Transition to employment

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

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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).

21.7%
of people with autism are in full or part time paid employment.
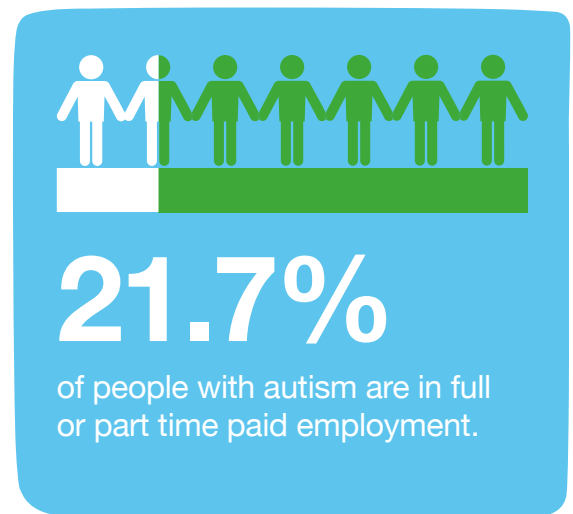
These resources provide the tools to help autistic young people prepare for work experience, employment or further training.

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.

How to use the toolkit

This toolkit contains resources and editable templates for post-16 professionals, young people and employers. It starts with information about autism that is relevant to all.

All the templates in this toolkit are editable. They can be adapted to meet each young person's level of understanding and support needs. They do not replace an education, health and care (EHC) plan or a vocational profile.

The content is based on best practice and up-to-date research where possible. You can use all the resources in each section or select those most suited to the needs of each young person.

Categories

For the post-16 professional

The resources in this section are for post-16 professionals to use when working with autistic young people. Building rapport and really getting to know the young person is critical for success. The editable templates can help the professional work with the young person to identify areas of interest: their likes and interests, as well as their skills and experience in employment.

Information gathered here can be used to help the young person prepare for work experience, for example, completing job application forms and telling employers about any required adjustments. This section also contains resources to help evaluate the work placement when it has finished.

For the young person

Preparing for your journey to further education, training, or employment can feel overwhelming. The resources in this section can help prepare you for successful careers discussions and work experience placements. Topics covered include help with preparing for interviews, planning travel to work and communicating your needs in a workplace setting.

For the employer

The resources in this section are designed to help employers ascertain the appropriate adjustments needed to support an autistic young person to access and participate in their role. They can be used by the employer's staff themselves, or in collaboration with a post-16 professional and an autistic young person.

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.

one in 100
people in the UK have autism.

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.

About autism

- 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.

Watch this video: Employ Autism
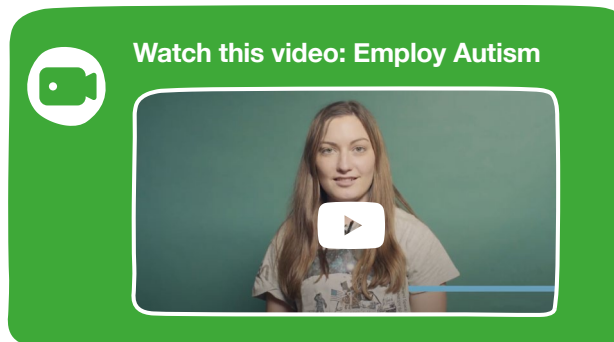
What are meltdowns and shutdowns?

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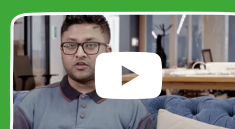
Watch these videos where young autistic people describe shutdowns and meltdowns:

Shutdowns

Meltdowns

About autism

> **"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.
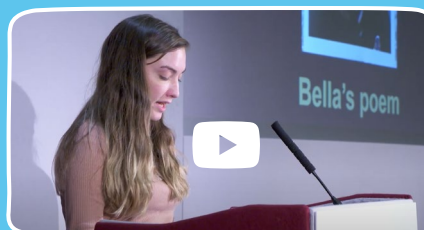
For the post-16 professional

For the post-16 professional

This section is for professionals working in a post-16 environment, to help them engage successfully with their autistic clients.

Having access to high-quality careers education, information, advice and guidance discussions with professionals who understand their needs and can support them is crucial to autistic young people's success as they consider the next stage of their academic or employment journey. In this section, you will find resources to facilitate successful discussions with autistic young people and help them prepare for, and reflect on, their work experience placements.

Things to think about before your session

Information processing
Help the autistic young person to gain the most from your discussions by sharing information in advance about what to expect from you and the session.

Send photos of yourself and the room you will meet in, to provide predictability and familiarity.

Consider completing these templates over more than one appointment or session to avoid overwhelming the young person. Can you produce a flow chart of what happens next? Many autistic young people prefer visual information.

The environment
Think about the room you will meet in. For example, can you control the light or the temperature? Is the room full of clutter? Are you likely to be disturbed or interrupted by external noise? These have potential to impact on your interaction.

You can ask the young person the following questions if it will help them to feel comfortable and engage in the meeting:

- Would you prefer the lights turned on or off?

- Do you need to wear sunglasses, ear defenders or use a stim toy (see glossary of terms)?

- Would you prefer the meeting room door to be open or closed (subject to safety and security)?

Ideally, avoid booking meetings with an autistic young person to coincide with scheduled fire alarm testing. If this cannot be avoided, warn the young person (preferably before the meeting), so that the noise is not unexpected. Try to minimise any distractions from:

- phones

- people walking past

- people interrupting your meeting.

Post-16 professional

The resources

You can use all the templates in this section or select just those most suited to the needs of each young person. It is good practice to share relevant information in advance, giving the young person time to prepare. A few extra minutes of preparation will help you have a more productive, rewarding and ultimately enjoyable discussion.

Invitation to appointment

Use this template to invite the young person to your session and help them prepare.

