



**Ambitious  
about Autism**



# Toolkit for young people Transition to employment

A toolkit to support autistic young people into their first experiences of employment, further education or training



Supported by:




Department  
for Education



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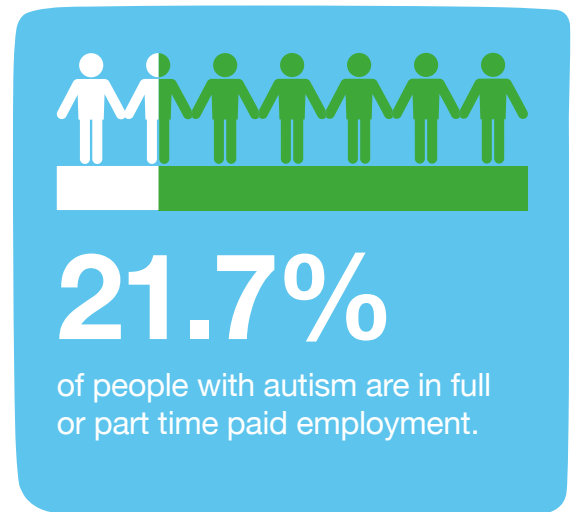
## Key to the icons in this toolkit

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-  contents page
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-  youtube video
-  resources



# Introduction

**When they finish school, few autistic young people move on to college, further training or the workplace. Only 21.7% of autistic individuals are in full or part-time employment (Office for National Statistics, 2020). We want to change this. We want to enable more autistic young people to reach their potential by equipping those who support them with the skills and knowledge to understand their needs. Just 19% of young people with autism say they have had good careers advice and a quarter of young people with autism have had no access to work experience (Ambitious about Autism, 2016).**



These resources provide the tools to help autistic young people prepare for work experience, employment or further training.

Ensuring that autistic young people can reach their potential in further education, training or employment is a collaborative effort. These resources aim to help young people entering the workplace, to reduce the anxiety associated with a new role and enable all candidates to demonstrate their experience with confidence.

## About us

**Ambitious about Autism** is the national charity for children and young people with autism. We run Employ Autism, a national programme that helps autistic individuals join the workforce by breaking down barriers and increasing the confidence of employers to recruit people with autism and neurodiversity. The programme provides training, resources and ongoing mentorship to a wide range of partners across the UK, including employers, careers professionals, parents and young people.

The **Autism Education Trust (AET)** is a not for-profit programme led by two national autism charities: the National Autistic Society and Ambitious about Autism. Established and supported by the Department for Education, the AET promotes and supports partnerships throughout the education system to improve educational access, experience and outcomes for children and young people with autism. Underpinned by current research into good education practice, the AET programme is structured around the three education phases: early years, school and post-16. The programme's core values are person-centred, outcomes and process-focused, inclusive and accessible, evidence-based, high quality and working in partnership.



Young person  
toolkit

# Toolkit for young people



# Toolkit for young people

**We know that planning your next step can be scary, whether you're thinking about going on to college, university, a training course or employment.**

We know that having time to plan your options is key to success. It's also important for you to have support from somebody who understands your needs.



## Career planning

The first step when thinking about your future is often to talk to a professional, such as a post-16 professional ([see glossary of terms](#)). In the first part of this section, you will find two templates that you can fill in and bring to a pre-placement discussion to help you explain what you'd like to do and the support you need to do it.

### Pre-placement discussion summary



Use this template to explain your skills and experience. It may be helpful to fill this out with someone who knows you well, for example, a parent, carer or support worker. Your post-16 professional should send you this template ahead of your pre-placement discussion with them. If for some reason they do not, it will still be helpful to fill this out and bring it along so that you can tell them about your career goals.



### Employee profile



Once you have been matched with a work experience placement, use this template to tell the employer all about yourself. You can discuss this with your post-16 professional during your session and then it can be shared with the employer so that they understand you and can put in place any support you may need.



## Preparing for a work experience placement

The second part of this section contains information and support for those taking part in work experience placements.

### Interview preparation



This section contains advice and support on preparing for a job interview.



### Communicating in the workplace



This section contains advice and support on explaining to your employers how you prefer to communicate at work.



# Pre-placement discussion summary

Use this template to identify your skills and experience. You should read it ahead of your pre-placement discussion meeting and you may find it useful to prepare for the session by completing the form in advance, perhaps discussing the questions with someone who knows you well or getting help to complete it.



If you have a CV (curriculum vitae), you should bring it with you to the session to help complete the skills and qualification sections of your plan or use it to complete the form in advance.

**1** Name of young person:

**2** Date:

**3** **Introductions**  
Post-16 professional to explain their role (including data protection, safeguarding and confidentiality as appropriate).

