

AUTISTIC SPECTRUM DISORDER **(ASD)**



RECOMMENDATIONS, RIGHTS **& RESOURCES**

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WHAT IS AUTISTIC SPECTRUM DISORDER?

ASD is a neuro-developmental condition that affects the way the brain processes information due to differences in the way the brain develops. This means that you understand people and events in a very different way to others, who do not have ASD.

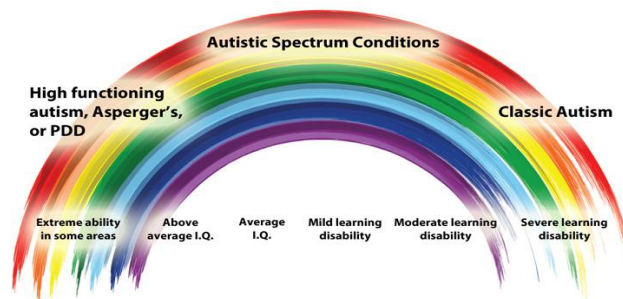
Other neuro-developmental conditions include Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Learning Disability (LD), Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLD) and speech disorders.

ASD is something you are born with; it is not an illness and not caused by bad parenting.

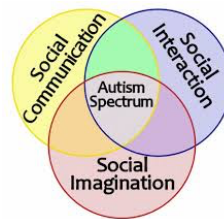
An accepted way of referring to a person with a neurodevelopmental condition is saying they are 'neurodiverse', and those with no neurodiversities as 'neuro-typical'.

Neurodevelopmental conditions have genetic links and so it is often common for more than one person in a family to have a neurodevelopmental condition (or more than one condition) or some traits.

The term 'autism spectrum' is used to describe people with a wide range of skills and difficulties.



- People at one end of the spectrum can have many difficulties in daily life and living independently. They may have severe learning difficulties and may never learn to talk.
- People at the other end of the spectrum have difficulties that are less obvious and many have jobs and live independently. This is described as having 'high-functioning autism' or ASD.



- All people on the autism spectrum have difficulties in these three areas:
 - Social communication → understanding conversations, non-verbal cues such as eye contact, facial expression or tone of voice when talking to people; communicating your own thoughts and feelings to others.
 - Social interaction → Understanding the 'social rules' of different situations and relationships and how to adapt behaviour with others in different contexts.
 - Social imagination → understanding the thoughts, feelings and intentions of others.

This sometimes leads to misunderstandings and people with ASD often find social situations and relationships very anxiety provoking. The confusion and worry might have resulted in the person avoiding others, leaving them feeling lonely or like an outsider.

Sometimes, people with ASD develop 'special interests' or expertise, and routines, which provide a sense of competence, enjoyment, predictability and, sometimes escape, from the stress of life.

Some of the Positives of ASD...



- Attention to detail
 - Thoroughness
 - Accuracy in observation/recognition
- Intense focus
 - Ability to concentrate intently
 - Ability to block out distraction
- Observational skills
 - Exceptional learning through listening and watching
 - Motivation to fact find
- Absorb and retain information
 - Excellent long-term memory
 - Superior recall
- Visual skills
 - Exceptional visual learning
 - Detailed focus
- Expertise
 - In depth knowledge in areas of interest
 - Acquisition of high level of specialist skill
- Methodological/systematic
 - Analytical and rational
 - Spotting patterns and repetition
- Novel Thinker
 - Unique thought processes
 - Innovative solutions to problems
- Creativity
 - Distinctive imagination
 - Expression of ideas in unusual ways
- Tenacity and resilience
 - Determination and perseverance
 - Willingness to challenge opinion
- Acceptance of other's differences
 - Less likely to judge other people
 - Questioning and not following norms blindly
- Integrity
 - Honesty
 - Commitment
- Loyalty to others
 - Standing by friends
 - Trusting and trustworthy

Understanding Your Experience of ASD

It is important to remember that all people with an Autism Spectrum Disorder are different, just as the neuro-typical population are.

You may find it helpful to look at personal accounts of other people who have been diagnosed with ASD, as this can help to make sense of your own personal experiences.

BOOKS

The following books give insights into how other people find having an Autism Spectrum Disorder.

- Overcoming Anxiety and Depression on the Autism Spectrum: A Self-Help Guide Using CBT by Lee A. Wilkinson
- The Autism Spectrum and Depression by Nick Dubin
- Asperger Syndrome and Alcohol: Drinking to Cope? By Matthew Tinsley and Sarah Hendrickx
- Thinking in Pictures by Temple Grandin
- Asperger Syndrome - A Love Story by Keith Newton, Sarah Hendrickx , et al.
- Spectrum Women: Walking to the Beat of Autism by Barb Cook, Michelle Garnett, et al
- Women and Girls with Autism Spectrum Disorder: Understanding Life Experiences from Early Childhood to Old Age by Sarah Hendrickx
- Uncomfortable Labels: My Life as a Gay Autistic Trans Woman by Laura Kate Dale
- The Independent Woman's Handbook for Super Safe Living on the Autistic Spectrum by Robyn Steward
- Living Through the Haze, by Paul Isaacs
- Women and Girls with Autism Spectrum Disorder: Understanding Life Experiences from Early Childhood to Old Age by Sarah Hendrickx
- Pretending to be Normal: Living with Asperger's Syndrome by Lianne Holliday Wiley
- What Every Autistic Girl Wishes Her Parents Knew by Haley Moss and Women's Network Inc.
- Odd Girl Out: An Autistic Woman in a Neurotypical World by Laura James
- Nerdy, Shy and Socially Inappropriate: A User Guide to an Asperger Life by Cynthia Kim (2014)