Employee profile

Once the young person has been matched with a work experience placement, use this template to create a profile of the young person that can be shared with the employer (with the young person's permission). This will help the employer to understand and support the young person.

Pre-placement discussion summary

Use this template to identify the young person's skills and experience. You should also send this template to the young person to read ahead of their session.

Work placement evaluation

This template can be used during the work placement and as a reflective tool once the work placement has finished, to understand what went well and what could have been improved. Also use this to consider the young person's future aspirations and career goals, and to plan actions.

Invitation to appointment

Use this template to invite the young person to your session and help them to prepare. Ensure you amend and personalise the template for each young person. Send blank templates of the pre-placement discussion summary and employee profile to enable the young person to prepare.

Appointment details

Young person's name:

Date of appointment: /   /

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

Time of appointment: 12-hour clock   24-hour clock

You will meet:

Building where the meeting will be:

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

Room where the meeting will be:

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

How to get to the meeting – useful Information

Also include information about accessing the building and the room, eg access codes, signing-in process, location of the lift and stairs, nearest bus stop, taxi rank, car drop-off point, car parking locations and costs.

Invitation to appointment (continued 2/2)

What we will talk about in the meeting:

You may find it useful to prepare for our session by reviewing the attached documents and completing this or discussing the questions with someone who knows you well.

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

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 meeting, please call:

Include the name and contact details of a friendly individual (you, the receptionist or a colleague) who will be available to speak to the young person before the meeting, eg if they have difficulties getting to the building, etc, so that the young person does not feel alone or overwhelmed.

Pre-placement discussion summary

Use this template to identify the young person's skills and experience. You should also send this template to the young person to read before for the session.

They may find it useful to prepare for the session by completing the form in advance, perhaps discussing the questions with someone who knows them well or getting help to complete the form.

If they have one, the young person should provide their existing CV (curriculum vitae) to support the completion of their skills and qualification sections of the plan.

1 Name of young person:

2 Date: / /

3 Introductions
Post-16 professional to explain their role (including data protection, safeguarding and confidentiality as appropriate.

4 What is your current situation?
(Include all that apply)

Studying   **Working**   **Volunteering**   **Unemployed**

5 Education

Which subjects have you studied and what grades did you achieve?

Pre-placement discussion summary (continued 2/7)

Which subjects did you enjoy the most?

What did you enjoy most about your studies?

Pre-placement discussion summary (continued 3/7)

6 **Future employment**

What kind of work would you like to do?

Do you want to achieve a qualification while at work?

Do you have preference for working hours and days?

7 **Previous employment**

Have you had any work experiences (including voluntary work)?

What was your role?

What responsibilities did you have?

What skills and knowledge do you have or did you learn?

Pre-placement discussion summary (continued 4/7)

8 **Training**

Have you undertaken any training for a job?

What did you do?

Did you enjoy it?

9 **What are your interests?**

Creative, technical, problem-solving

TV programmes, films or computer games

Researching a particular area or topic

Animals or nature

Other

Pre-placement discussion summary (continued 5/7)

10 **Past experience**

Have you looked for work before?

Where did you research jobs to apply for?

Did you face any barriers or challenges when applying for jobs and attending interviews?

Have you had feedback on unsuccessful applications?
If yes, what was the feedback?

What do you think you are good at?

What do other people say you are good at?

Have you experienced any barriers or challenges in the workplace?
If yes, how could they be avoided in a future workplace?

Pre-placement discussion summary (continued 6/7)

11 **Future work placement**

What kind of work placement are you interested in?

What would you like to learn from a work placement?

What would you like to happen once the placement is completed?

12 **Any further questions?**

How confident do you feel about a future work placement? (Please select one option)

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	

not very confident

very confident

Any concerns or worries?

Pre-placement discussion summary (continued 7/7)

13 **Suggest actions**

Discussions about your future are important. Watch this message from Sam:

Employee profile

Work with the young person to create a profile of their strengths and needs that can be shared with the employer, using this template as the basis and supplementing it with information you have gathered through their pre-placement discussion summary. Share the completed profile with the young person and check that they are happy for you to send it to the employer. The final part of the document is for the employer to fill out to agree adjustments being made for the young person.

Tell the young person that their employee profile is a confidential document and that only the relevant people in the placement organisation, who they agree to in advance, will have access, for example, their line manager and HR. Other colleagues can be informed if the young person feels this is required, when appropriate.

This template is an editable document.

Employee profile

My name is:

Section 1.1: About me

My skills
(Tick all that apply)

Attention to detail
(eg being thorough, accurate, detecting errors)

Artistic skills
(eg drawing, visual arts)

Music and sound skills
(eg ability to think and understand in patterns, creative thinking)

Listening skills
(eg ability to absorb and retain facts)

A strong sense of morality
(eg honesty, lack of judgmental attitude)

Maintain focus when engaged in repetitive work
(eg not getting distracted or bored)

Conscientious and diligent
(eg organised, punctual)

Mathematical abilities
(eg processing numbers, calculations)

Social skills
(eg face-to face interaction with others)

Online communication skills (eg email and text interaction with others)

Creative talents
(eg identifying improvements)

Analysing information
(eg detecting patterns in data)

Technical abilities
(eg computer skills, engineering)

Trustworthiness
(eg doing what you say you will do)

Loyalty
(eg staying with a friend, or course or organisation)

Emotional intelligence
(eg self-awareness, empathy)

Kindness
(eg helping others)

Good memory
(eg recalling facts)

Employee profile (continued 2/8)

Anything else not covered above:

My strengths and other things I am good at
Use information gathered in the pre-placement discussion summary or any other additional information, such as the young person's EHC plan if you have access to this.

Employee profile (continued 3/8)

Section 1.2: How to prepare me in the best way for my work experience.
(Tick all that apply)

I would benefit from receiving a plan, schedule of work or list of tasks I am expected to do each day or week.