**4** **What is your current situation?**  
(Include all that apply)

**Studying**

**Working**

**Volunteering**

**Unemployed**

**5** **Education**

**Which subjects have you studied and what grades did you achieve?**



# Pre-placement discussion summary (continued 2/7)



**Which subjects did you enjoy the most?**

**What did you enjoy most about your studies?**





## Pre-placement discussion summary (continued 3/7)



### 6 Future employment

**What kind of work would you like to do?**

**Do you want to achieve a qualification while at work?**

**Do you have preference for working hours and days?**

### 7 Previous employment

**Have you had any work experiences (including voluntary work)?**

**What was your role?**

**What responsibilities did you have?**

**What skills and knowledge do you have or did you learn?**







## Pre-placement discussion summary (continued 4/7)



### 8 Training

**Have you undertaken any training for a job?**

**What did you do?**

**Did you enjoy it?**

### 9 What are your interests?

**Creative, technical, problem-solving**

**TV programmes, films or computer games**

**Researching a particular area or topic**

**Animals or nature**

**Other**





## Pre-placement discussion summary (continued 5/7)



### 10 Past experience

**Have you looked for work before?**

**Where did you research jobs to apply for?**

**Did you face any barriers or challenges when applying for jobs and attending interviews?**

**Have you had feedback on unsuccessful applications?  
If yes, what was the feedback?**

**What do you think you are good at?**

**What do other people say you are good at?**

**Have you experienced any barriers or challenges in the workplace?  
If yes, how could they be avoided in a future workplace?**





# Pre-placement discussion summary (continued 6/7)



## 11 Future work placement



What kind of work placement are you interested in?

What would you like to learn from a work placement?

What would you like to happen once the placement is completed?

## 12 Any further questions?

How confident do you feel about a future work placement? (Please select one option)

	<input type="text" value="0"/>	<input type="text" value="1"/>	<input type="text" value="2"/>	<input type="text" value="3"/>	<input type="text" value="4"/>	<input type="text" value="5"/>	<input type="text" value="6"/>	<input type="text" value="7"/>	<input type="text" value="8"/>	<input type="text" value="9"/>	<input type="text" value="10"/>	
not very confident												very confident

Any concerns or worries?



# Pre-placement discussion summary (continued 7/7)



## 13 Agree actions



Discussions about your future are important. Watch this message from Sam:



# Employee profile

Use this template to tell your future work placement manager or employer all about yourself. The information can be shared with the employer so that they understand you and can put in place any support you might need. You should read this ahead of your pre-placement discussion meeting, and you may find it useful to prepare for the session by completing the form in advance, perhaps discussing the questions with someone who knows you well, or getting help to complete it.



The employee profile is a confidential document and only the relevant people in the placement organisation, who you agree to in advance, will have access to it, for example, your line manager and HR. Other colleagues can be informed if you feel this is required, when appropriate.

## Employee profile

My name is:



### Section 1.1: About me



### My skills (Tick all that apply)

**Attention to detail**  
(eg being thorough, accurate, detecting errors)

**Artistic skills**  
(eg drawing, visual arts)

**Music and sound skills**  
(eg ability to think and understand in patterns, creative thinking)

**Listening skills**  
(eg ability to absorb and retain facts)

**A strong sense of morality**  
(eg honesty, lack of judgmental attitude)

**Maintain focus when engaged in repetitive work**  
(eg not getting distracted or bored)

**Conscientious and diligent**  
(eg organised, punctual)

**Mathematical abilities**  
(eg processing numbers, calculations)

**Social skills**  
(eg face-to face interaction with others)

**Online communication skills** (eg email and text interaction with others)

**Creative talents**  
(eg identifying improvements)

**Analysing information**  
(eg detecting patterns in data)

**Technical abilities**  
(eg computer skills, engineering)

**Trustworthiness**  
(eg doing what you say you will do)

**Loyalty**  
(eg staying with a friend, or course or organisation)

**Emotional intelligence**  
(eg self-awareness, empathy)

**Kindness**  
(eg helping others)

**Good memory**  
(eg recalling facts)





## Employee profile (continued 2/8)



**Anything else not covered above:**



### **My strengths and other things I am good at**

Use information gathered in the pre-placement discussion summary or any other additional information, such as the young person's EHC plan if you have access to this.





## Employee profile (continued 3/8)



### Section 1.2: How to prepare me in the best way for my work experience

(Tick all that apply)

I would benefit from receiving a plan, schedule of work or list of tasks I am expected to do each day or week.

I would benefit from visiting my work experience placement before starting.

I would benefit from meeting my manager before starting my placement.

I would benefit from seeing where I am going to sit and where I can have my lunch.

I would benefit from knowing the address of my work experience placement so that I can practise undertaking my journey.