The following books are written by professionals:

- Living well on the spectrum by Valerie Gaus
- Asperger's Syndrome: A Guide for Parents and Professionals, by Tony Attwood
- Autism: An Inside-Out Approach: An Innovative Look at the 'Mechanics' of 'Autism' and its Developmental 'Cousins' Donna Williams, Jessica Kingsley
- The Guide to Good Mental Health on the Autism Spectrum by Jeanette Purkis, Emma Goodall and Jane Nugent.
- Autism Equality in the Workplace: Removing Barriers and Challenging Discrimination by Janine Booth and John McDonnell
- The Adolescent and Adult Neuro-diversity Handbook: Asperger Syndrome, ADHD, Dyslexia, Dyspraxia and Related Conditions by Hendrickx, Sarah
- Autism & Asperger Syndrome in Adults: Overcoming Common Problems (2016) by Dr Luke Beardon, SPCK Publishing

WEBSITES AND FORUMS

- <http://emotionsexplained.com.au/index.html>
- <http://www.tonyattwood.com.au>
- <http://www.researchautism.net>
- http://www.autismresearchcentre.com/arc_tests
- <http://www.autism.org.uk/>
- <http://www.autismoxford.org/>
- <http://www.asd-forum.org.uk>
- <http://www.asdfriendly.org>
- <http://www.talkaboutautism.org.uk>

EXCELLENT TED TALKS BY:

- Rosie King
- Temple Grandin
- Alix Generous
- Daniel Tammet
- Daniel Wendler

YOUTUBE VIDEOS

- Autism Inclusion and the Law
- Autism in Women and Girls by Yo Samdy Sam
- Temple Grandin - The Autistic Brain
- Chris Packham: My Autism and Me
- BBC3 - Things Not to Say To An Autistic Person (hilarious!)
- Emotional Intelligence mini-series by Paul Micallef

BLOGS:

- Asperger's from the Inside by an Australian man with ASD fascinated by emotions
<https://aspergersfromtheinside.com/>
- Asperger Syndrome: A Survival Guide Written by a British adult with Asperger Syndrome
<http://www-users.cs.york.ac.uk/~alistair/survival/>
- Wrong Planet: an American website with articles and blogs by and for people with autism (including Asperger Syndrome) <http://www.wrongplanet.net/>
- Alex Lowery speaks about autism: a blog by a British young adult with autism with a mixture of written and video posts <http://www.alexlowery.co.uk/my-blog/>
- Thinking Person's Guide to Autism: includes lots of articles by people with autism as well as parents, partners and professionals <http://www.thinkingautismguide.com/p/contributors.html>
- Asperger Management: Blog by a British man focussing on employment and work life.
<http://www.aspergermanagement.com/>
- Confessions of a Memory Foam Mattress: bog by a British man with Asperger Syndrome who is employed as a public speaker on autism.
<http://confessionsofamemoryfoammattress.blogspot.co.uk/>



MANAGING AND OVERCOMING DIFFICULTIES



These recommendations are based on the common difficulties that people with ASD have. Some or all of these may be helpful.

Do remember when reading or listening to anything about ASD, that everyone with ASD is different, often people make general statements that may, or may not, apply to you and there are many myths and misconceptions about the condition that persist.

Structure and routine

Day to day planning

People with ASD often prefer things to be familiar, structured and predictable.

Plan your day out at in the morning or the night before, in terms of task priority and time allocation.

Use a list or timetable or planning app, rather than trying to plan in your head so you don't have to rely on your memory.

Always include breaks and motivating or rewarding activities.

It can be helpful to set an alarm, maybe on your phone, or ask someone for a reminder, so that you know how much time has passed and when it's time to have a break or start the next activity.

Planning routines around others

It is important your routine or timetable is planned around the people you live and work with to avoid interruptions, missing out on things and double booking.

Let people know what your routine is (you could do this by having a public calendar or timetable) and discuss if this fits with their plans.

Managing in a new or strange situation

It can help if you find out as much as possible about the situation or new person beforehand.

Talk things over beforehand with someone familiar that you trust, so you are clear about what to expect, what is expected of you and what you should do.

Stay close to people you are comfortable with until you feel more confident and the situation feels more familiar.

Managing changes and disruption of routines

Ask for information about what is going to happen and any other questions, such as what is expected of you or how the change might affect you.

When life seems unpredictable or uncertain try to stick to as much of your routine as you can and focus on the things that are predictable and give you a sense of stability and certainty.

