



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government



WLGA • CLILC



Working with Autism

a development resource for those
supporting individuals with autism
to access employment



Autism is a 'hidden disability', meaning it is not easy to recognise when someone has the condition. When you see the following pattern (on a wristband, card or mobile device) it means someone has autism and wants you to know so that you can support them:



Individuals with autism have difficulty in accessing and maintaining employment. Support from staff can make a huge difference, understanding autism has the power to change lives. The information to follow is provided to help you to understand autism and ways in which you can support adults with the condition to access your provision.

Autism



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

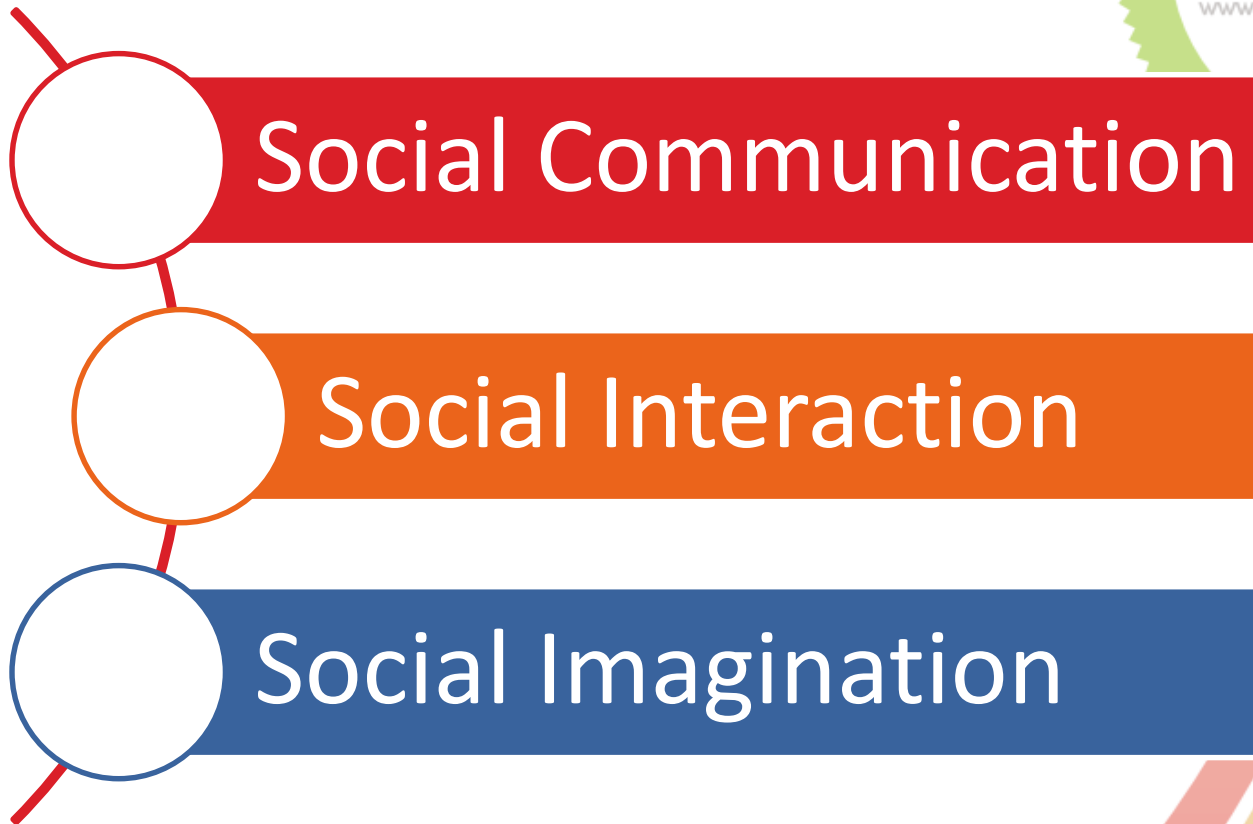
Autism is a lifelong condition and affects people from all backgrounds

Autism affects more males than females

Many people with autism have not been diagnosed, and therefore may not realise they have the condition

Individuals with autism experience difficulties with finding and sustaining employment

