

Supporting autistic people to access employment

A Training Development
Resource



AwtistiaethCymru.org
AutismWales.org

What Is Autism?

Autism is a 'hidden disability', this means that it is not easy to recognise when someone has the condition. If someone has a wristband, card or screensaver on their mobile device this means that they are autistic and want you to know so that you can support them:



Autistic people often have difficulty in accessing community activities, leisure facilities and other services. Everyone having a better understanding of autism has the power to change lives. The following information is provided to help you to gain a better understanding of autism and suggests ways in which you can support autistic people.

For more information on the 'Can You See Me?' scheme, please visit:
AutismWales.org/en/i-am-autistic/resources-for-you/can-you-see-me/



What Is Autism?

Autism is also known by other names, including:

**Autism Spectrum
Disorder (ASD)**

**Asperger's
Syndrome**

**Autistic Spectrum
Condition (ASC)**

**Pervasive
Developmental
Disorder**



What Is Autism?

Autism is a lifelong condition and affects people from all backgrounds

Currently more males than females are diagnosed with autism

It is estimated that 1 in every 100 people in the UK have an Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

Many people are unaware that they are autistic

This is especially true for adults

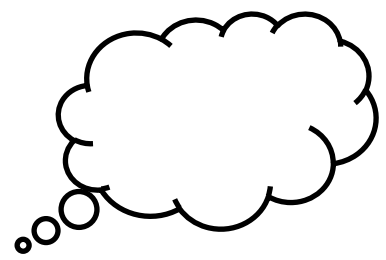


What Is Autism?

Autistic people have differences in the following areas:



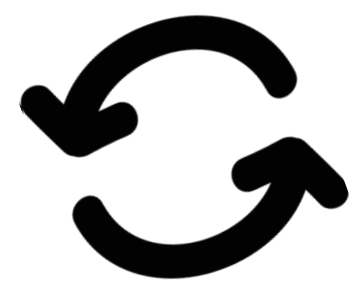
Social Communication & Social Interaction



Social Imagination and Flexibility of Thought



Restricted, repetitive interests or activities



Restricted, repetitive patterns of behaviour



Unusual sensory responses



What Is Autism?

These difficulties may impact on someone's functioning in all areas of life, but the degree to which the individual is affected and the impact this has on daily life varies from one person to another. Please click on the link below to watch a short film that follows three autistic people – Amara Tamblyn, Rhiannon Lloyd-Williams and Osian Harries – as they explore what their autism means to them, including: social communication; patterns and routines; sensory experience; and how to make things better. It also includes the professional voice of Dr Elin Walker Jones, consultant Psychologist.

To first gain a basic autism awareness please visit:
AutismWales.org/en/parents-carers/what-is-autism/