Try to create a new routine or structure and allow yourself some time to get used to it.

Have some strategies to manage the stress involved with unpredictable events (e.g. soothing breathing, stress toys in your pocket).

COMPROMISE....

Having routines can help to structure and manage busy days - but tell others so they understand why you have them and can avoid disrupting them.

Remember that sometimes people will not be able to adapt to accommodate all your needs or wishes even when they really want to, so it's important to be able to discuss things with the people involved and reach an agreement.

Work out what would cause you the most difficulty if it were changed or what the most important things you rely on are and focus on getting those protected e.g. your mealtimes or the day you go to the library.

Task-planning

Planning and problem-solving

Ensure that tasks are clearly defined → what is the goal or purpose and where are you starting from?

Ask for more explanation or information if you need it.

Break larger tasks down into logical, smaller sub-tasks that are more manageable and more easily achieved.

Make a written plan or checklist.

Use the Eisenhower matrix as a way to prioritise and schedule tasks (shown below)

	URGENT → NOT URGENT	
IMPORTANT	1 DO	2 PLAN
↓ NOT AS IMPORTANT	3 DELEGATE	4 LEAVE (for now)

Use an App, checklist and/or calendar on your phone to plan things

Focus on one thing at a time and don't try to deal with too much information at once.

Try using the following steps to problem solving:

1. Identify the problem
2. Describe your goal - make sure your goal is *SMART* → Simple, measurable, attainable, realistic, time-limited.
3. Identify obstacles to achieving your goal
4. List all possible solutions to overcome obstacles
5. Select the best solutions where the advantages outweigh the disadvantages

6. Try one of the best solutions and evaluate how effective it is in solving the problem.
7. If it isn't as effective as you hoped then try another possible solution and evaluate after a few days or a week.

Visual Integration

Visual overload and disturbance or confusion

This can be due to difficulties with visual integration (i.e. putting everything you see into one clear picture) and it can impact on your ability to gather and integrate visual information from the environment

The following points may help you.

- Keep your work area as free from 'clutter' as you can.
- Verbalise routes and directions (record yourself saying these and play them back to remind you)
- Use *simple* visual cues (pictures/phrases/objects)
- If you have visual (light) sensitivity use sunglasses, low light or coloured light (mood lights) and blinds in a room might help.
- Try to have your work area facing away from a busy or cluttered area.
- Find what works for you e.g. pastel colours rather than vivid ones, words rather than pictures or complex diagrams.
- Cut out other stimuli such as sounds, to allow you the best chance to process visual information.
- Try to notice if this is worse when you are tired or stressed and consider when planning and managing this difficulty i.e. avoid tasks that require heavy focus on visual processing at the end of the day.

Communication and Social Interaction

Starting, sustaining, and ending conversations

Think about a range of topics that you could use in social settings, with people that you don't know well. Thinking about this beforehand is likely to be easier than doing so at the time.

Plan for particular social situations that may challenge you (e.g. meeting someone new) by rehearsing.

If you know who is likely to be present at a gathering, find out a little bit about their interests beforehand, so that you can talk about things that are likely to engage them.

If you are concerned that you may talk too much about your own interests, you could consider saying something like (for example if you are interested in dogs):

"I love talking about dogs, but I know not everybody is, so please tell me if I am going on too much!"

Sometimes, it can feel anxiety provoking to leave gaps in the conversation. But *not* doing so may mean that the other person can't say what they want to. By consciously slowing down but

remaining interested and engaged, you may create opportunities for them to speak. This also allows you to share responsibility for maintaining the conversation with them (it isn't all down to you!).

People often like being able to share information and may be pleased, if you don't know something, so it's nice to let someone else share their knowledge.

Avoid correcting people and if you do it, be polite and sensitive to avoid making the other person feel embarrassed or irritated e.g. if you know someone has said something incorrect about dogs, use a phrase like:

"that's interesting, I thought _____, but it's possible I got that wrong"

If you find it difficult to know how to end a conversation, you may find it helpful to remember some 'standard' phrases for example:

- *"It's been good talking to you, but I should dash or I'll be late for _____"*
- *"It's been good talking to you, but I ought to mingle and chat to everybody else a bit"*
- *"It's been good talking to you, but I should get back home"*
- *"It's been good talking to you, but I should get back to my work now"*

BUT REMEMBER it is okay *not* to "get it right" all of the time and EVERYBODY makes mistakes when socialising sometimes (comedians would never have anything to make us laugh about if it weren't true!!)

Finding hidden meanings in social communication can be confusing

Don't be afraid to ask for clarification when someone is talking. For example, say something like "Sorry I didn't follow that."

If you are uncertain about expectations in a given situation, it is reasonable to ask a person that you know or are familiar with, e.g. "I'm not sure if I'm meant to approach people or let them approach me first."

In interpreting what people say, it is helpful to take account of the context in which they say it since this can also provide clues about meaning, e.g.

1. If someone says, "the weather is good today isn't it?" at the bus stop, a brief reply of "yes, it's very nice" is fine.