**Individuals with Autism experience impairments
in these 3 areas:**



Social Communication

Social Interaction

Social Imagination



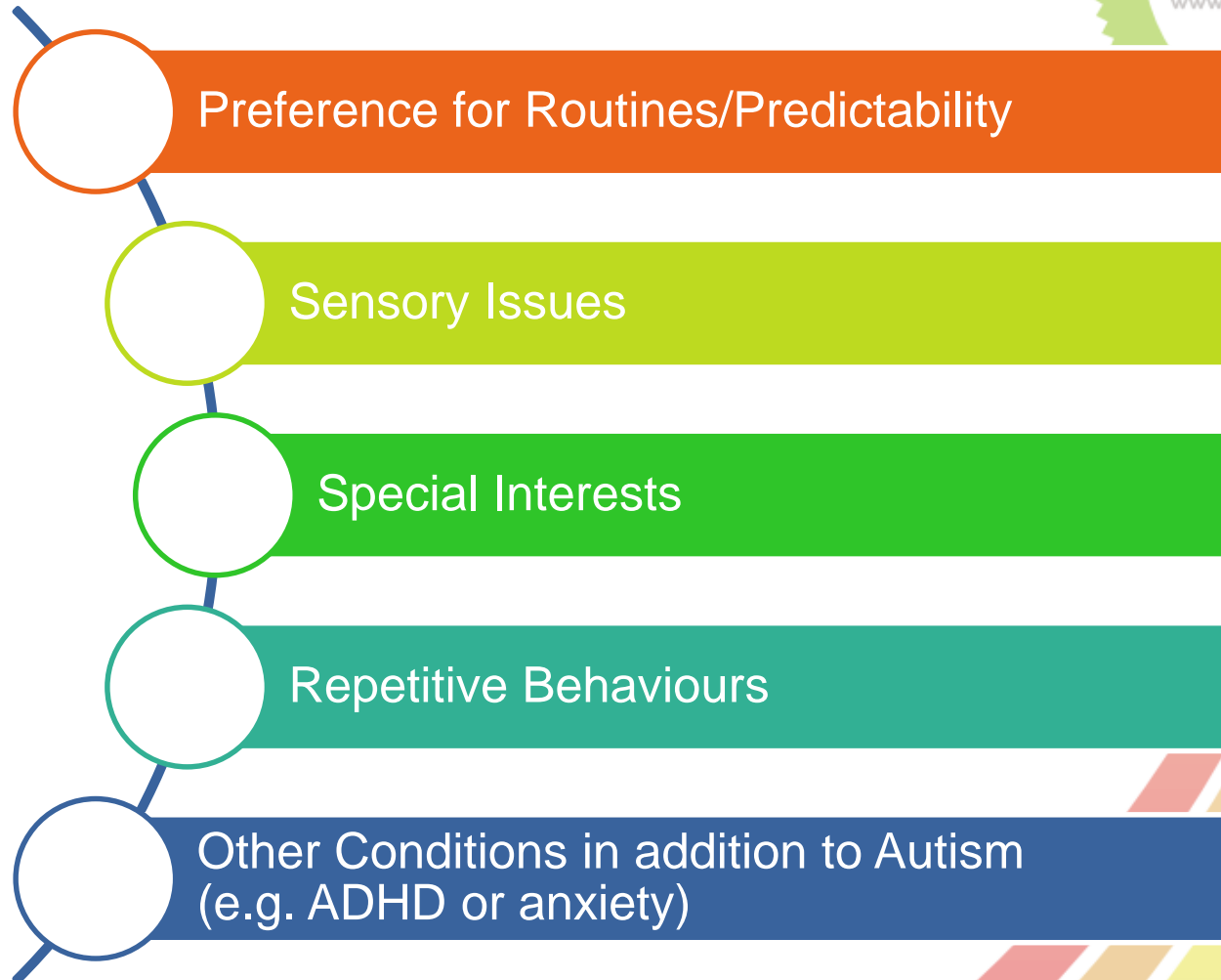
These impairments and associated difficulties impact an individual's functioning in all areas of life, but the degree to which the individual is affected and the impact this has on daily functioning varies from one person to another.

To first gain a basic awareness of autism please visit:
www.ASDinfoWales.co.uk/ASDaware

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

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

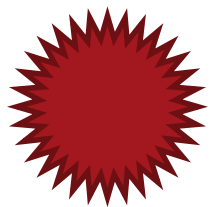
Many individuals with Autism have:



You must consider the difficulties individuals with autism 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 approaches that may help with these issues. By Increasing your awareness, adapting your communication and introducing structure you can support an individual with autism to fulfil their employment potential.