I would benefit from visiting my work experience placement before starting.

I would benefit from meeting my manager before starting my placement.

I would benefit from seeing where I am going to sit and where I can have my lunch.

I would benefit from knowing the address of my work experience placement so that I can practise undertaking my journey.

I would benefit from understanding the job role, the tasks I am expected to undertake and the hours I will be working, including breaks.

I would benefit from discussing flexible work hours, so that I can avoid travelling during rush hour.

I would benefit from knowing whether there is a dress code or what standard of dress is expected.

Any other information:

Employee profile (continued 4/8)

Section 1.3: The best ways of communicating with me in the workplace
(Tick all that apply)

I would prefer to be introduced to new people one at a time.

I prefer to communicate verbally.

I prefer to communicate via email and written communication.

I enjoy talking with people.

I prefer them to start the conversation.

I would prefer it if people didn't talk to me about non-work-related topics (eg at lunchtime).

I prefer to avoid eye contact.

I prefer to talk to only one person at a time.

Say my name to get my attention.

I do not like answering the phone.

Any other information:

I do not like making phone calls.

I may have times when I am focusing and cannot be disturbed (and I will use the four-step traffic light system).

I appreciate frequent feedback.

I like to ask lots of questions until I am familiar with a task.

I benefit from regular scheduled meetings with my manager (eg weekly).

I would prefer not to attend face-to-face meetings.

I would prefer not to attend online meetings.

Employee profile (continued 5/8)

Section 1.4: The best ways to give me instructions and tasks
(Tick all that apply)

I need instructions backed up in writing.

I prefer visual information, for example, flow charts and diagrams.

I need to record instructions, so that I have time to process the information and to support my memory.

I need one question or instruction at a time.

I need instructions given to me in prearranged meetings rather than when I am concentrating on something else.

I need time to process what you have said.

I need to do something else while listening, for example, use a fidget toy.

I need information or questions in advance before discussing them.

I prefer to concentrate on one task at a time.

I am more comfortable completing the same task repeatedly.

I prefer to have a bit of variety in the tasks I am undertaking.

I need advance notice of changes and help to manage these changes (including time to get used to them).

I need help to structure my daily tasks, including breaks.

I may need some extra time to complete tasks or flexibility in relation to deadlines.

Any other information:

Employee profile (continued 6/8)

Section 1.5: What you might see me do and what this means
(Tick all that apply, and/or include other behaviours relevant to you and provide some further information)

When I am happy, I:

- talk a lot

- jump up and down

- move about or dance

- hum or sing.

-

-

When I am unsettled, I:

- start scratching or picking

- stop talking

- leave the room

- look angry

- become upset or sad.

-

-

If I become overwhelmed, have a meltdown or shutdown, I need:

- to be left alone

- to be allowed to leave

- to be checked on by someone

- to be allowed to sit somewhere quiet

- my parents or carers to be contacted.

-

-

Any other information:

Post-16 professional

Employee profile (continued 7/8)

Section 1.6: My preferred environment
(Tick all that apply and provide some further information)

I can be distracted by background conversation, office talk, the sound of air conditioning, fans etc.

I can find office lighting too bright.

I can find the temperature too warm.

I can find the temperature too cold.

I can be distracted by smells such as strong perfume or aftershave, cleaning products or office kitchens.

I can be distracted very easily, for example, by people walking past me or doors banging.

I benefit from taking frequent breaks.

I benefit from having access to a quiet space.

I use ear defenders, ear plugs or noise-cancelling headphones.

I wear tinted glasses or sunglasses in the office.

I prefer to work remotely if possible.

Any other information:

Employee profile (continued 8/8)

Section 2: Agreed workplace adjustments

This section is for the employer to agree workplace adjustments.

It may be useful to follow STEPS in order to agree adjustments with the young person.

STEPS were based upon and adapted from the work of the Centre for Applied Autism Research, and Natalie Jenkins and Sue Fletcher-Watson.

Agreed workplace adjustments:
(For example, flexible work hours to avoid commuting during rush hour, allocated desk (in an otherwise hot-desking environment), designated quiet space, noise-cancelling headphones)

Agreed by:

Employer:

Young person:

Date:

/   /

Date for review:
(review every two months)

/   /

Work placement evaluation

This template can be used during the work placement and as a reflective tool once the work placement has finished to identify from the young person's perspective what went well and what could have been improved. You will also consider the young person's future aspirations and career goals, and plan actions with set time frames.

Send a blank template of the work placement evaluation to the young person before their work placement starts so they can include aspects throughout their placement. Some individuals will probably find it better to complete the form in person with you during the post-placement meeting, drawing on your direction and insight, and knowing the questions in advance is likely to be helpful.

Name of young person:

Date: /   /

Role and responsibilities
(For example, what tasks did you complete throughout your placement? These can include daily tasks, one-off tasks, project work, etc.)

What you enjoyed during your placement
(Think about your role, the tasks you completed, the people you worked with, the environment and nature of the company.)

What you did not enjoy during your placement
(Think about your role, the tasks you completed, the people you worked with, the environment and nature of the company.)

Work placement evaluation (continued 2/4)

To what extent were you able to put your existing skills and knowledge to practical use?
(For example, to what extent were the skills identified in your employee profile used during your work placement?)

What skills did you learn?
(For example, computer and IT skills, time management, organisation, social skills, etc. Did you learn more that you expected?)

Do you feel that the skills you learned were challenging enough?
(For example, did you find these new skills interesting, and did you feel a sense of accomplishment?)

Professional development completed during the placement
(For example, include any in-house training or courses you completed during your work placement.)

Work placement evaluation (continued 3/4)

What do you think could have been improved or changed during your placement?
(For example, think about the support you received during your placement. Did they understand your needs sufficiently? Was the learning adapted so that it met your needs? Did you get enough support from your manager? Was the pre-placement support good enough?)

