **“Ask how I like to work.** For example, I might work best in a quiet room with headphones on.”
- ✔ **“Be open to flexible working** so I can miss the rush hour or have the option of working from home.”
- ✔ **“Don’t stereotype me.** Don’t assume you know my traits.”
- ✔ **“Make reasonable adjustments** but don’t treat me differently.”
- ✔ **“Treat me the same as everyone else.”**
- ✔ **“Make sure all your staff have understanding autism training.”**



Resources

Resources





Resources

- **Ambitious about Autism Training and Consultancy services**
- **Youth Group for autistic young people**
- **Autism Education Trust (AET) – learning and development programme and resources**
- **Creased Puddle**
- **DARE Adjustments Toolkit**
- **Centre for Applied Autism Research**
- **STEPS: Sensory, Timely, Explicit, Predictable, Social. 10 STEPS to creating a neurodiverse inclusive environment**
- **EmployAbility – assisting disabled young persons and graduates into employment**
- **Know Your Normal – understanding your baseline mental health and wellbeing**
- **RNID – using technology to communicate**
- **AS Mentoring – specialist mentoring and employment support for neurodiverse adults**
- **Autism Forward – specialised mentoring funding to support adults with autism with employability and accessing employment**
- **Dr Mitzi Waltz – Autism consultant, expert witness, trainer, author and researcher**
- **Evenbreak – helping talented disabled candidates and inclusive employers to find each other**
- **Employ Autism – Autism specialist careers advice and work experience, supported recruitment**
- **NAS Autism Services Directory – a nationwide directory of services**
- **Autism Alliance – umbrella organisation for autism groups**
- **Neurodiversity at work – a guide published by CIPD**
- **Neurodiversity at work – a research paper published by ACAS**

Ambitious about Autism provides a range of free resources for anybody to access when supporting autistic children and young people. Below is a list of links to resources available to you.



Free webinars
for professionals

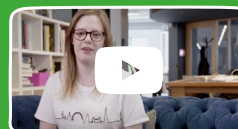


Free toolkits
co-produced with
autistic youth patrons



A series of videos explaining autism
by autistic youth patrons:

What is autism



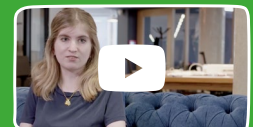
Shutdowns



Meltdowns



Communication



Glossary of terms

A

anxiety disorder

Anxiety is a condition which means you worry more than normal about things. Anxiety can be mild or very difficult to live with and can change depending on the situation and support available. There are many causes for anxiety and different ways it can present, and it doesn't always make sense to the non-anxious person. Anxiety is a condition that someone can have alongside autism.

asperger syndrome

Previous versions of the 'International Classification of Diseases (ICD) and the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-V) diagnostic manuals categorised Asperger syndrome as a separate classification and an individual could have received a diagnosis of Asperger syndrome. In both ICD-11 and DSM-5 the classification of autism has been changed to include Asperger syndrome. Diagnosticians (people who diagnose 'autism') will be moving away from the separate diagnosis of Asperger syndrome, and the diagnosis a person will receive if they have the characteristics of autism will be defined as autism spectrum disorder.

attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)

A condition that someone can have alongside autism. People who have ADHD may be more hyperactive or struggle with attention than people who don't have ADHD. There are three presentations of ADHD: predominantly inattentive presentation, predominantly hyperactive or impulsive presentation, and combined presentation.

auditory processing disorder (APD)

This is a condition where the person has difficulty processing sound as you would expect. They may understand speech more slowly, struggle to distinguish similar spoken words, be unable to concentrate when there is a lot of noise and may hear music differently. This is a condition that someone can have alongside autism.

autism

Autistic people process the world around them differently from non-autistic people. Someone who is autistic or has a diagnosis of autism is different in four areas: social interaction, social communication, routines and repetition (social imagination) and sensory differences.

It is important to acknowledge there have been different diagnostic names and terms used, including autism, autism spectrum disorder,

autism spectrum condition, atypical autism, high-functioning autism, pervasive developmental disorders and Asperger syndrome. There are two diagnostic manuals which provide the standardisation criteria for the classification of disorders and can be used in diagnosing 'autism'; the International Classification of Diseases (ICD-11) (which will come into effect on 1 January 2022) and the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-V). The diagnostic manuals do vary; for example, the ICD-11's classification provides detailed guidelines for distinguishing between autism with and without a learning disability.

It is important to note that although the titles of the two diagnostic classification systems DSM and ICD refer to 'mental disorders' and 'diseases', 'autism' is neither a disease nor a mental health condition. Within both manuals 'autism' is categorised as a 'neurodevelopmental disorder'.