If someone says, "the weather is good today isn't it?" at a football match, a more detailed reply such as, "yes, it is, it's going to be good for the match today, who do you think will win?" might be more acceptable.

Feeling anxious and overwhelmed in social situations

Try to plan and rehearse any stressful event or situations, including generating 'what if' scenarios, but avoid going over too many and getting anxious!

If you are anxious or stressed, your speed of response can be reduced, so prior planning may be helpful.

A toilet brake can always be helpful in chilling out by yourself for 10 minutes.

Carry a small booklet or piece of paper with phrases and reminders on - you can always pop off to the toilets and check them privately.

Practice some strategies to manage anxiety that you can use before and during social situations, such as belly breathing (see later in the booklet)

Working out how you feel and communicating this to others

Sometimes people with ASD have difficulty working out how they feel (or other people feel) and how to explain this - it's called Alexithymia.

Alexithymia isn't a disease or a illness it's related to the way the brain works differently for some people.

The following YouTube video by a woman with ASD describes alexithymia and coping with it:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S3tD94tB6T4>

Recognising the bodily sensations you get in different situations can help to get an idea of what emotion you feel (e.g. your heart beating fast and feeling shaky when watching a car race might mean you feel anxious).

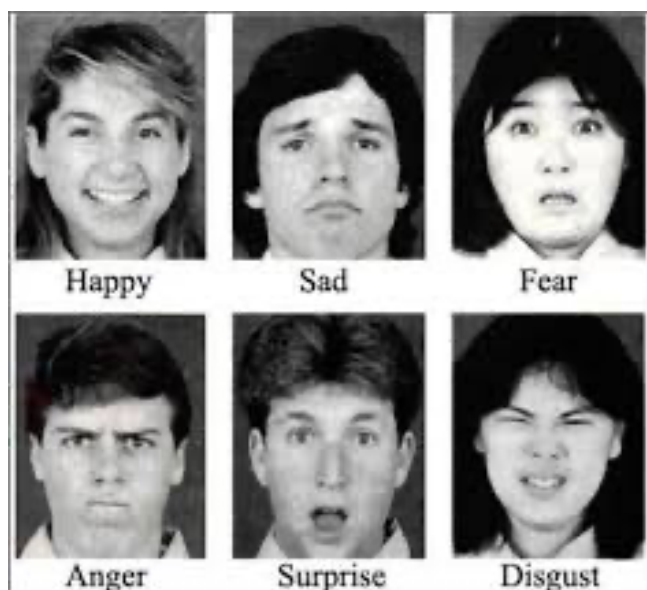
Working out other people are thinking and feeling and knowing how to respond

Try to notice the following in others as a guide to what they might be feeling and how you can express yourself to be understood:

- Posture
- Facial expression
- Hand movements
- Words used
- Tone of voice

Use the pictures below as a guide to the 6 basic emotions (*but remember that sometimes people hide their emotions, so it's not easy for anyone to notice them*)

If you are still unsure how someone feels, ask ("Are you OK?", "can I help with anything?").



It can be helpful to take some time learning how people express emotions that you find hard to recognise. You might find YouTube videos and photographs beneficial for this.

REMEMBER that sometimes if a person is in a grumpy mood it doesn't matter what you say or do, they will react in a bad way and you can't change this - it does NOT mean it's your fault.

Social Perception

Social skills

It's important to PRACTICE any skill to get better at it → use it or lose it!

Start off small in familiar situations and expand slowly to harder situations that you can tolerate.

Watch how friends and relatives cope in different situations, ask them how they do it and try using the techniques they use.

The following YouTube video can be helpful created by an adult with ASD:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nZvHurJi5sk&feature=youtu.be>

There are several apps that can be used on phones to help learn social skills, such as:

- Social Learning Platform - an app to help develop social skills quickly - by Everyday Speech LLC
- Social Perspective - helps to build perspective taking skills - by Social Skill Builder
- Between the Lines Advanced- created for social communication - by Hamaguchi Learning & Development
- Conversation Builder - to help people develop conversation skills - by Virtual Conversation Simulator
- Emotions - to help build skills in emotion recognition, perspective taking and general empathy - by I Can Do Apps
- Brainy Skills Apps by A Brainy Choice, Inc
 - Idioms - Pragmatics Reasoning Fluency
 - Synonym Antonym - Synonyms And Antonyms Practice
 - Multiple Meaning - Homonyms and comprehension logic

Social isolation

Try to enjoy home-based activities with a friend.

Maintain social contact through text, email and Skype or Face Time.

However, it is important that you do go out regularly to avoid becoming lonely and finding that you cannot tolerate any stress involved in going out.

Going out sometimes will help to habituate you to necessary outings.

Join an ASD support group

Join a hobby group where you can be with people who share your hobby/interest - these are often advertised in local newspapers and on the internet.

Bullying and/or coercion by others

Sometimes people with ASD can be more at risk of bullying and manipulation as a result of confusion in social situations.