Did the placement help confirm that you wanted to work in that environment or do something else?
(For example, did you enjoy your work placement? Did you not enjoy aspects of your work placement?)

What kind of job do you want to do after you have finished your placement?
(For example, do you want to stay in the same field of work? Do you want to do something different? Do you feel confident about these plans?)

Work placement evaluation (continued 4/4)

Actions:
Using the information gathered above, discuss with the young person and collaboratively decide on agreed actions and outline when they will be completed.

Action 1 (1)

Action 1 (3)

Date to be completed by: | / | / |

Date to be completed by: | / | / |

Action 1 (2)

Action 1 (4)

Date to be completed by: | / | / |

Date to be completed by: | / | / |

For the young person

For the young person

This section is for autistic young people. We know that planning your next step can be scary, whether you're thinking about going on to college, university, a training course or employment.

We know that having time to plan your options is key to success. It's also important for you to have support from somebody who understands your needs.

Career planning

The first step when thinking about your future is often to talk to a professional, such as a post-16 professional (see glossary of terms). In the first part of this section, you will find two templates that you can fill in and bring to a pre-placement discussion to help you explain what you'd like to do and the support you need to do it.

Pre-placement discussion summary

Use this template to explain your skills and experience. It may be helpful to fill this out with someone who knows you well, for example, a parent, carer or support worker. Your post-16 professional should send you this template ahead of your pre-placement discussion with them. If for some reason they do not, it will still be helpful to fill this out and bring it along so that you can tell them about your career goals.

Employee profile

Once you have been matched with a work experience placement, use this template to tell the employer all about yourself. You can discuss this with your post-16 professional during your session and then it can be shared with the employer so that they understand you and can put in place any support you may need.

Preparing for a work experience placement

The second part of this section contains information and support for those taking part in work experience placements.

Interview preparation

This section contains advice and support on preparing for a job interview.

Communicating in the workplace

This section contains advice and support on explaining to your employers how you prefer to communicate at work.

Pre-placement discussion summary

Use this template to identify your skills and experience. You should read it ahead of your pre-placement discussion meeting and you may find it useful to prepare for the session by completing the form in advance, perhaps discussing the questions with someone who knows you well or getting help to complete it.

If you have a CV (curriculum vitae), you should bring it with you to the session to help complete the skills and qualification sections of your plan or use it to complete the form in advance.

1 **Name of young person:**

2 **Date:**   /   /

3 **Introductions**
Post-16 professional to explain their role (including data protection, safeguarding and confidentiality as appropriate.

4 **What is your current situation?**
(Include all that apply)

Studying   **Working**   **Volunteering**   **Unemployed**

5 **Education**

Which subjects have you studied and what grades did you achieve?

Pre-placement discussion summary (continued 2/7)

Which subjects did you enjoy the most?

What did you enjoy most about your studies?

Pre-placement discussion summary (continued 3/7)

6 **Future employment**

What kind of work would you like to do?

Do you want to achieve a qualification while at work?

Do you have preference for working hours and days?

7 **Previous employment**

Have you had any work experiences (including voluntary work)?

What was your role?

What responsibilities did you have?

What skills and knowledge do you have or did you learn?

Pre-placement discussion summary (continued 4/7)

8   **Training**

Have you undertaken any training for a job?

What did you do?

Did you enjoy it?

9   **What are your interests?**

Creative, technical, problem-solving

TV programmes, films or computer games

Researching a particular area or topic

Animals or nature

Other

Pre-placement discussion summary (continued 5/7)

10 **Past experience**

Have you looked for work before?

Where did you research jobs to apply for?

Did you face any barriers or challenges when applying for jobs and attending interviews?

Have you had feedback on unsuccessful applications?
If yes, what was the feedback?

What do you think you are good at?

What do other people say you are good at?

Have you experienced any barriers or challenges in the workplace?
If yes, how could they be avoided in a future workplace?

Pre-placement discussion summary (continued 6/7)

11 **Future work placement**

What kind of work placement are you interested in?

What would you like to learn from a work placement?

What would you like to happen once the placement is completed?

12 **Any further questions?**

How confident do you feel about a future work placement? (Please select one option)

| not very confident | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | very confident |

Any concerns or worries?

Pre-placement discussion summary (continued 7/7)

13 **Agree actions**

Discussions about your future are important. Watch this message from Sam:

Employee profile

Use this template to tell your future work placement manager or employer all about yourself. The information can be shared with the employer so that they understand you and can put in place any support you might need. You should read this ahead of your pre-placement discussion meeting, and you may find it useful to prepare for the session by completing the form in advance, perhaps discussing the questions with someone who knows you well, or getting help to complete it.

The employee profile is a confidential document and only the relevant people in the placement organisation, who you agree to in advance, will have access to it, for example, your line manager and HR. Other colleagues can be informed if you feel this is required, when appropriate.

Employee profile

My name is:

Section 1.1: About me

My skills
(Tick all that apply)

Attention to detail
(eg being thorough,
accurate, detecting errors)

Artistic skills
(eg drawing, visual arts)

**Music and
sound skills**
(eg ability to think and
understand in patterns,
creative thinking)

Listening skills
(eg ability to absorb
and retain facts)

**A strong sense
of morality**
(eg honesty, lack of
judgmental attitude)

**Maintain focus when
engaged in repetitive work**
(eg not getting
distracted or bored)

Conscientious and diligent
(eg organised, punctual)

Mathematical abilities
(eg processing numbers,
calculations)

Social skills
(eg face-to face interaction
with others)

**Online communication
skills** (eg email and text
interaction with others)

Creative talents
(eg identifying improvements)

Analysing information
(eg detecting patterns in data)

Technical abilities
(eg computer skills, engineering)

Trustworthiness
(eg doing what you say
you will do)

Loyalty
(eg staying with a friend,
or course or organisation)

Emotional intelligence
(eg self-awareness, empathy)

Kindness
(eg helping others)

Good memory
(eg recalling facts)

Employee profile (continued 2/8)

Anything else not covered above:

My strengths and other things I am good at
Use information gathered in the pre-placement discussion summary or any other additional information, such as the young person's EHC plan if you have access to this.