B

burnout

When an autistic person over stretches themselves by doing too many tasks, too much socialising or making their brain work too hard they can experience burnout. Burnout is similar to when you are ill, tired and need a rest but are unable to do so.

The autistic person might not act like themselves because they aren't able to think as clearly as they did before a burnout started.

C

communication difficulties

Communication difficulties can impact how an individual is able to communicate expressively. This could mean having little or no speech or speech that can be difficult to understand or finding it difficult to say words, generate sentences or express feelings, wants and needs. Communication difficulties may affect an individual's receptive communication, understanding what other people are saying, responding to others' language, and following tasks and instructions. Communication difficulties can be a co-occurring condition for some individuals with autism.



Glossary of terms (continued)

co-occurring conditions

Individuals with autism may also experience other neurodevelopmental, physical or mental health conditions alongside their autism, which can make their needs more complex. These could include ADHD, depression, anxiety disorder, learning disabilities, physical health conditions and communication difficulties.

CV (curriculum vitae)

A curriculum vitae, commonly referred to as a CV, is a document used when applying for jobs. It summarises a person's education, work experience, skills and achievements, and interests to promote their abilities to potential employers.

D

disclosure

Autistic individuals can choose whether to tell other people that they are autistic and what that means for them. Some people choose not to disclose, and others choose whether to disclose depending on the situation they are in.

dyslexia

This condition affects the development of literacy and language-related skills. Dyslexic individuals may find it difficult to process and remember information they see and hear and experience difficulties with reading, writing and spelling. Dyslexia can also impact on other areas, such as organisational skills. It can be a co-occurring condition alongside autism.

dyspraxia or developmental coordination disorder (DCD)

A neurological condition that affects movement, fine or gross motor coordination skills, which can cause clumsiness, and poor hand-eye coordination, which affects writing or using small objects. It can be a co-occurring condition alongside autism.

E

education, health and care (EHC) plan

A legal document issued by a local authority describing a child or young person's education, health and social care needs and the support that will be given to them.

A young person can request an assessment themselves if they're aged 16 to 25.

H

human resources (HR)

A department of people in an organisation responsible for managing all matters related to employees, including the recruitment and selection process for job opportunities. When applying for a role, the HR department may be the main point of contact for an individual to find out further information about the role and explore adjustments during the recruitment process. They may be the first point of contact after successful appointment and in the workplace.

L

learning difficulty

Unlike a learning disability, a learning difficulty does not affect intellect. Examples of learning difficulties are dyscalculia, dysgraphia, dyslexia, dyspraxia and language and social communication disorders.

learning disabilities

A learning disability is a reduced intellectual ability, which may result in difficulty with everyday activities or taking longer to develop new skills. Learning disabilities are lifelong and can be mild, moderate or severe. With the right support, people with learning disabilities can lead independent lives. People can be autistic or have a learning disability, or both.

M

masking

Masking or camouflaging is when an autistic individual acts to appear less autistic or not autistic at all. They may change how they look, how they talk and their behaviours. Too much masking can lead to a burnout.

meltdown

A meltdown is a response to an overwhelming situation. The response can be very loud and sometimes physical. The person needs time to recover and should not be laughed at for having a meltdown.



Glossary of terms (continued)

mental health conditions

These are conditions for which an individual with autism may also receive a diagnosis and are therefore defined as co-occurring conditions. Mental health conditions can include depression, anxiety disorder, bipolar disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder and more. An autistic individual will need to receive appropriate support and interventions, such as talking treatments or psychiatric medication to reduce the impact of the condition (or conditions).

N

neurodivergent

This is the term used to describe someone who has a neurodiverse condition, for example, autism. This means their brain functions, learns and processes information differently. Due to this diversity, neurodivergent thinkers offer a different approach and contribute a great deal to any team or workforce.

neurodiversity

This refers to the diversity of the human brain. The way we think is not always the same; everyone has different experiences based on how their brain works.

The term 'neurodiversity' describes the range of different diagnoses that may lead people to perceive and experience the world in different ways, including autism, ADHD, dyspraxia and dyslexia. Neurodiversity encompasses individuals who are 'neurodivergent'; a neurodivergent individual will have one or more neurodiverse conditions.

neurotypical

This is the term used to describe people who are not autistic, that is, whose neurodevelopment has been typical and whose brain functioning is considered 'normal' according to societal norms.