Bullying is the "repetitive, intentional hurting of one person or group by another person or group, where the relationship involves an imbalance of power. It can happen face to face or online" (from the Anti Bullying Alliance: <https://www.antibullyingalliance.org.uk>)

The term 'hurting' can mean emotional upset or physical harm.

It is important to talk to a relative who you trust, or your GP, if it seems that you always come off worse in a situation with certain people.

Ask a friend or relative to help with:

- Recognising manipulation or abusive behaviours (emotional or physical)
- Identifying what others might do to exploit you
- Understanding what to do and practicing reacting in situations where this might happen

See the following websites for more information:

- <https://www.bullying.co.uk/>
- <https://www.nationalbullyinghelpline.co.uk/>
- <https://www.anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk/>

Understanding another person's intentions and thoughts

In situations where you don't understand how others are feeling it can help to ask (e.g. 'How are you doing?' or 'would it be ok if I...?')

Sometimes it is okay not to tell the truth, in order to make someone else happy, such as saying you like a person's clothes even if you don't like them really. Being honest in such a situation might offend the person unnecessarily.

If you find it hard not to be completely honest, take care not to be blunt and try to find something positive to say because people generally like that. In the example above, you could say:

"I like the material/colour/style, your dress isn't to my taste, but you look fine".

This involves a pattern: something nice, something not so nice, then something nice again.

Sensory Issues

Overcoming and Managing Sensory Issues

- Time visits to places, so you can minimize the risk of sensory overload.
- Learn some relaxation strategies to help manage the anxiety your sensitivities might cause.
- Wear tinted glasses to reduce the impact of light.
- Wear sunglasses and a hat
- Try wearing earphones to block out noise (but make sure that you can still hear, and be aware of, traffic noise or 'warning' sounds).
- Wear a heavy coat or put filled plastic water bottles in coat pockets
- Use a weighted blanket
- Use a mood light to change the colour and intensity of light in a room.
- Change light bulbs or fixtures to alter the brightness of a room.
- Use blackout curtains if you cannot sleep.
- Request to move your desk to a quieter spot in an office or in an area where the light suits

you better.

- Use headphones and listen to your favourite music to reduce over-stimulation and distraction from noise around you.
- Request to work from home for part of your working week if possible.
- Carry a favourite scent with you (e.g. lavender oil or aftershave) so if you are going somewhere with an unpleasant smell you can put it on your sleeve or a tissue and smell it

Adjustments in Further Education

Suggested adjustments for students in educational settings:

- Extra time to get used to the campus or site
- Specialist tuition support, e.g. language skills or structuring work
- Materials in literal language, including exam papers
- Special photocopying arrangements
- Digital recorder for recording lectures, notes, etc
- Extra time immediately after group sessions to check understanding
- Extra time to read, understand, and produce answers in exams
- Alternative ways of completing team-work tasks or help with these
- To have the same information conveyed verbally and in writing
- Preparation for changes of routine, e.g. around deadlines and exam time
- Use of a separate room with an invigilator
- Exam paper written on *plain paper in one colour*
- Use of a prompter to keep you focused during exams
- Word processing facilities if motor control is impaired
- Use of peers, volunteers or a buddy system.
- Provision of quiet room for study if there are sensory issues.
- Allowing students to present to academic staff or make a video presentation instead of written assignments.
- Guidance to help plan your private study and coursework to ensure that you meet deadlines.
- Support to cope with independent living to establish a routine.

Education & Work

Expectations at work

Ask that any expectations that others have of you (and of others you might be supervising or working with) are made:

- Clear - because your ability to 'fill in the gaps' or 'read between the lines' is likely to be less than your skills in other areas might suggest.
- Unambiguous - because minor differences in instructions, that might seem unimportant to others, can be confusing.
- Explicit - ask for unwritten rules or assumptions to be spelled out, as they may not be as

obvious to you.

Being clear about your job will help you perform well and you are less likely to feel anxious, which will make it easier to do your job well.

Language at work

Language processing is often different for people with ASD and this can cause difficulties for people understanding others and expressing themselves.

This can cause difficulties such as:

- problems processing several pieces of information at once
- slower processing
- distraction by the presence of unnecessary information and extreme emotional tones
- literal understanding
- not knowing how much information to give

Others can help by being:

- Giving information in small chunks;
- Giving time to process what has been said before more information is given
- Avoiding verbal "padding" (e.g. "I wonder if you could just..." etc.)
- Using a clear and neutral tone of voice
- Specific about information they want, for example, "a 30 second précis" or "information in 2 sentences".

Relationships and social interactions at work

Consider telling some colleagues about your diagnosis and/or your difficulties e.g. saying:

"I can be a bit blunt sometimes without intending to be, let me know if I am because I don't want to offend you" - you don't even have to mention your ASD if you prefer that.

A mentor who understands Autism Spectrum Disorders could be useful to act as an advocate for you and help you cope in difficult situations.

Explaining Autism Spectrum Disorder to others

An Autism Alert Card can be useful if you find verbal explanations hard.

