

# Understanding Autism

## Handout 8 - Services and approaches to support



### Supporting autistic people to access services and support

Under the Equality Act 2010, services such as health services, community services and social care services have a duty to make 'reasonable adjustments' for autistic people to ensure they have equal access to support.

#### The Surrey Autism Partnership Board website



The website lists services that are available to autistic adults, including people not eligible for adult social care.

#### These services include:

- The National Autistic Society Assist service
- Employment support
- Diagnostic services
- A wide range of community based services

You will also find details about The Surrey Autism Partnership Board reference group for autistic adults on our website, and minutes of Partnership Board meetings.

[www.surreypb.org.uk](http://www.surreypb.org.uk)

#### Reasonable adjustments

Different autistic people may benefit from different adjustments. There is not an agreed list of adjustments that services should offer, though many adjustments simply require a change in approach.

#### Adjustments that autistic people can find helpful include:

- Offering people an appointment at a quiet time of the day to avoid busy environments
- Communicating with a person by text or email if they find phone calls difficult to manage
- Offering one to one support if a person finds group work overwhelming
- A community service such as a gym offering 'quiet times' without loud music playing
- Offering Easy Read information using easy words and pictures

- Offering visits in advance of appointments to people who may find new environments overwhelming
- Offering extra time at an appointment if a person needs more time to explain things, and being clear and direct in how you communicate
- Helping people to prepare for things like assessments by giving them advance notice of the things you want to talk about.
- Being able to take a friend, support workers or carer to help explain your needs and ensure information is understood



#### Reducing health inequalities

Autistic people's health outcomes can be improved by a better understanding of people's needs, and a proactive approach to offering reasonable adjustments.

All health and social care staff now have to be offered autism training. We have developed specific handouts for health staff, and staff working in social care.

# Approaches to supporting autistic people

SPELL is the National Autistic Society's framework for understanding and responding to the needs of autistic people. There are five key best practice principles focusing on developing helpful environments and approaches.



## A summary of SPELL principles

Go to: [www.autism.org.uk](http://www.autism.org.uk) and search for 'SPELL' to find out more.

### Structure

Structure makes the world feel more predictable, accessible and safe. Visual information helps provide certainty and reduce anxieties.

### Positive (approaches and expectations)

This is about helping autistic people to use their strengths, and engaging

with people through their interests, to help them to develop their skills and confidence.

### Empathy

Seeing the world from the autistic person's perspective, and the importance of understanding what motivates and interests them.

### Low arousal

Environment and approaches need to be calm and ordered to help reduce potential anxieties. Being aware of sensory sensitivities is vital.

### Links

Supporting people to develop and maintain links with their support network and the wider community is helpful. Working as team with consistent approaches to support.

## Post diagnosis support

Autistic adults, particularly people diagnosed recently or later in life, may not have an in-depth understanding of autism, and of their unique profile on the autism spectrum.

People may have spent years feeling 'a bit different' without understanding why. Connecting with other autistic people through groups or chat rooms can be valuable. "It's the one place where I don't feel like the odd one out, and people really get how I experience things."

Useful resources and websites are listed on the Surrey Autism Partnership Board website.

## Employment

Whilst some autistic people may need support to find and maintain work, many autistic people have successful careers in a wide range of professions including finance, admin, engineering, the arts, teaching, retail, medicine, IT and driving. Under the Equality Act 2010, employers have a duty to make reasonable adjustments for autistic people, which can include flexible working, a workplace buddy or equipment. Further support, including specialist mentoring, can be funded through the Government's Access To Work scheme.

For more information, go to [www.autismbyexperience.co.uk](http://www.autismbyexperience.co.uk) to see our handout about employment.



## Understand that an ideal life may not be a typical life

Support for people should not aim to 'make them less autistic'. For example if a person needs to 'stim' to manage their anxiety, they should be able to do so, unless it's harmful or unsafe, in which case alternatives can be explored.

A person may enjoy socialising, but find it tiring. Some people choose to socialise less often, or leave events early to manage their energy. It's important that people are encouraged to 'be themselves'. It's ok not to enjoy all the things most other people do.