Employee profile (continued 3/8)

Section 1.2: How to prepare me in the best way for my work experience
(Tick all that apply)

I would benefit from receiving a plan, schedule of work or list of tasks I am expected to do each day or week.

I would benefit from visiting my work experience placement before starting.

I would benefit from meeting my manager before starting my placement.

I would benefit from seeing where I am going to sit and where I can have my lunch.

I would benefit from knowing the address of my work experience placement so that I can practise undertaking my journey.

I would benefit from understanding the job role, the tasks I am expected to undertake and the hours I will be working, including breaks.

I would benefit from discussing flexible work hours, so that I can avoid travelling during rush hour.

I would benefit from knowing whether there is a dress code or what standard of dress is expected.

Any other information:

Employee profile (continued 4/8)

Section 1.3: The best ways of communicating with me in the workplace the best way
(Tick all that apply)

I would prefer to be introduced to new people one at a time.

I prefer to communicate verbally.

I prefer to communicate via email and written communication.

I enjoy talking with people.

I prefer them to start the conversation.

I would prefer it if people didn't talk to me about non-work-related topics (eg at lunchtime).

I prefer to avoid eye contact.

I prefer to talk to only one person at a time.

Say my name to get my attention.

I do not like answering the phone.

Any other information:

I do not like making phone calls.

I may have times when I am focusing and cannot be disturbed (and I will use the four-step traffic light system).

I appreciate frequent feedback.

I like to ask lots of questions until I am familiar with a task.

I benefit from regular scheduled meetings with my manager (eg weekly).

I would prefer not to attend face-to-face meetings.

I would prefer not to attend online meetings.

Employee profile (continued 5/8)

Section 1.4: The best ways to give me instructions and tasks
(Tick all that apply)

I need instructions backed up in writing.

I prefer visual information, for example, flow charts and diagrams.

I need to record instructions, so that I have time to process the information and to support my memory.

I need one question or instruction at a time.

I need instructions given to me in prearranged meetings rather than when I am concentrating on something else.

I need time to process what you have said.

I need to do something else while listening, for example, use a fidget toy.

I need information or questions in advance before discussing them.

I prefer to concentrate on one task at a time.

I am more comfortable completing the same task repeatedly.

I prefer to have a bit of variety in the tasks I am undertaking.

I need advance notice of changes and help to manage these changes (including time to get used to them).

I need help to structure my daily tasks, including breaks.

I may need some extra time to complete tasks or flexibility in relation to deadlines.

Any other information:

Employee profile (continued 6/8)

Section 1.5: What you might see me do and what this means
(Tick all that apply and provide some further information)

When I am happy, I:

• talk a lot

• jump up and down

• move about or dance

• hum or sing.

•

•

When I am unsettled, I:

• start scratching or picking

• stop talking

• leave the room

• look angry

• become upset or sad.

•

•

If I become overwhelmed, have a meltdown or shutdown, I need:

• to be left alone

• to be allowed to leave

• to be checked on by someone

• to be allowed to sit somewhere quiet

• my parents or carers to be contacted.

•

•

Any other information:

Employee profile (continued 7/8)

Section 1.6: My preferred environment
(Include all that apply and provide some further information)

I can be distracted by background conversation, office talk, the sound of air conditioning, fans etc.

I can find office lighting too bright.

I can find the temperature too warm.

I can find the temperature too cold.

I can be distracted by smells such as strong perfume or aftershave, cleaning products or office kitchens.

I can be distracted very easily, for example, by people walking past me or doors banging.

I benefit from taking frequent breaks.

I benefit from having access to a quiet space.

I use ear defenders, ear plugs or noise-cancelling headphones.

I wear tinted glasses or sunglasses in the office.

I prefer to work remotely if possible.

Any other information:

Employee profile (continued 8/8)

Section 2: Agreed workplace adjustments

This section is for the employer to agree workplace adjustments.

It may be useful to follow STEPS in order to agree adjustments with the young person.

STEPS were based upon and adapted from the work of the Centre for Applied Autism Research, and Natalie Jenkins and Sue Fletcher-Watson.

Agreed workplace adjustments:
(For example, flexible work hours to avoid commuting during rush hour, allocated desk (in an otherwise hot-desking environment), designated quiet space, noise-cancelling headphones)

Agreed by:

Employer:

Young person:

Date:

/	/

Date for review:
(review every two months)

/	/

Interview preparation

You may want to go through all this information in advance with someone who knows you well to help you prepare, ask questions or get support.

1 **Before the interview**

As soon as you have been invited to an interview, email the person who contacted you (this could be a member of the HR team) to find out more about what to expect. Ask only about any relevant information listed below which has not been clearly outlined in the invitation to interview document you should have received from the employer.

2 **Ask about the format of the interview**

Will there be a task   or assessment   as well as questions?

If there is an English assessment, will it be verbal, written or both?

Yes   Verbal   Written   Both

If there is a maths assessment, what type of exercises will there be and how long will I have?

If there is a group assessment, how many people will be in the group and how long will I have?

How many people?   How long will I have?

3 **Ask about the interview panel**

How many people will interview me?

How long will the interview last?

What will be the questions or the topic of questions?

Once you have more information about the interview you can ask for **workplace adjustments**.

Interview preparation (continued 2/10)

Examples of workplace adjustments:

✓ Questions in advance for the interview and written assessment (which can allow you time to prepare and seek clarification on any questions you are not sure about)

✓ More time to answer verbal and written questions, if needed

✓ More time for any tasks

✓ You can request a different interview format if you have been invited to a group assessment.