They can be obtained from the National Autistic Society for 50p or downloaded and printed yourself for free.



Managing change and new situations at work

First of all (as Douglas Adams says in the Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy...) **DON'T PANIC!**

Prepare - as much as you can by asking for as much notice of changes as possible so you can adapt your 'rule base' or 'code' to include this.

Talk - things through with someone who knows about the changes so you can understand and prepare for how they will affect you.

Ask for *explanations or reasons* underlying the changes - *this can help make change easier to understand and might help you create a cognitive model or system to use for other changes in the future.*

Keep some of your *structure and predictability* - this can help people adapt to a new situation or change.

Working environment

Try to create a working environment that:

- Is well organised and uncluttered to avoid distraction
- Avoids overwhelming your senses, especially if you are sensitive to noise, lighting and smell
- Takes account of your need for space and unexpected interruptions

Social 'overload'

Being with other people for any length of time can be exhausting for people with ASD because of the additional mental effort involved in dealing with everyday tasks, people and social interaction and trying to fit in.

Tell others (or ask your supervisor to tell others) that this is NOT laziness or a lack of interest and that you may can be sociable but need breaks.

Working hours

Due to all of the above working full-time can be impossible for some people with ASD.

Employers must be told that this is NOT laziness or lack of motivation

Many people, with ASD work most efficiently and effectively on a part-time basis or work from home for part of the working week.

Information for Employers

It is of huge benefit to employers to nurture the qualities and skills of their employees with ASD and they must also meet their obligations under the Autism Act and the Equality Act.

The National Autistic Society offers information and Training, including:

- *Online training*: information available at www.autism.org.uk/askautism
- *Prospects*: this is the employment arm of the National Autistic Society and they can offer support to employers and employees. employment.training@nas.org.uk
- *Factsheets*: the National Autistic Society also has a range of factsheets available for employers: <http://www.autism.org.uk/employer-factsheets>

Mental Health and Well-being

Building positive self-esteem

Self-esteem is 'the opinion you have of yourself' and many people with ASD don't have much self-esteem.

This can be due to years of difficulties they've had trying to fit into the world. However, there are ways that you can improve that such as:

- Make a list of things you enjoy doing then do something from that list every day.

- Do things that make use of your own special talents and abilities
- Try not to compare yourself to others
- Understand your ASD and how it affects you so you can start to accept yourself as a person with ASD, which gives your strengths and challenges and not because there is something 'wrong' or shameful about you.
- Practice self-compassion - see: The Compassionate Mind Foundation at: <https://www.compassionatemind.co.uk/>
- Trying techniques others with ASD have used successfully might help - see resources on page 3 of this booklet.

Anxiety and Depression

Mental health difficulties are more common in people with ASD and is likely to be contributed to by the high levels of anxiety and stress caused by trying to cope without enough support.

Manage the impact your ASD difficulties have upon you by using the strategies in this document and others that you find helpful.

Getting support from family and friends, colleagues and your GP

Find a therapist or psychologist who has a good understanding of ASD and experience of working with people on the spectrum so you can have some therapy to help deal with any additional difficulties.

Learn some coping strategies to manage anxiety and low mood such as Soothing Breathing, relaxation, self-compassion and mindfulness.

SOOTHING BREATHING

Sit comfortably, place both feet flat on the floor about shoulder's width apart and rest your hands on your legs. Close your eyes or look down at the floor if you prefer. Allow yourself to have a gentle facial expression may be a slight smile.

Gently focus on your breathing. As you breathe try to allow the air to come down into your diaphragm (that's just at the bottom of your ribcage in the upside down 'V'). Feel your diaphragm, the area underneath your ribs, move as you breathe in and out. Just notice your breathing and play an experiment with your breathing. Breathe a little faster or a little slower until you find a breathing pattern that, for you, seems to be your own soothing, comforting rhythm. Link up, with the rhythm within your body that is soothing and calming to you.

What you will usually find is that your breathing is slightly slower and deeper than normal. The in-breath is about 4 seconds ... hold ... and then take 4 seconds for the out-breath. Ensure that the breaths in and out are smooth and even.

Spend as long as we wish - just focusing on your breathing, just noticing the breath coming down into the diaphragm, your diaphragm lifting and then the air moving out, through your nose. Sometimes it's useful to focus on the point just inside the nose where the air enters. So, in through your mouth and out from your nose, in through your mouth and out through your nose..... Just focus on that for a while.

Turn your attention to your body. Sense the weight of your body resting on the chair and the

floor underneath you. Allow yourself to feel held and supported, coming to rest, in the present moment....

Remember that it is fine for your mind to wander. Simply notice it happening with curiosity about where your mind has gone and then gently guide your attention back to an awareness of your body as best as you can. Sense the flow of air coming in and out of your nostrils....just gently observing....no need to change anything.....just allowing things to be as they are.

If you find focusing on your breathing a bit difficult then allow your attention to rest on an object. Find something you might like to hold such as a smooth stone or a soft ball - something that gives you the feeling of gentleness and calmness. Now as you just focus on your breathing also focus on your object that you're holding noticing how it feels in your hand resting your gaze on your object as best as you can.... staying with the sensations of holding it in your hand.