I would benefit from understanding the job role, the tasks I am expected to undertake and the hours I will be working, including breaks.

I would benefit from discussing flexible work hours, so that I can avoid travelling during rush hour.

I would benefit from knowing whether there is a dress code or what standard of dress is expected.

**Any other information:**





## Employee profile (continued 4/8)



### Section 1.3: The best ways of communicating with me in the workplace the best way

(Tick all that apply)

I would prefer to be introduced to new people one at a time.

I prefer to communicate verbally.

I prefer to communicate via email and written communication.

I enjoy talking with people.

I prefer them to start the conversation.

I would prefer it if people didn't talk to me about non-work-related topics (eg at lunchtime).

I prefer to avoid eye contact.

I prefer to talk to only one person at a time.

Say my name to get my attention.

I do not like answering the phone.

**Any other information:**

I do not like making phone calls.

I may have times when I am focusing and cannot be disturbed (and I will use the four-step traffic light system).

I appreciate frequent feedback.

I like to ask lots of questions until I am familiar with a task.

I benefit from regular scheduled meetings with my manager (eg weekly).

I would prefer not to attend face-to-face meetings.

I would prefer not to attend online meetings.







## Employee profile (continued 5/8)



### Section 1.4: The best ways to give me instructions and tasks

(Tick all that apply)

I need instructions backed up in writing.

I need information or questions in advance before discussing them.

I prefer visual information, for example, flow charts and diagrams.

I prefer to concentrate on one task at a time.

I need to record instructions, so that I have time to process the information and to support my memory.

I am more comfortable completing the same task repeatedly.

I need one question or instruction at a time.

I prefer to have a bit of variety in the tasks I am undertaking.

I need instructions given to me in prearranged meetings rather than when I am concentrating on something else.

I need advance notice of changes and help to manage these changes (including time to get used to them).

I need time to process what you have said.

I need help to structure my daily tasks, including breaks.

I need to do something else while listening, for example, use a fidget toy.

I may need some extra time to complete tasks or flexibility in relation to deadlines.

**Any other information:**





# Employee profile (continued 6/8)



## Section 1.5: What you might see me do and what this means

(Tick all that apply and provide some further information)



### When I am happy, I:

- talk a lot
- jump up and down
- move about or dance
- hum or sing.
- 
- 



### When I am unsettled, I:

- start scratching or picking
- stop talking
- leave the room
- look angry
- become upset or sad.
- 
- 



### If I become overwhelmed, have a meltdown or shutdown, I need:

- to be left alone
- to be allowed to leave
- to be checked on by someone
- to be allowed to sit somewhere quiet
- my parents or carers to be contacted.
- 
- 

### Any other information:





## Employee profile (continued 7/8)



### Section 1.6: My preferred environment

(Include all that apply and provide some further information)

I can be distracted by background conversation, office talk, the sound of air conditioning, fans etc.

I can find office lighting too bright.

I can find the temperature too warm.

I can find the temperature too cold.

I can be distracted by smells such as strong perfume or aftershave, cleaning products or office kitchens.

I can be distracted very easily, for example, by people walking past me or doors banging.

I benefit from taking frequent breaks.

I benefit from having access to a quiet space.

I use ear defenders, ear plugs or noise-cancelling headphones.

I wear tinted glasses or sunglasses in the office.

I prefer to work remotely if possible.

**Any other information:**





## Employee profile (continued 8/8)



### Section 2: Agreed workplace adjustments

**This section is for the employer to agree workplace adjustments.**

It may be useful to follow STEPS in order to agree adjustments with the young person.

STEPS were based upon and adapted from the work of the [Centre for Applied Autism Research](#), and Natalie Jenkins and Sue Fletcher-Watson.

#### **Agreed workplace adjustments:**

(For example, flexible work hours to avoid commuting during rush hour, allocated desk (in an otherwise hot-desking environment), designated quiet space, noise-cancelling headphones)

**Agreed by:**

**Employer:**

**Young person:**

**Date:**

**Date for review:**

(review every two months)



# Interview preparation

You may want to go through all this information in advance with someone who knows you well to help you prepare, ask questions or get support.



## 1 Before the interview

As soon as you have been invited to an interview, email the person who contacted you (this could be a member of the HR team) to find out more about what to expect. Ask only about any relevant information listed below which has not been clearly outlined in the invitation to interview document you should have received from the employer.

## 2 Ask about the format of the interview

**Will there be a task or assessment as well as questions?**

**If there is an English assessment, will it be verbal, written or both?**

Yes      Verbal      Written      Both

**If there is a maths assessment, what type of exercises will there be and how long will I have?**

**If there is a group assessment, how many people will be in the group and how long will I have?**

How many people?                      How long will I have?