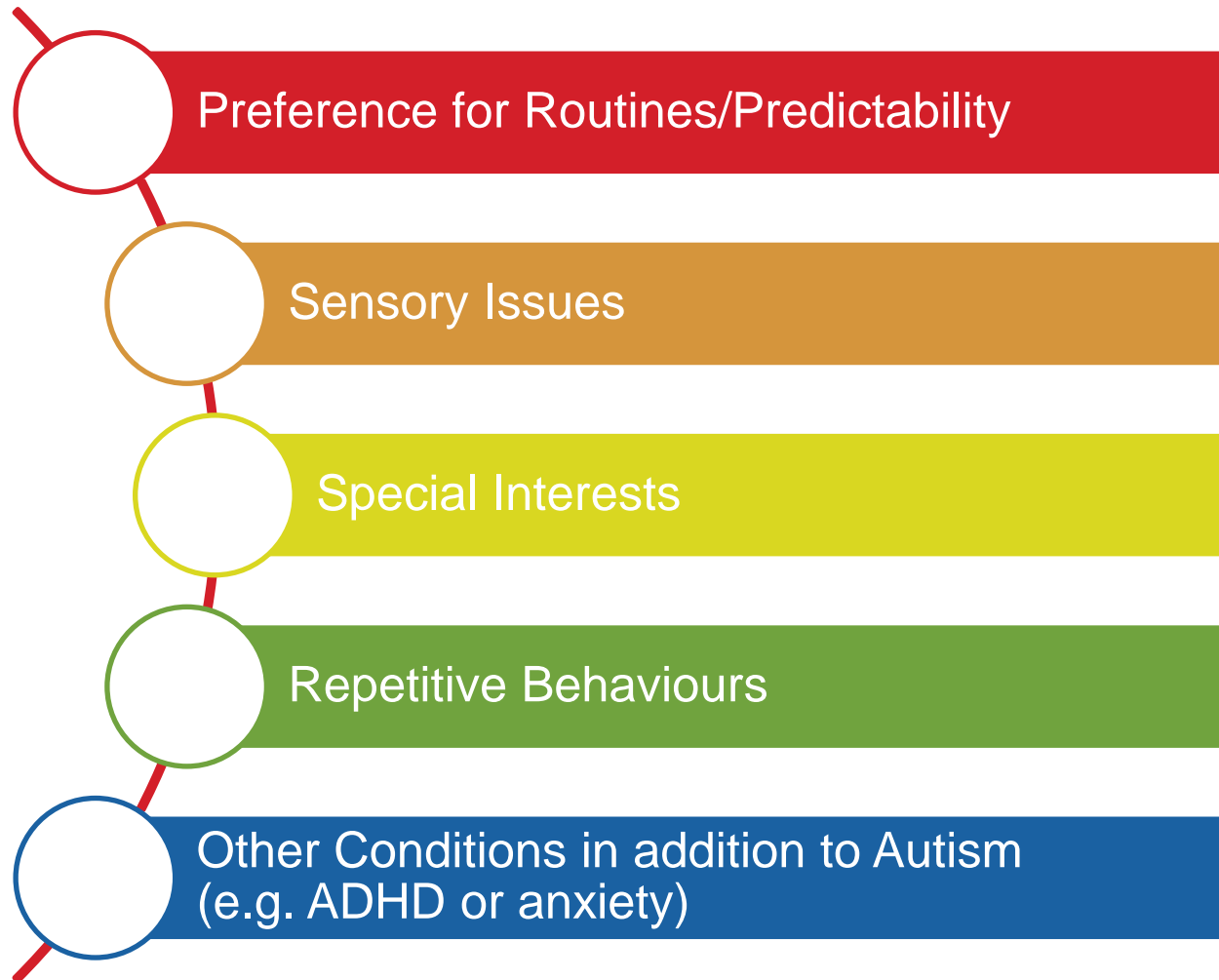
Within this resource we have concentrated on how these difficulties can impact on an individual's ability to seek, secure and maintain employment.

Many autistic people are keen to work, and have skills, attributes and knowledge that will benefit employers. It is said that many traits associated with the autistic traits can be of benefit to the workplace, but some autistic people may need additional support to secure suitable employment.



What Is Autism?

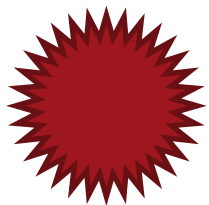
Many autistic people have:



You should consider the difficulties autistic people may experience in the following areas:

- **Meetings and appointments**
- **Specific work issues**
- **Defining employment essentials and preferences**
- **The job search**
- **Applying for jobs**
- **Job interviews**

and offer ideas of what may help with these issues. By increasing **your** awareness, adapting **your** communication and introducing structure **you** can support an autistic person to fulfil their employment potential.



A series of tools to accompany this resource can be found at AutismWales.org/en/employment/i-support-autistic-people-seeking-employment/
Further resources are also available at AutismWales.org/en/education/i-am-a-work-based-learning-provider/



Meetings and appointments

Possible issues

Difficulties in social communication

Autistic people may experience difficulties with using and understanding elements of social communication. The level and range of difficulties varies from one person to another.

Some autistic people whilst, they may appear to have a highly developed use of social communication, have a more limited level of understanding., Therefore it is important not to assume someone's level of understanding based on the language and communication skills they are using.

Issues with social communication can cause problems in giving information to and gaining information from autistic people

Solutions

- Avoid using metaphors, idioms and similes
- Keep instructions short
- Avoid using phrases that are unnecessary
- Keep a calm, consistent voice pattern
- Use pictures and written information to support your communication
- Check that the individual has understood what you have said
- Remember poor eye contact does not mean the person with autism is not paying attention
- Do not force an autistic person to give you eye contact
- Sitting alongside, rather than in front of, the autistic person when talking to them as this can often help alleviate eye contact issues
- Say the person's name before addressing them, especially if in a group
- Do not assume that an autistic person's facial expression is a true reflection of their feelings
- Avoid using facial expressions, body language and gesture to emphasise a point
- Avoid sarcasm
- Say what you mean and mean what you say, use clear language to communicate rather than relying on non-verbal communication



Meetings and appointments continued...