You can share your **employee profile** with the people who will interview you if you feel this would be useful for them to help understand and support you during the interview. You can send the document to the HR team or the contact on the interview invitation.

Interview questions

During the interview, you will be asked some questions, some of which will be **competency questions.** This is when you need to provide a specific example of how you match the competency being assessed.

Here are some examples of competency questions:

> Show me an example of good customer service.

> Describe a time when you worked as a part of a team.

> Please give us an example of a situation where you have had to prioritise tasks.

To answer, you can use the **STAR model**. You can use this technique when completing application forms too.

STAR Technique
★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Prepare
Listen to the question and think of an event.

Result
Close with the result of your effords.

Situation
Describe the event or situation that you were in.

Task
Explain the task you had to complete.
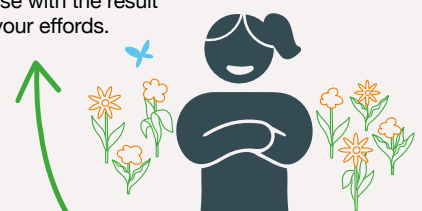
Action
Describe the specific actions you took to complete the task.

Interview preparation (continued 3/10)

4 **Attending an in-person interview**

Before the interview

a Plan your journey. You may have been sent instructions in advance to help you do this.

b Give yourself enough time and allow extra time for delays. For example, if the journey takes an hour, allow at least another 15 minutes in case of delays.

**c** Have a backup plan. For example, if the train is not running, what will you do instead?

d Prepare for the interview in advance. The HR department will have provided information about the questions you will be asked and explain the interview format, including any tasks to be completed. This information will be included in the **invitation to interview** you have received. It will be beneficial to prepare your responses to these questions and how you will undertake potential tasks. You may find it useful to prepare with someone who knows you well. Also take notes of this preparation to reflect upon before your interview.

e Prepare one or two relevant questions in advance that you would like to ask the interviewer (or interviewers) about the potential role and the organisation. This will demonstrate to them your interest in the position.

f Make sure you have your clothes clean and ready (including your shoes).

g Pack a bag and include anything you have been asked to take for the interview, for example, your passport or other identity documents.
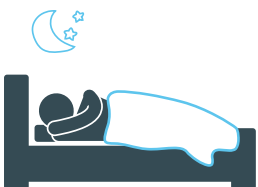
h Go to sleep early.

i Set your alarm to give you enough time to get up and get ready.

j Include in your bag any items that will help you to relax while on your journey and waiting for the interview, eg music player and headphones, interview preparation notes, magazine, book, newspaper and stim toy.
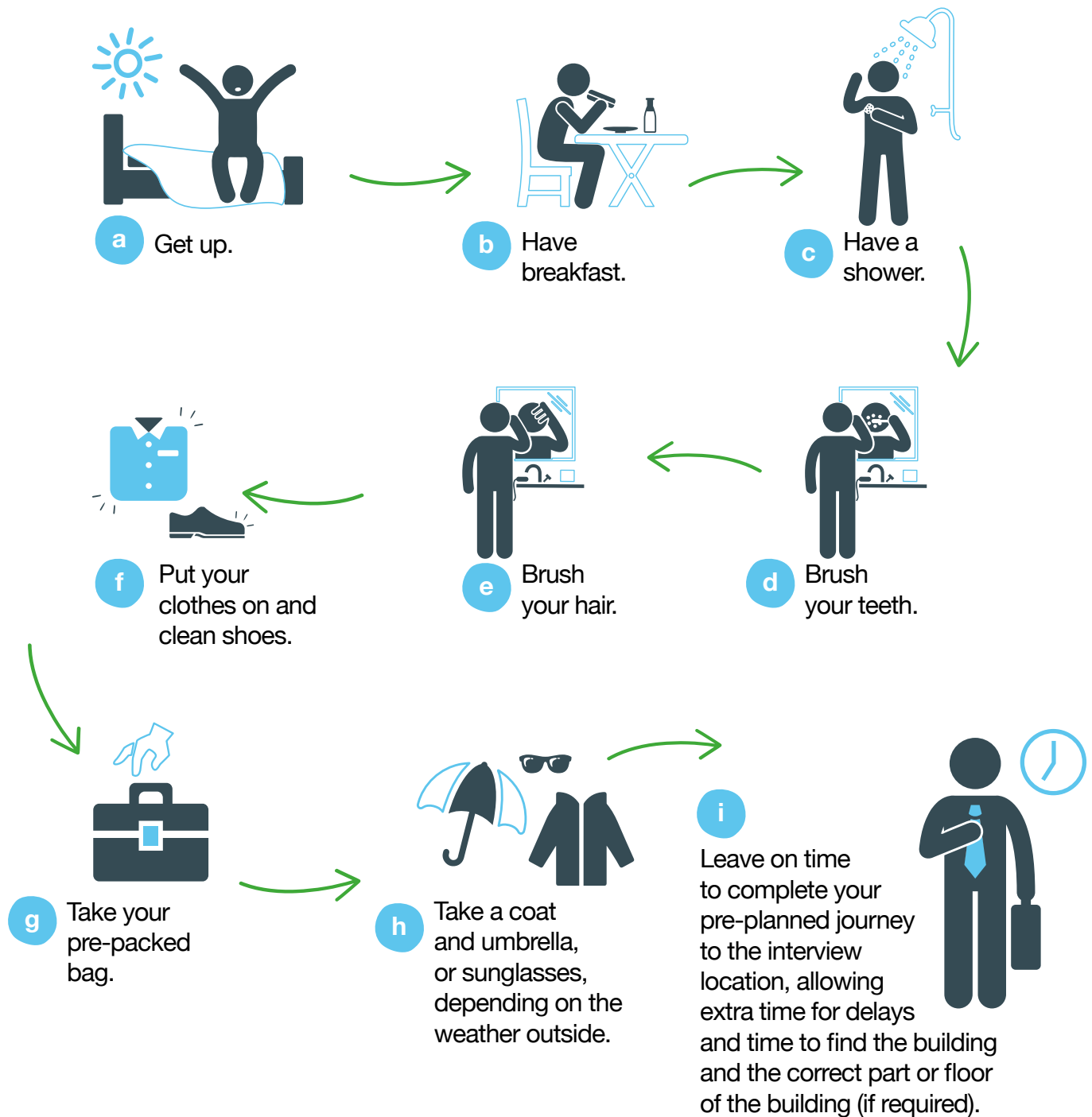
Interview preparation (continued 4/10)