## 3 Ask about the interview panel

**How many people will interview me?**

**How long will the interview last?**

**What will be the questions or the topic of questions?**

Once you have more information about the interview you can ask for **workplace adjustments**.





# Interview preparation (continued 2/10)

## Examples of workplace adjustments:

- ✓ Questions in advance for the interview and written assessment (which can allow you time to prepare and seek clarification on any questions you are not sure about)
- ✓ More time to answer verbal and written questions, if needed
- ✓ More time for any tasks
- ✓ You can request a different interview format if you have been invited to a group assessment.

You can share your **employee profile** with the people who will interview you if you feel this would be useful for them to help understand and support you during the interview. You can send the document to the HR team or the contact on the interview invitation.

## Interview questions

During the interview, you will be asked some questions, some of which will be **competency questions**. This is when you need to provide a specific example of how you match the competency being assessed.

Show me an example of good customer service.

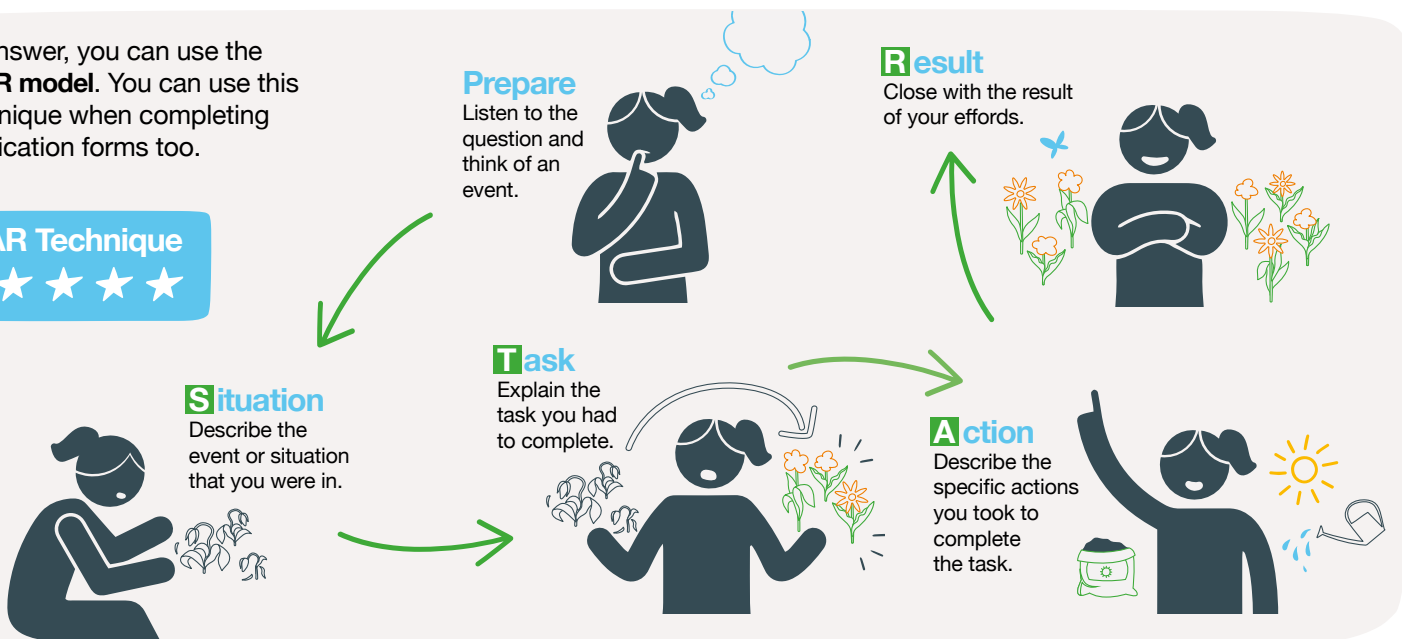
Describe a time when you worked as a part of a team.

Please give us an example of a situation where you have had to prioritise tasks.

Here are some examples of competency questions:

To answer, you can use the **STAR model**. You can use this technique when completing application forms too.

### STAR Technique





# Interview preparation (continued 3/10)

## 4 Attending an in-person interview

### Before the interview



**a** Plan your journey. You may have been sent instructions in advance to help you do this.

**b** Give yourself enough time and allow extra time for delays. For example, if the journey takes an hour, allow at least another 15 minutes in case of delays.

**c** Have a backup plan. For example, if the train is not running, what will you do instead?

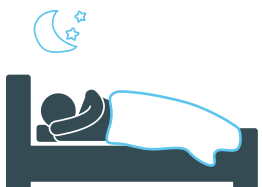


**d** Prepare for the interview in advance. The HR department will have provided information about the questions you will be asked and explain the interview format, including any tasks to be completed. This information will be included in the **invitation to interview** you have received. It will be beneficial to prepare your responses to these questions and how you will undertake potential tasks. You may find it useful to prepare with someone who knows you well. Also take notes of this preparation to reflect upon before your interview.