When you feel ready, slowly open your eyes and bring yourself back to the present moment. Sometimes it helps if you just have a gentle stretch and a deep breath to prepare you to carry on with your day.

Apps to Help Manage Mood

Meditation Oasis	A variety of apps with guided meditations for sleep, relaxation, stress relief, energizing, and mindfulness.
Moodtracker.com	Allow people to track changes in mood and behavior online and share with their coach.
Breathing Zone	A guided breathing app that helps users to slow down their breathing and create a feeling of calm. This uses recorded sounds, voices and visual cues.
Calm	Assists people with sleep and meditation using guided audio instructions to follow. There are recordings for general use, work, exercise and sleep. Many people find it helpful in getting better sleep, lowering stress, and reducing anxiety.
Mood Tools - Depression Aid	Designed to help you combat depression and alleviate your negative moods, aiding you on your road to recovery. The app contains several different research-supported tools. They include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thought Diary • Activity suggestions • Safety Plan - Develop a safety plan to keep you safe and utilize emergency resources during a suicidal crisis • Information and videos

SERVICES AND SUPPORT

Local Services and Provision for People with ASD



Kingwood Aspiration

- Phone: 01235 532680
- aspiration@kingwood.org.uk
- www.kingwood.org.uk/aspiration

A free service for people living in Oxfordshire providing advice, information and guidance on housing, budgeting, employment, social skills and signposting to other organisations, offers drop-in sessions twice a week and peer support and social groups.

Oxfordshire County Council

Oxfordshire Employment Service

- Tel: 01865 815809 or email oes@oxfordshire.gov.uk

Helps to support people with long term health issues or a disability to keep paid employment. The employment advisers throughout Oxfordshire offer:

- Information, advice and guidance on finding employment
- Help and support to keep you working
- Information on employment related benefits
- Links with local employers.

Support Finder 2014

www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/supportfinder

A council service to help people live satisfying lives as independently as possible, providing information about support services across Oxfordshire

Autism Oxford

- <https://autismoxford.org.uk>

Autism Oxford provides support, training, seminars and workshops for people with ASD, families and those wanting to know more about ASD.

They employ people with ASD and have a positive enthusiastic approach to increasing knowledge and understanding about ASD.

Autism Family Support

- www.afso.org.uk

Autism Family Support provides:

- Support and Information for parents
- Activities and workshops for children & young people on the autism spectrum
- Information, training, and consultation with professionals, including joint working and development

Oxfordshire Autistic Society Information & Support

- <http://oasionline.org.uk>

OASIS is a charity run by parents for parents/carers who are bringing up children/young adults with ASD or related conditions in Oxfordshire offering a supportive community through informal coffee and chat groups, evening meetings with professional speakers, subsidised courses and family play days during school holidays.

Useful Helplines

IF YOU START TO FEEL YOU CANNOT MANAGE YOUR MOOD ALONE

→Contact your GP

If you begin to feel hopeless and have thoughts of harming yourself get in touch with someone immediately e.g. a friend, relative, neighbor or call the emergency services on 111 and a helpline

Samaritans - Confidential support for people experiencing feelings of distress or despair.

Phone: 116 123 (free 24-hour helpline)

Website: www.samaritans.org.uk

PAPYRUS - Young suicide prevention society.

Phone: HOPElineUK 0800 068 4141 (Monday to Friday, 10am to 5pm and 7pm to 10pm, and 2pm to 5pm on weekends)

Website: www.papyrus-uk.org

SANE - Emotional support, information and guidance for people affected by mental illness, their families and carers.

SANEline: 0300 304 7000 (daily, 4.30pm to 10.30pm)

Textcare: comfort and care via text message: www.sane.org.uk/textcare

Peer support forum: www.sane.org.uk/supportforum

Website: www.sane.org.uk/support

No Panic - Voluntary charity offering support for sufferers of panic attacks and OCD.

Offers a course to help overcome your phobia or OCD.

Phone: 0844 967 4848 (daily, 10am to 10pm)

Website: www.nopanic.org.uk

Victim Support

Phone: 0808 168 9111 (24-hour helpline)

Website: www.victimsupport.org

CALM - CALM is the Campaign Against Living Miserably, for men aged 15 to 35.

Phone: 0800 58 58 58 (daily, 5pm to midnight)

Website: www.thecalmzone.net

Men's Health Forum - 24/7 stress support for men by text, chat and email.

Website: www.menshealthforum.org.uk

Rethink Mental Illness - Support and advice for people living with mental illness.

Phone: 0300 5000 927 (Monday to Friday, 9.30am to 4pm)

Website: www.rethink.org

Alcoholics Anonymous

Phone: 0845 769 7555 (24-hour helpline)

Website: www.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk

ASD Rights Responsibilities and The Law

Under Fair Access to Care Services (FACS), you are entitled to an assessment of your needs from the local council.