	Possible issues	Solutions
Difficulties in Social Interaction	<p>Often, autistic people find social 'small talk' difficult, and may worry about what answers are expected from them, or even feel as if they are being tested.</p> <p>Building relationships with co workers may be difficult for some autistic people</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Keep 'small talk' to a minimum, try and form a relationship by finding out about special interests• Explain clearly whether your interactions are purely social, supportive or of a formal nature before hand• State what is expected of the person before starting, along with implications of non-compliance
Preference for predictability	<p>Many autistic people find coping with changes difficult. Meeting unfamiliar people, using different rooms, changing the usual routine and late running appointments may make the person anxious.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Arrange to meet with a familiar member of staff• Keep appointments to time• Give notice of any changes• Use the same room / area• Follow the same routine
Sensory issues	<p>Fluorescent lights, noisy background, busy environments, other conversations in vicinity can cause distress and may prevent an autistic person from concentrating.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Use a meeting room rather than open plan office• Dim lighting• Arrange appointments at quieter times of day• Offer quiet space to wait rather than busy waiting area



Autism specific work issues to consider

Conditions / tasks that may cause problems for autistic people

- Varying shift patterns
- Uniform / protective clothing
- Chaotic environments
- Loud noises, strong smells, bright lights
- Making 'small talk'
- Managing competing priorities
- Complex problem solving
- Large teams
- High levels off staff turnover

Conditions / tasks that may benefit autistic people


- Defined tasks
- Repetitive activities
- Consistent line management system
- Attention to detail
- Set hours of work
- Linked to special interests
- Small teams
- Supportive environment





Defining employment essentials and preferences

	Possible issues	Solutions
Difficulties in Social interaction and communication	Often, autistic people will provide the information they are specifically asked about, and may not provide additional information about their needs. Often open-ended questions can prove difficult to answer.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ask specific questions• Use checklists and questionnaires with closed questions, offer written information for the individual's future reference• Be thorough, ensure you have covered all aspects of employment and don't rely on the individual raising issues without being specifically asked
Difficulties in Social Imagination	Sometimes autistic people may find it difficult to predict their suitability for employment opportunities and working environments, or may find it difficult to imagine the attributes needed for particular jobs. Difficulties with planning and problem solving may cause issues with considering travel to work and areas within which a job could be managed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ascertain the essential requirements any employment opportunity would need to meet for the individual to cope• Explore travel options, including travel time to support the individual to seek work in the appropriate geographical area• Use lists of potential work sectors to help the individual to verbalise their preferences
Sensory issues and preference for predictability	If the autistic person experiences sensory issues or dislikes change, it may mean that certain types of employment are not suitable. If not discussed fully these issues may be missed and will have a significant impact on the autistic person's ability to maintain their job.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ask specific questions relating to work environment limitations, working hours and ability to work flexibly
Special interests and attributes	Often autistic people have attributes that are extremely beneficial to employers and special interests that are linked to extensive skills and knowledge in a particular area.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Explore special interests and how they may relate to the work environment• Ascertain skills and knowledge that may not have been acquired through formal study or experience



The job search

	Possible issues	Solutions
Difficulties in Social interaction and Social Communication	<p>Autistic people have difficulty in understanding figurative language. Most job adverts and job descriptions are heavily laden with figurative language ('be flexible', 'team player' etc) making them difficult for individuals with autism to interpret. This difficulty will also impact on the person's ability to convey their skills in the figurative language needed for many job search online tools.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Explain figurative phrases using literal language• Online idiom and metaphor translators may be useful• Assist the person by providing 'figurative' descriptions of their skills which can be used for job matching and in job search tools
Difficulties in Social Imagination	<p>Difficulties predicting what others need or expect, planning or problem solving can make it difficult for autistic people to compare their skills to those stated in job descriptions.</p> <p>It is often difficult for autistic people to relate their existing skills or experiences to new situations.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Encourage the person to list their personal information, preferences, skills and experience• Use lists of essential job criteria and travel requirements alongside skills when job matching• Support the person to consider their existing skills and attributes and consider how they may relate to different situations
Routines / Structure	<p>Many autistic people feel more comfortable with set tasks, routines and defined timescales. They may find it difficult to quantify terms such as 'regularly', 'frequently' or 'often' and using such unstructured terms may cause anxiety as they may not be clear as to what is expected of them.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• If the person is required to search for or apply for a specific number of jobs in a given timescale, explain this clearly.• Support them to create a job search plan which specifies certain activities on certain days / at certain times.• Ensure that they has understood what is expected of them.