**e** Prepare one or two relevant questions in advance that you would like to ask the interviewer (or interviewers) about the potential role and the organisation. This will demonstrate to them your interest in the position.

**f** Make sure you have your clothes clean and ready (including your shoes).

**g** Pack a bag and include anything you have been asked to take for the interview, for example, your passport or other identity documents.



**h** Go to sleep early.

**i** Set your alarm to give you enough time to get up and get ready.



**j** Include in your bag any items that will help you to relax while on your journey and waiting for the interview, eg music player and headphones, interview preparation notes, magazine, book, newspaper and stim toy.



# Interview preparation (continued 4/10)

## Attending the interview

On the morning of the interview or before the interview if during the afternoon







# Interview preparation (continued 5/10)

## When you arrive for the interview



**a** When you arrive at the building, follow the instructions provided in the invitation to interview: where you need to go in the building, what you do when you approach the reception area, or receptionist, if there is one; this will include informing the receptionist who you are visiting.



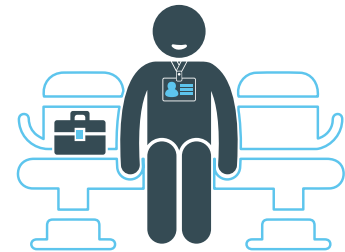
**b** Follow the instructions provided by the receptionist; sign in, place your visitor's lanyard around your neck (if you're comfortable to do so), or place the name label on top of your clothes around your chest area.



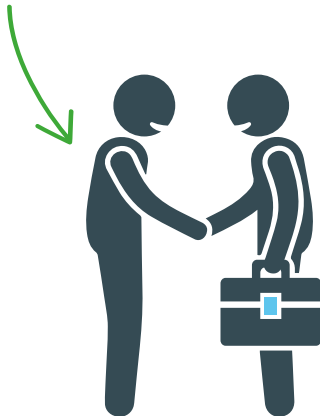
**e** While waiting, you may find it beneficial to use some of the items you have brought with you in your bag to help you relax and prepare for the interview.



**d** Ensure that your mobile phone is in silent mode or turned off during the interview.



**c** Once the receptionist has directed you to the waiting area, find an empty seat and sit and wait until the person you are visiting comes to get you from the waiting area and takes you to where you are meeting for the interview.



**f** When you first meet the person you are visiting, say hello, smile and shake their hand, by way of a formal, professional greeting (if you are comfortable shaking hands with the interviewer). If you would find it uncomfortable shaking hands with the interviewer, explain this beforehand to HR, so they know why you do not do this, ensuring mutual understanding in advance.



## Interview preparation (continued 6/10)

### During the interview



**a** When you arrive in the interview room, greet the other interviewers, say hello, smile and shake each person's hand, one at a time (if you are comfortable shaking hands with the interviewers).



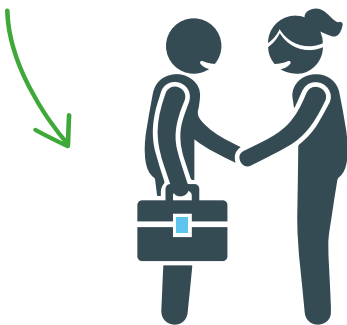
**b** The interview will be led by the interviewers. They will ask questions, one at a time, and you will need to provide appropriate answers after each question. Remember, you will have been given the questions in advance, so refer to your preparation to answer the questions.



**d** Towards the end of a formal interview, you will be asked by the interviewer if you have any questions you would like to ask. This will now be the opportunity to ask the question (or questions) you have prepared in advance about the potential role and the organisation.



**c** The interview format, which you will have been informed of in advance, may also include one or more tasks for you to complete individually or in a group to assess your skills and knowledge. You will have been able to prepare for such scenarios in advance; remember to reflect upon and use this preparation.



**e** When the interview finishes, say goodbye to the interviewers, thank them for their time and shake hands (if you are comfortable doing so); this is a formal and professional way of saying goodbye.





# Interview preparation (continued 7/10)

## When you leave the interview



**a** After the interview has finished and you have said your goodbyes, one of the interviewers will take you back to reception. If you are comfortable doing so, shake hands or wave goodbye.



**b** The receptionist will ask you to sign out and you will leave behind your visitor's lanyard or name label.



**c** Thank the receptionist for their help.



**d** Ensure that you have all your personal belongings.



**✓** Leave the building and begin your journey home.



## Interview preparation (continued 8/10)

### 5 Attending a virtual or phone interview

#### Before the interview



- a** Practise using the virtual meeting software, eg Zoom, Teams or Skype, with someone who knows you well.