## Positive Behaviour Support

Some autistic people may need support to manage their emotions and behaviour. Positive Behaviour Support is a way to understand a person's behaviour. It is the preferred way for working with people with learning disabilities who show behaviours that challenge.

Behaviours that challenge others can stop or reduce when people have a better life, with more choice and control. Restraint, punishments and seclusion for behaviour are avoided.

The aim is to try to understand the purpose of a behaviour. For example a person may get distressed due to wanting to escape from an overwhelming situation.



# Examples of helpful approaches and reasonable adjustments



I found going to a new gym really daunting. It overwhelms me trying to work out how to sign in, find the toilets and get used to a new environment. Having someone to go with me the first time really helped.



Help me to escape from a situation if I seem overwhelmed, as I may struggle to think what to do myself, and may find it difficult to communicate.

Visual supports, such as timetables, help me manage my day to day life. I find written or pictorial things better than verbal because they are permanent.



If I need to go to the clinic I ask for the last appointment of the day so that the waiting room is quieter.

My partner helps me describe how I'm feeling as I find this hard.



It was amazing to talk to other autistic people who experience things in a similar way to me - I felt I'd found my tribe !

I wear my noise cancelling headphones and weighted vest when I go to an appointment, as they help me feel secure.



Help me to understand why people behave and react the way they do. I will often think other people's bad moods are my fault.



Take time to find out what I like, need and want. They may not be the typical things most other people want. My support workers understand that I like my own space a lot of the time.



I take my care passport with me to appointments. It tells people about my communication and sensory differences. This makes things easier for both me and the hospital staff.



Autism hour at my local supermarket is great. The self checkout bleeps are switched off, there's no music playing and the lights are dimmed.



My employment mentor is funded through the Government's Access To Work scheme. She supports me with my workplace anxiety and communication.

I was able to visit the hospital before my appointment. This was a huge help as I knew what to expect on the day.



Changes that may seem small to you can feel huge to me.

I need a lot of time to process the idea of things being different to how I expected them to be. I may say no at first, just because I don't feel safe.



I may think you know things, like appointment dates, just because I do. I forget to share sometimes, so please do check dates with me regularly.





We were worried when we heard that Daryl had been 'absconding' from his dayservice. After spending time with him we worked out he wanted to get fish and chips, so we plan this in his schedule every Friday now to give him certainty.



I don't need people to do things for me, I just need help with the things I find really hard. For example, I needed to find someone to help with my garden, but was overwhelmed by all the options, and didn't know where to start. Help to navigate things like this are essential for me.



Rather than just asking me what I want to do, give me suggestions - I struggle to imagine things from a blank piece of paper and just get stuck.

It helps when people gently explain the social rules in situations if I don't just pick them up.  
My friend thought it was hilarious that I broke the stalks off the broccoli at the supermarket and just weighed the heads - she said "You just can't do that!". There's nothing to say you can't, but I guess she's right.



Many autistic people have suffered bullying, so it doesn't help to just say 'Don't worry it won't happen'. Understand that it's more likely to happen to me than you, and then help me plan ways to avoid risky situations.



Understand that uncertainty causes me a lot of anxiety, so I may often stick to familiar choices. So what if I choose the same meal each time at the restaurant - I choose it because I know I like it!



Max loves snooker and can list all the world champions year by year.  
We always explain to new staff that asking him about snooker is the best way to get to know him and build trust. Max understands that after a while we have to say we need to talk about other things.

Don't assume I'm good at all the things autistic people are stereotypically supposed to be good at. I'm rubbish at mind maps and IT!



Small adjustments can make a big difference. My mental health worker met me outside the building, as I was very anxious about going into an unfamiliar building for the first time. He always texts me if he's running late as I tend to panic.



My employment mentor tells me the latest date she needs me to reply to her email by. If I don't reply on time she knows I'm likely to be struggling, so she contacts me again to help out.



Understand that I may cope in one environment, but not in others - for example I can't function in a busy shopping centre. Also, I get embarrassed when I can't do things that others see as easy, like following a recipe, even though I've got a Masters degree.

