



Autism in Surrey

Working to improve the lives
of autistic people in Surrey

Autism Friendly Surrey

A focus on very isolated people

Notes from our November 2025 meeting

What we mean when we say 'very isolated'

There are autistic people who enjoy a more solitary life, and whilst others may feel they are isolated, they are fairly happy.

There are also children, young people and adults for whom the outside world does not feel safe and they spend most, if not all, their time at home. They would like to connect with others but issues like anxiety, fatigue and burnout have a huge impact on them.



Common themes

24 people joined our online open meeting on Tuesday 25th November.

Attendees, including several members of the Autism by Experience team, shared their experience of feeling very isolated, and some common themes emerged.

Burnout / Fatigue



Autistic children and young people can be vulnerable to experiencing burnout/fatigue due to trying to cope in overwhelming environments and 'masking' for long periods (typically school)

Adults can experience similar difficulties in the workplace.

Transitions



A common experience is for a young person to have a network of friends and acquaintances at school and college and for these relationships to dwindle after leaving school/college.

Some young adults struggle to maintain relationships once they no longer see people day to day.

Anxiety



Autistic people are particularly vulnerable to anxiety and can find the outside world unpredictable and overwhelming.

Some people do not feel safe going out on their own and may not have anyone who can support them when going out.

Some people may have had experiences of bullying/abuse or of social activities not going well in the past.

Socialising and connecting through shared interests - People often find it easier to socialise through an activity – where the focus is on the activity rather than just chatting. Ideas like 'gig buddies' could be helpful.

The importance of family support - Families are often a great source of support to help people to access their communities. At events and groups we support it's common for a parent or sibling to accompany a person until they are more confident. Family support needs to be highly valued.

Connecting with people through their interests

Autistic people often have very specific interests which others may also share and can be a way to help people connect with others.

As part of our work on the Autism Friendly Surrey project we are arranging social meet-ups and taster sessions at inclusive activities. Supported activities involving animals seem to be very popular !

One idea is to develop a form where people can share details of their interests and families could possibly connect with other families where their sons and daughters share common interests.



EOTAS

Education otherwise than at School (EOTAS).



EOTAS stands for Education Other Than At School.

Children and young people may be entitled to an EOTAS package if they are not able to manage in any school environment.

During our meeting several families shared experiences of their son or daughter being out of school and experiencing isolation even when they had an EOTAS package in place.

Families often have to battle to secure EOTAS packages for their son or daughter.

Some of these children and young people continue to experience burnout and/or mental health difficulties

It's important to also recognise that families supporting a child or young person who is out of school can become very isolated themselves.

Connecting with others online

People may have an online network of 'friends' they game with. These are often people not local to them.

There are online support groups for adults, and also organisations offer online/virtual social opportunities such as supported gaming groups. These online options can be a stepping stone to in-person meet ups.

Online safety

We discussed online safety, and many people told us that they are wary of using social media to connect with others due to concerns about online safety and also how toxic social media can be at times.

Next steps after our first meeting



We are keen to build on this first meeting.

Autism Friendly Surrey is currently funded until the end of March 2026. We hope to hear about further funding soon.

Our plan from January to March 2026:

- The Autism by Experience team will continue to collate information about specific support that may be available for children and adults who are very isolated, and publish this.
- We will offer further safe, structured, supported taster activities, with clear visual information.
- We will host a further online meeting in January to explore potential ideas such as an interests register, gig buddies and developing online networks that are safe and secure.

Alternative Provision

In November 2025 Surrey County Council published its independent Alternative Provision (AP) list of providers for children and young people, including specialist tutors, therapies and wellbeing services. Click here or use the QR code to see the list