- b** Ensure that you have received the meeting invitation and link, including any passwords.



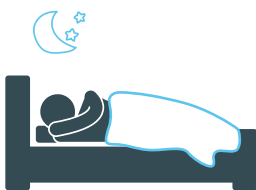
- c** Prepare for the interview in advance. The HR department will have provided information about the questions you will be asked and explained the interview format, including any tasks to be completed. This information will be included in the **invitation to interview** you have received. It will be beneficial to prepare your responses to these questions and how you will undertake potential tasks. You may find it useful to prepare with someone who knows you well. Also take notes of this preparation to reflect upon before your interview.



- d** Prepare one or two relevant questions in advance which you would like to ask the interviewer (or interviewers) about the potential role and the organisation. This will demonstrate to them your interest in the position.



- e** Make sure you have your interview clothes clean and ready.



- e** Go to sleep early.



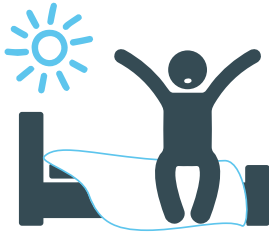
- f** Set your alarm to give you enough time to get up and get ready.





# Interview preparation (continued 9/10)

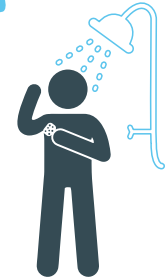
On the morning of the interview or before the interview if during the afternoon



**a** Get up.



**b** Have breakfast.



**c** Have a shower.



**f** Put your clothes on and clean shoes.



**e** Brush your hair.



**d** Brush your teeth.



**g** Make sure your device is fully charged and a charger with a nearby power source is available.



**h** Make sure that you log in to the virtual meeting at least five minutes before the scheduled start time. This will allow time to resolve any potential technical issues.



**i** Make sure you have pen and paper available for completing tasks (if required).



**l** When you arrive at the virtual interview or meeting, greet the interviewers, say hello and smile.



**k** You may have to wait for the virtual interview or meeting to start; a pop-up will inform you of this.



**j** Ensure that your camera and audio (sound) is turned on once you join the meeting.

continue on next page

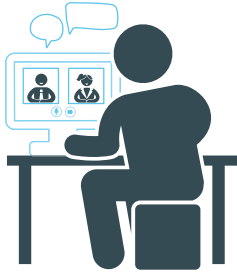




# Interview preparation (continued 10/10)

On the morning of the interview or before the interview if during the afternoon

continued from previous page



**m** The interview will be led by the interviewers. They will ask questions, one at a time, and you will need to provide appropriate answers after each question. Remember, you will have been given the questions in advance, so refer to your preparation to answer the questions. Sometimes the internet connection may drop out and the virtual meeting will stop, which will not be your fault. Ask the interviewers at the beginning of the interview what you should do if this happens.

**n** The interview format, which you will have been informed of in advance, may also include one or more tasks for you to complete, eg a presentation, to assess your skills and knowledge. You will have been able to prepare for such scenarios in advance; remember to reflect upon and use this preparation.



**p** When the interview finishes, say goodbye to the interviewers and thank them for their time.

**o** Towards the end of a formal interview, you will be asked by the interviewer if you have any questions you would like to ask. This will now be the opportunity to ask the question (or questions) you have prepared in advance about the potential role and the organisation.



**q** The virtual interview will now finish, and the meeting will end.





## Communicating in the workplace

### The four-step traffic light system



There may be times in your workplace when you need to concentrate on a particular task, or you don't feel like talking. That is OK, but it is important that you communicate this to your colleagues. The traffic light system can help you do this.

You can personalise the text boxes and print them out to use as badges to put on your desk or a lanyard. It is important that your employer and your colleagues understand what these badges mean and that they respect the rules. You can discuss this with your post-16 professional or employer.

This communication system may also be incorporated within a virtual workplace (working remotely or from home), through your computer, eg Microsoft Teams status, colour coding status regarding availability and set status message.

A **red badge** means that you do not want to talk to anyone; you will approach others if you require support.

An **orange badge** means that it may not be a good time to talk, and that is OK; you want to talk only to a few people whom you recognise.

A **yellow badge** means that you may want to talk to others if you feel you can; the approached people can then talk back to you in that case. You would prefer it if people started a conversation with you.

A **green badge** means you want to talk to other people. You may start a conversation with someone if you feel able to, but you would prefer to have someone start a conversation with you.



A **red badge** means that you do not want to talk to anyone; you will approach others if you require support.



An **orange badge** means that it may not be a good time to talk, and that is OK; you want to talk only to a few people whom you recognise.