People with ASD have their rights protected by the Care Act (2014), the Equality Act (2010) the Autism Act (2009; 2011; 2015), the Adult Autism Strategy (2010), Think Autism (2014) and trade unions.

Information on these can be found at:

- http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2009/15/pdfs/ukpga_20090015_en.pdf
- https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/422338/autism-guidance.pdf
- <http://network.autism.org.uk/knowledge/policy-guidance/what-does-care-act-mean-people-autism-spectrum>
- <http://www.autism.org.uk/about/strategy.aspx>
- <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents>
- <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2014/23/contents>
- <https://www.tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/Autism.pdf>

Letting people know

You do not have to tell anyone you have a diagnosis of ASD if you do not want to.

However, if you would like access to reasonable adjustments then it will be necessary to tell some of the people you work with including your boss/supervisor.

Motoring

The National Autistic Society has produced an information sheet about motoring issues: <https://www.autism.org.uk/about/family-life/everyday-life/driving.aspx>

Currently you only need to tell the DVLA you have ASD if it affects your ability to drive.

Discrimination

The 1995 Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) and Equality Act (2010) protect you at work and in education. The terms of the Acts say you have a disability if:

- You have a mental or physical impairment
- The impairment has an adverse effect on your ability to carry out normal everyday tasks
- The effect is substantial and long term (this means it lasts for at least 12 months).

At least one aspect of day-to-day life needs to be affected. For **ASD**, the key areas are social interactions and communication.

All organisations must comply with these acts, including the NHS, Criminal Justice System (police, prisons and courts), companies and educational institutions whether you are a service user or employer.

It is always lawful to treat a disabled person more favourably than a nondisabled person

In the UK the following actions by an employer are unlawful under the Equality Act (2010):

Direct discrimination

In a typical scenario this would occur if:

Because of a protected characteristic, (a disability due to autism), Sanjay treats Fiona less favourably than he would treat others.

E.g, if an employer were to say I'm dismissing you because you have ASD or I'm not giving you a bonus unlike the rest of the staff because you have ASD , that would constitute direct discrimination. In addition, direct discrimination includes less favourable treatment towards someone because:

- They have an association with someone who is disabled – for example dismissing an employee because he has a child with ASD
- A person is perceived to have a disability – for example an employer dismissing an employee because he thinks the employee is autistic or has ASD

Indirect discrimination

In a typical scenario this would occur if:

Wendy applies a provision, criterion or practice to everyone but it disadvantages a particular group of people who share a particular protected characteristic, and she cannot justify it.

For example, an employer requires staff to attend a yearly teambuilding weekend stating that their performance during the weekend will inform their pay rise. Saffy performs badly in the teambuilding exercises because of his autism/ASD. He is therefore disadvantaged by the policy, as would be other autistic people. Given that there are many ways that would better inform a pay rise the employer is unlikely to be able to justify its policy.

Discrimination arising from disability

In a typical scenario this would occur if:

Peter discriminates against Dave if he treats Dave unfavourably because of something arising in consequence of his disability and Peter cannot show that the treatment is a proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim.

E.g. if an employer dismisses a person with ASD because she works more slowly in an open plan office, even though she performs adequately in her job. However, there is no protection for the disabled worker here if the boss shows that he did not know and could not reasonably have been expected to know that she had a disability.

Victimisation

This is when you are treated badly because you have made a complaint of discrimination under the equality act. It can also occur if you are supporting someone who has made a complaint of discrimination.

Harassment

Harassment occurs when someone treats you in a way that makes you feel humiliated, offended or degraded.

For example, Bob is regularly sworn at and called names by colleagues at work because of his disability.

Harassment can never be justified, though if an organisation or employer can show it did everything it could to prevent people who work for it from behaving like that you will not be able to make a claim for harassment against it though you may be able to claim against the harasser.

Education rights

Education providers:

- colleges
- universities
- providers of adult education
- local education authorities.

Education providers cannot discriminate against adult learners with disabilities. They must make reasonable adjustments to make sure you are not disadvantaged.

This could be by:

- changing policies that make it difficult for you to use a particular service
- providing extra classroom aids
- providing the service in a different way.

Policies that help a student with ASD include:

- having breaks or relaxation exercises during classes
- allowing you to tape-record lectures and tutorials for later reference
- offering you paper copies of slides used in presentations
- repeating instructions
- giving written as well as verbal instructions
- one-to-one monitoring by email or phone calls.

Employment rights

Under the DDA, employers must not discriminate for reasons related to disability unless it can be justified. This applies to:

- application forms (employers cannot ask job applicants about their health or disability until they have been offered a job, except in specific circumstances where the information is necessary for the application process or requirement of the job.
- interviews
- proficiency tests
- job offers
- terms of employment
- promotion opportunities
- training opportunities
- work-related benefits such as refreshment and recreational facilities.

Since October 2004, the law also applies to employers with fewer than 15 staff.

If you think you are being discriminated against keep a log of what has happened to you with regards to being discriminated against.

Speak to your supervisor or boss and talk about it - you can use your log to describe the incidents that have occurred.