Attending the interview

On the morning of the interview or before the interview if during the afternoon

a Get up.

b Have breakfast.

c Have a shower.

f Put your clothes on and clean shoes.

e Brush your hair.

d Brush your teeth.

g Take your pre-packed bag.

h Take a coat and umbrella, or sunglasses, depending on the weather outside.

i Leave on time to complete your pre-planned journey to the interview location, allowing extra time for delays and time to find the building and the correct part or floor of the building (if required).

Interview preparation (continued 5/10)

When you arrive for the interview

a When you arrive at the building, follow the instructions provided in the invitation to interview: where you need to go in the building, what you do when you approach the reception area, or receptionist, if there is one; this will include informing the receptionist who you are visiting.
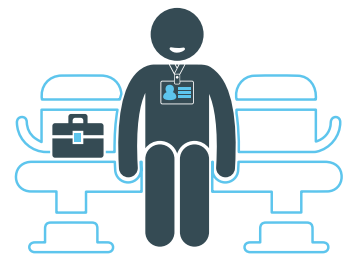
b Follow the instructions provided by the receptionist; sign in, place your visitor's lanyard around your neck (if you're comfortable to do so), or place the name label on top of your clothes around your chest area.

c Once the receptionist has directed you to the waiting area, find an empty seat and sit and wait until the person you are visiting comes to get you from the waiting area and takes you to where you are meeting for the interview.

d Ensure that your mobile phone is in silent mode or turned off during the interview.

e While waiting, you may find it beneficial to use some of the items you have brought with you in your bag to help you relax and prepare for the interview.

f When you first meet the person you are visiting, say hello, smile and shake their hand, by way of a formal, professional greeting (if you are comfortable shaking hands with the interviewer). If you would find it uncomfortable shaking hands with the interviewer, explain this beforehand to HR, so they know why you do not do this, ensuring mutual understanding in advance.

Interview preparation (continued 6/10)

During the interview

a When you arrive in the interview room, greet the other interviewers, say hello, smile and shake each person's hand, one at a time (if you are comfortable shaking hands with the interviewers).

b The interview will be led by the interviewers. They will ask questions, one at a time, and you will need to provide appropriate answers after each question. Remember, you will have been given the questions in advance, so refer to your preparation to answer the questions.

c The interview format, which you will have been informed of in advance, may also include one or more tasks for you to complete individually or in a group to assess your skills and knowledge. You will have been able to prepare for such scenarios in advance; remember to reflect upon and use this preparation.

d Towards the end of a formal interview, you will be asked by the interviewer if you have any questions you would like to ask. This will now be the opportunity to ask the question (or questions) you have prepared in advance about the potential role and the organisation.
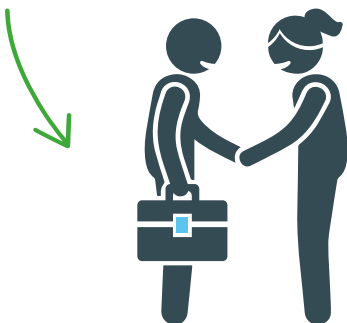
e When the interview finishes, say goodbye to the interviewers, thank them for their time and shake hands (if you are comfortable doing so); this is a formal and professional way of saying goodbye.

Interview preparation (continued 7/10)

When you leave the interview

a After the interview has finished and you have said your goodbyes, one of the interviewers will take you back to reception. If you are comfortable doing so, shake hands or wave goodbye.

b The receptionist will ask you to sign out and you will leave behind your visitor's lanyard or name label.

Thank you

d Ensure that you have all your personal belongings.

c Thank the receptionist for their help.

✓ Leave the building and begin your journey home.

Interview preparation (continued 8/10)

5 **Attending a virtual or phone interview**

Before the interview

a Practise using the virtual meeting software, eg Zoom, Teams or Skype, with someone who knows you well.

b Ensure that you have received the meeting invitation and link, including any passwords.

c Prepare for the interview in advance. The HR department will have provided information about the questions you will be asked and explained the interview format, including any tasks to be completed. This information will be included in the **invitation to interview** you have received. It will be beneficial to prepare your responses to these questions and how you will undertake potential tasks. You may find it useful to prepare with someone who knows you well. Also take notes of this preparation to reflect upon before your interview.

d Prepare one or two relevant questions in advance which you would like to ask the interviewer (or interviewer) about the potential role and the organisation. This will demonstrate to them your interest in the position.

e Make sure you have your interview clothes clean and ready.
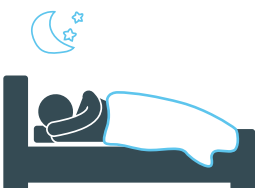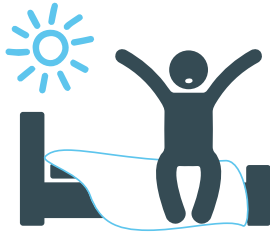
e Go to sleep early.

f Set your alarm to give you enough time to get up and get ready.