A series of tools to accompany this resource can be found at www.ASDinfoWales.co.uk/employment



Meetings and appointments

	Possible issues	Solutions
Impairments in social communication	<p>Individuals with autism experience difficulties with using and understanding elements of social communication; the level and range of difficulties varies from one individual to another.</p> <p>Many people with autism have differences in the level of social communication they use in comparison to the level they can understand, therefore it is important not to assume someone's level of understanding based on the language and communication skills they appear to be using.</p> <p>Issues with social communication can cause problems in giving information to and gaining information from individuals with autism.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 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 someone with autism to give you eye contact• Sitting alongside, rather than in front of, the individual with autism when talking to them can often help alleviate eye contact issues• Say the person's name before addressing them, especially if in a group• Do not assume that the individual with autism'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, use clear language to communicate rather than relying on non verbal communication

Meetings and appointments continued...

	Possible issues	Solutions
Impairments in Social Interaction	Often, individuals with Autism find social 'small talk' difficult, and may worry about what answers are expected from them, or even feel as if they are being tested.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Keep 'small talk' to a minimum• Explain clearly whether your interactions are purely social, supportive or of a formal nature before hand• State what is expected of the individual before starting, along with implications of non compliance
Preference for predictability	Many individuals with autism find coping with changes difficult. Meeting unfamiliar people, using different rooms, changing the usual routine and late running appointments may make the individual anxious.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Arrange for individual to meet familiar member of staff• Keep appointments to time• Give notice of any changes• Use the same room / area• Follow the same routine
Sensory issues	fluorescent lights, noisy background, busy environments, other conversations in vicinity can cause distress and may prevent individual from concentrating.	<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 individuals with autism

- 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 individuals with autism

- 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
Impairments in Social interaction and communication	Often, people with Autism will only 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
Impairments in Social Imagination	Sometimes individuals with Autism find it difficult to predict their suitability to 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 individual autism experiences sensory issues or dislike of changes, it may mean that certain types of employment are not suitable. These problems may not be conveyed unless specifically asked about.	<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 individuals with Autism 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
Impairments in Social interaction and Social Communication	Individuals with autism 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 individuals ability to convey their skills in the figurative language needed for many job search online tools.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Explain figurative phrases using literal language• Online idiom and metaphor translators may be useful• Assist the individual by providing 'figurative' descriptions of their skills which can be used for job matching and in job search tools
Impairments in Social Imagination	<p>Difficulties predicting what others need or expect, planning or problem solving can make it difficult for individuals with autism to compare their skills to those stated in job descriptions.</p> <p>It is often difficult for individuals with Autism to relate existing skills or experiences to new situations.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Encourage the individual to organise personal information, preferences, skills and experience in list form so they can be used for future reference• Use a structured approach to support the individual to assess their suitability for a job• Use lists of essential job criteria and travel requirements alongside skills when job matching• Support the individual to consider the existing skills and attributes they have and how they may relate to different situations
Routines / Structure	Many individuals with autism 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 the individual may not be clear as to what is expected of them.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• If the individual is required to search for or apply for a specific number of jobs in a given timescale, explain this clearly.• Support the individual to create a job search plan which specifies certain activities on certain days / at certain times.• Ensure the individual has understood what is expected of them.

Applying for jobs



	Issues	Solutions
Impairments in Social Interaction and Social Communication	Difficulties with the use of figurative language can 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
Impairments in Social Imagination	Many individuals with autism have difficulties predicting others or seeing things from another's perspective. This may impact on the individuals 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">• Support the individual 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 individuals with autism may prefer a structured approach to CV writing, with content being added in defined stages. Suggesting that the individual 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		Solutions
Impairments in Social Interaction and Social Communication	<p>Impairments in social communication and interaction can mean that individuals with autism 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.</p> <p>Interview questions that are overcomplicated or asked using figurative language may not be understood or may be misunderstood.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 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
Impairments in Social Imagination	<p>An individual with autism 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.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Support the individuals 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
Anxiety	<p>Attending a job interview will be extremely anxiety provoking for most individuals with autism. 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 individuals with autism.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 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

Finally...

For some individuals, understanding colleagues and a supportive manager can provide enough support to enable the individual 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 need support at difficult times, but manage without any support at other times.

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

Don't forget to access the certification scheme at www.ASDinfoWales.co.uk