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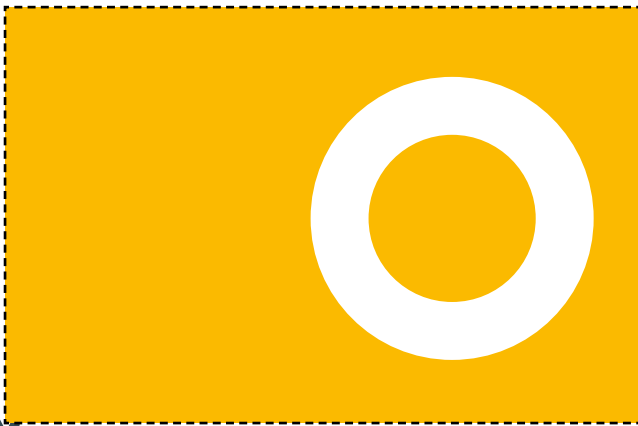




## Communicating in the workplace (continued 2/2)

### The four-step traffic light system

You can edit the four-step traffic light system, by including your own personalised statements in the editable text boxes below.





Resources

# Resources





## Resources

- **Ambitious about Autism Training and Consultancy services**
- **Youth Group for autistic young people**
- **Autism Education Trust (AET) – learning and development programme and resources**
- **Creased Puddle**
- **DARE Adjustments Toolkit**
- **Centre for Applied Autism Research**
- **STEPS: Sensory, Timely, Explicit, Predictable, Social. 10 STEPS to creating a neurodiverse inclusive environment**
- **EmployAbility – assisting disabled young persons and graduates into employment**
- **Know Your Normal – understanding your baseline mental health and wellbeing**
- **RNID – using technology to communicate**
- **AS Mentoring – specialist mentoring and employment support for neurodiverse adults**
- **Autism Forward – specialised mentoring funding to support adults with autism with employability and accessing employment**
- **Dr Mitzi Waltz – Autism consultant, expert witness, trainer, author and researcher**
- **Evenbreak – helping talented disabled candidates and inclusive employers to find each other**
- **Employ Autism – Autism specialist careers advice and work experience, supported recruitment**
- **NAS Autism Services Directory – a nationwide directory of services**
- **Autism Alliance – umbrella organisation for autism groups**
- **Neurodiversity at work – a guide published by CIPD**
- **Neurodiversity at work – a research paper published by ACAS**

Ambitious about Autism provides a range of free resources for anybody to access when supporting autistic children and young people. Below is a list of links to resources available to you.



Free webinars  
for professionals

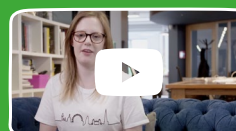


Free toolkits  
co-produced with  
autistic youth patrons



A series of videos explaining autism  
by autistic youth patrons:

What is autism



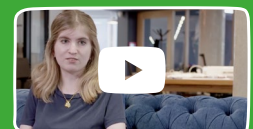
Shutdowns



Meltdowns



Communication



## Glossary of terms

### A

#### **anxiety disorder**

Anxiety is a condition which means you worry more than normal about things. Anxiety can be mild or very difficult to live with and can change depending on the situation and support available. There are many causes for anxiety and different ways it can present, and it doesn't always make sense to the non-anxious person. Anxiety is a condition that someone can have alongside autism.

#### **asperger syndrome**

Previous versions of the 'International Classification of Diseases (ICD) and the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-V) diagnostic manuals categorised Asperger syndrome as a separate classification and an individual could have received a diagnosis of Asperger syndrome. In both ICD-11 and DSM-5 the classification of autism has been changed to include Asperger syndrome. Diagnosticians (people who diagnose 'autism') will be moving away from the separate diagnosis of Asperger syndrome, and the diagnosis a person will receive if they have the characteristics of autism will be defined as autism spectrum disorder.

#### **attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)**

A condition that someone can have alongside autism. People who have ADHD may be more hyperactive or struggle with attention than people who don't have ADHD. There are three presentations of ADHD: predominantly inattentive presentation, predominantly hyperactive or impulsive presentation, and combined presentation.

#### **auditory processing disorder (APD)**

This is a condition where the person has difficulty processing sound as you would expect. They may understand speech more slowly, struggle to distinguish similar spoken words, be unable to concentrate when there is a lot of noise and may hear music differently. This is a condition that someone can have alongside autism.

#### **autism**

Autistic people process the world around them differently from non-autistic people. Someone who is autistic or has a diagnosis of autism is different in four areas: social interaction, social communication, routines and repetition (social imagination) and sensory differences.

It is important to acknowledge there have been different diagnostic names and terms used, including autism, autism spectrum disorder,

autism spectrum condition, atypical autism, high-functioning autism, pervasive developmental disorders and Asperger syndrome. There are two diagnostic manuals which provide the standardisation criteria for the classification of disorders and can be used in diagnosing 'autism'; the International Classification of Diseases (ICD-11) (which will come into effect on 1 January 2022) and the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-V). The diagnostic manuals do vary; for example, the ICD-11's classification provides detailed guidelines for distinguishing between autism with and without a learning disability.