Applying for jobs

	Issues	Solutions
Difficulties in Social Interaction and Social Communication	Difficulties with the use of figurative language may cause difficulties in matching job applications or CVs to the job description, advert or person specification.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provide explanations of figurative phrases• Encourage the use of these common figurative phrases in the application, as expected by employers
Difficulties in Social Imagination	Autistic people may have difficulties predicting others or seeing things from another's perspective. This may impact on their approach to applying for jobs or writing CVs, with them having difficulty in being able to write with the employer's perspective in mind.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provide support to develop a basic CV that can be kept as a template• Offer assistance in writing a personal profile, providing examples is unlikely to be sufficient• Share ideas about what the employer may be expecting to see in a job application or CV, define rules if necessary (e.g. don't write about personal relationships)
Preference for Structure	Some autistic people may prefer a structured approach to CV writing, with content being added in defined stages. Suggesting that they choose a template may cause anxiety for those who experience difficulties in making choices.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Use a CV writing tool to provide structure• Recommend a CV template



Job interviews

Issues

Difficulties in Social Interaction and Social Communication

Difficulties in social communication and interaction can mean that some autistic people are at a real disadvantage in an interview. Many may struggle with the social pleasantries that take place before the interview gets started, may have issues with conversational turn taking or eye contact.

Interview questions that are overcomplicated or asked using figurative language may not be understood or may be misunderstood.

Difficulties in Social Imagination

Some autistic people may experience difficulties in planning and problem solving. This can make it very difficult for them to prepare for an interview. For individuals who struggle to see things from another's perspective, conforming to the expected social rules of the interview (such as clothing choice, waiting to be asked before sitting) may prove difficult.

Solutions

- Practice interview techniques on repeated occasions
- During practice, ensure to practice answers to social pleasantries such as 'how was your journey?'
- Outline key things an employer will be seeking to find out in the interview, even if you think they are obvious
- Offer advice around social skills in an interview
- Ensure the individual has practiced a phrase that can be utilised when the question is not understood
- Increasing understanding and acceptance in organisations

- Support the person to plan and prepare for the interview by timetabling set tasks to undertake on specific days prior to the interview
- Ensure the time and date of the interview has been recorded in a diary / planner
- Encourage the individual to take a practice journey to interview so that they can predict journey times, and become more familiar with the journey
- Discuss appropriate interview attire, and specify what needs to be taken to interview



Job interviews continued.....

Issues

Anxiety

Attending a job interview will be extremely anxiety provoking for many autistic people. Meeting unfamiliar people, attending an unfamiliar place and being unsure of what is expected can cause anxiety in most people but this is heightened in autistic people.

Solutions

- Preparation and practice will help to reduce anxiety
- Give the individual examples of phrases that can be used if things are not going well
- Don't push the individual to move too quickly, allow time to build confidence to attend interviews
- Increasing understanding and acceptance in organisations recognising that someone may be on the autistic spectrum and asking them if they need to take a break may help.



Finally...

For some autistic people, understanding colleagues and a supportive manager can provide enough support to enable them to manage and enjoy their employment.

For others, more structured support will be needed, either during the induction period or as an ongoing support mechanism.

Others may only need support at difficult times.

Thank you for taking the time to develop your autism awareness.

Don't forget to access the certification scheme at [AutismWales.org](https://www.autismwales.org)



For information on the SIGNS of autism, please visit:

AutismWales.org/en/community-services/i-work-with-young-people-adults-in-health-social-care/clinicians-toolkit-adults/

Further information and links to other resources can be found at:



@ or email enquiries to AutismWales@WLGA.gov.uk



AutismWales



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