P

post-16 professional

A qualified professional who supports young people to think about their future career, as well as learning and training opportunities to fulfil employment opportunities. A young person would meet them during a pre-placement discussion meeting. 'Post-16 professional' is an umbrella term we have used for this toolkit. A relevant professional is likely to have one of the following job titles: Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) Officer, Employment Coach, Job Coach, Employability Coach, Careers Adviser, Employment Specialist or Employability Specialist. It is best practice for a post-16 professional to be registered with a professional body and have a qualification at Level 4 or above.

pathological demand avoidance (PDA)

Individuals with PDA experience an extreme resistance to and avoidance of everyday demands. PDA is described as all-encompassing for an individual. At present PDA is not identified as a separate diagnosis or a subtype in the autism spectrum disorder diagnosis in diagnostic manuals used in the UK or internationally. Therefore, there is no consensus regarding PDA, and the academic and clinical debates continue about the condition and how best to support individuals with PDA.

physical health conditions

These are conditions for which an autistic person may also receive a diagnosis, and are therefore defined as co-occurring conditions. Physical health conditions can include diabetes, asthma or irritable bowel syndrome, to name a few. An individual will need to be supported by medical professionals who are experts in these conditions and receive appropriate support and interventions, possibly including medication, to reduce the impact of the condition (or conditions).

pre-placement discussion

A meeting with a young person to explore information, advice and guidance on education, training and work opportunities, to develop their employability skills, preparing them for their future career. The session would be conducted by a post-16 professional, to help a young person make informed choices about their future.

A session would normally take place at a time of transition for a young person, for example, a move from school into further education, employment or an apprenticeship.



Glossary of terms (continued)

pre-placement discussion summary

A form to guide the discussions between a young person and a post-16 professional during a pre-placement discussion. The form includes questions to ask a young person about their education, training and past experiences, future employment aspirations and their interests, and to explore future work placement opportunities.

R

repetitive behaviour

An intense preoccupation with one subject or activity; distress about change; insistence on routines or rituals with no purpose; or repetitive movements, such as hand-flapping.

routine

Some autistic people have very strict routines that they like to stick to. Having a predictable routine helps them to manage anxiety.

S

self-stimulatory (stimming) behaviour

Stimming is short for 'self-stimulatory behaviour'. Stimming can involve a repetitive movement, repeating words, hand movements and making noises. Some stims are barely noticeable and some are very visible. Stimming behaviours are a way of self-regulating and shouldn't be stopped or reduced as they are an autistic person's way of managing a situation. Some individuals may use a 'stim toy' (see definition).

sensory processing and sensitivity

Sensory processing is how we take in and perceive sensory information. This may include hyper (high) or hypo (low) sensitivity to the five senses (taste, touch, sight, smell and sounds), as well as balance and body awareness.

shutdown

Shutdowns are similar to meltdowns but are not as visible or loud. A person may withdraw instead of being their usual self.

social communication

This is the way individuals communicate, understand and use language with others. Autistic people may show differences in understanding and expressing communication and language.

social interaction

This is how individuals interact with other people, develop relationships and socialise with other people. Autistic people may differ in their ability to understand social behaviour and the feelings of others, which informs the development of friendships and relationships.

special interest

This is an intense and passionate level of focus on things of interest on a specific subject. For some people, this can be a game or TV show, a type of animal, a type of machine or a country. Special interests are varied and can bring the person joy.

STEPS (sensory, timely, explicit, predictable, social)

A checklist tool developed by the Centre for Applied Autism Research at the University of Bath to create a neurodiverse inclusive environment, for neurotypical and neurodivergent individuals; an autistic individual could identify as neurodivergent. The tool provides a structure to aid discussion and evaluation of a current environment, with examples of adaptations to consider, ensuring environments are fully inclusive.

stim toy

An object used for stimming or fiddling with when a person is feeling anxious. Stim toys come in a range of different types and can include fidget spinners, play dough, tangles, pens, soft toys and balls. Each person's preference is unique and personal; using their preferred stim toy can help them to feel comfortable and engage in the situation they are in.

W

workplace adjustments

Employers are required under the governance of law to make reasonable adjustments to ensure that workers (including trainees and interns) with disabilities, or physical or mental health conditions, are not substantially disadvantaged when doing their jobs. Reasonable adjustments can include changing the recruitment process, physical changes to the workplace and adaptations to equipment.

The [Equality Act 2010](#) defines a disability as a physical or mental impairment that has a 'substantial' and 'long-term' negative effect on an individual's ability to do normal daily activities. To align with the Equality Act a diagnosis of autism would be classified as a disability, to ensure an individual receives reasonable adjustments in the workplace.



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gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-education



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For further information about the work of the Ambitious Youth Network, or if you would like to become involved, [visit our website](#) or email participation@ambitiousaboutautism.org.uk



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creasedpuddle.co.uk



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bath.ac.uk/research-centres/centre-for-applied-autism-research



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dareuk.org

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We are Ambitious about Autism

Ambitious about Autism is the national charity for children and young people with autism.

We provide services, raise awareness and understanding, and campaign for social and policy change. Through TreeHouse School, The Rise School and Ambitious College, we offer specialist education and support.

Our ambition is to make the ordinary possible for more children and young people with autism.

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