Interview preparation (continued 9/10)

On the morning of the interview or before the interview if during the afternoon

a Get up.

b Have breakfast.

c Have a shower.

d Brush your teeth.

e Brush your hair.

f Put your clothes on and clean shoes.

g Make sure your device is fully charged and a charger with a nearby power source is available.

h Make sure that you log in to the virtual meeting at least five minutes before the scheduled start time. This will allow time to resolve any potential technical issues.

5 min

i Make sure you have pen and paper available for completing tasks (if required).

j Ensure that your camera and audio (sound) is turned on once you join the meeting.

k You may have to wait for the virtual interview or meeting to start; a pop-up will inform you of this.

l When you arrive at the virtual interview or meeting, greet the interviewers, say hello and smile.
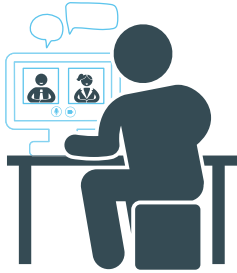
Hello

Interview preparation (continued 10/10)

On the morning of the interview or before the interview if during the afternoon
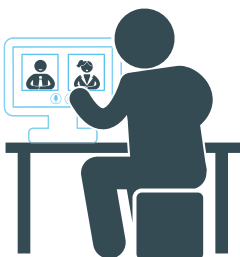
continued from previous page

m The interview will be led by the interviewers. They will ask questions, one at a time, and you will need to provide appropriate answers after each question. Remember, you will have been given the questions in advance, so refer to your preparation to answer the questions. Sometimes the internet connection may drop out and the virtual meeting will stop, which will not be your fault. Ask the interviewers at the beggining of the interview what you should do if this happens.

n The interview format, which you will have been informed of in advance, may also include one or more tasks for you to complete, eg a presentation, to assess your skills and knowledge. You will have been able to prepare for such scenarios in advance; remember to reflect upon and use this preparation.

o Towards the end of a formal interview, you will be asked by the interviewer if you have any questions you would like to ask. This will now be the opportunity to ask the question (or questions) you have prepared in advance about the potential role and the organisation.

p When the interview finishes, say goodbye to the interviewers and thank them for their time.

Thank you

Leave meeting
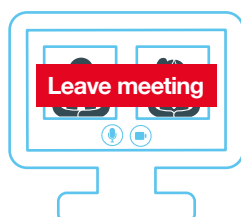
q The virtual interview will now finish, and the meeting will end.

♻ Communicating in the workplace

The four-step traffic light system

There may be times in your workplace when you need to concentrate on a particular task, or you don't feel like talking. That is OK, but it is important that you communicate this to your colleagues. The traffic light system can help you do this.

You can personalise the text boxes and print them out to use as badges to put on your desk or a lanyard. It is important that your employer and your colleagues understand what these badges mean and that they respect the rules. You can discuss this with your post-16 professional or employer.

This communication system may also be incorporated within a virtual workplace (working remotely or from home), through your computer, eg Microsoft Teams status, colour coding status regarding availability and set status message.

A **red badge** means that you do not want to talk to anyone; you will approach others if you require support.

An **orange badge** means that it may not be a good time to talk, and that is OK; you want to talk only to a few people whom you recognise.

A **yellow badge** means that you may want to talk to others if you feel you can; the approached people can then talk back to you in that case. You would prefer it if people started a conversation with you.

A **green badge** means you want to talk to other people. You may start a conversation with someone if you feel able to, but you would prefer to have someone start a conversation with you.

❌ **A red badge means that you do not want to talk to anyone; you will approach others if you require support.**

❗ **An orange badge means that it may not be a good time to talk, and that is OK; you want to talk only to a few people whom you recognise.**

◎ **A yellow badge means that you may want to talk to others if you feel you can; the approached people can then talk back to you in that case. You would prefer it if people started a conversation with you.**

✅ **A green badge means you want to talk to other people. You may start a conversation with someone if you feel able to, but you would prefer to have someone start a conversation with you.**
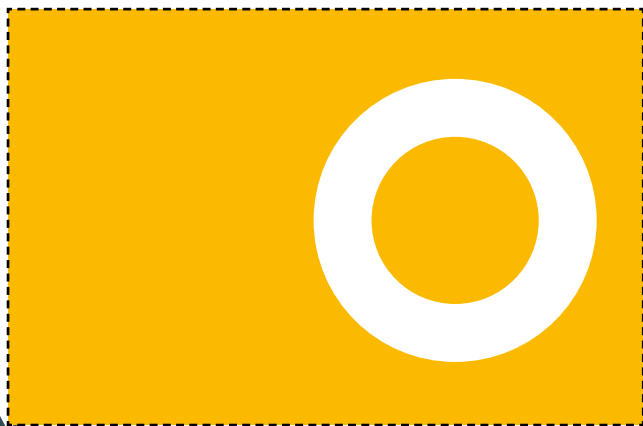
Communicating in the workplace (continued 2/2)

The four-step traffic light system
You can edit the four-step traffic light system, by including your own personalised statements in the editable text boxes below.

For the employer

For the employer

This section 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 section

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.

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.

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.

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:

Tristia Harrison
Chief Executive Officer
TalkTalk

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.
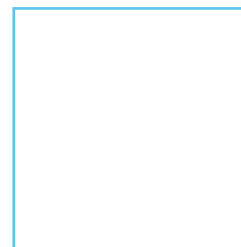
One-page profile

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.

What is autism

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.
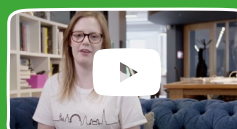
Free webinars for professionals ❯

Free toolkits co-produced with autistic youth patrons ❯

A series of videos explaining autism by autistic youth patrons:
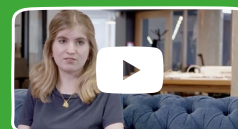
What is autism

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 includes 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 adaptions 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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Thank you to Creased Puddle for its support and expertise with the development of the toolkit. Creased Puddle works closely with organisations to formulate communication strategies, provide training tools, carry out workplace assessments and put people with autism in the right jobs.

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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