It is important to note that although the titles of the two diagnostic classification systems DSM and ICD refer to 'mental disorders' and 'diseases', 'autism' is neither a disease nor a mental health condition. Within both manuals 'autism' is categorised as a 'neurodevelopmental disorder'.

### B

#### **burnout**

When an autistic person over stretches themselves by doing too many tasks, too much socialising or making their brain work too hard they can experience burnout. Burnout is similar to when you are ill, tired and need a rest but are unable to do so.

The autistic person might not act like themselves because they aren't able to think as clearly as they did before a burnout started.

### C

#### **communication difficulties**

Communication difficulties can impact how an individual is able to communicate expressively. This could mean having little or no speech or speech that can be difficult to understand or finding it difficult to say words, generate sentences or express feelings, wants and needs. Communication difficulties may affect an individual's receptive communication, understanding what other people are saying, responding to others' language, and following tasks and instructions. Communication difficulties can be a co-occurring condition for some individuals with autism.



## Glossary of terms (continued)

### co-occurring conditions

Individuals with autism may also experience other neurodevelopmental, physical or mental health conditions alongside their autism, which can make their needs more complex. These could include ADHD, depression, anxiety disorder, learning disabilities, physical health conditions and communication difficulties.

### CV (curriculum vitae)

A curriculum vitae, commonly referred to as a CV, is a document used when applying for jobs. It summarises a person's education, work experience, skills and achievements, and interests to promote their abilities to potential employers.

## D

### disclosure

Autistic individuals can choose whether to tell other people that they are autistic and what that means for them. Some people choose not to disclose, and others choose whether to disclose depending on the situation they are in.

### dyslexia

This condition affects the development of literacy and language-related skills. Dyslexic individuals may find it difficult to process and remember information they see and hear and experience difficulties with reading, writing and spelling. Dyslexia can also impact on other areas, such as organisational skills. It can be a co-occurring condition alongside autism.

### dyspraxia or developmental coordination disorder (DCD)

A neurological condition that affects movement, fine or gross motor coordination skills, which can cause clumsiness, and poor hand-eye coordination, which affects writing or using small objects. It can be a co-occurring condition alongside autism.

## E

### education, health and care (EHC) plan

A legal document issued by a local authority describing a child or young person's education, health and social care needs and the support that will be given to them.

A young person can request an assessment themselves if they're aged 16 to 25.

## H

### human resources (HR)

A department of people in an organisation responsible for managing all matters related to employees, including the recruitment and selection process for job opportunities. When applying for a role, the HR department may be the main point of contact for an individual to find out further information about the role and explore adjustments during the recruitment process. They may be the first point of contact after successful appointment and in the workplace.

## L

### learning difficulty

Unlike a learning disability, a learning difficulty does not affect intellect. Examples of learning difficulties are dyscalculia, dysgraphia, dyslexia, dyspraxia and language and social communication disorders.

### learning disabilities

A learning disability is a reduced intellectual ability, which may result in difficulty with everyday activities or taking longer to develop new skills. Learning disabilities are lifelong and can be mild, moderate or severe. With the right support, people with learning disabilities can lead independent lives. People can be autistic or have a learning disability, or both.

## M

### masking

Masking or camouflaging is when an autistic individual acts to appear less autistic or not autistic at all. They may change how they look, how they talk and their behaviours. Too much masking can lead to a burnout.

### meltdown

A meltdown is a response to an overwhelming situation. The response can be very loud and sometimes physical. The person needs time to recover and should not be laughed at for having a meltdown.



## Glossary of terms (continued)

### mental health conditions

These are conditions for which an individual with autism may also receive a diagnosis and are therefore defined as co-occurring conditions. Mental health conditions can include depression, anxiety disorder, bipolar disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder and more. An autistic individual will need to receive appropriate support and interventions, such as talking treatments or psychiatric medication to reduce the impact of the condition (or conditions).

## N

### neurodivergent

This is the term used to describe someone who has a neurodiverse condition, for example, autism. This means their brain functions, learns and processes information differently. Due to this diversity, neurodivergent thinkers offer a different approach and contribute a great deal to any team or workforce.

### neurodiversity

This refers to the diversity of the human brain. The way we think is not always the same; everyone has different experiences based on how their brain works.

The term 'neurodiversity' describes the range of different diagnoses that may lead people to perceive and experience the world in different ways, including autism, ADHD, dyspraxia and dyslexia. Neurodiversity encompasses individuals who are 'neurodivergent'; a neurodivergent individual will have one or more neurodiverse conditions.

### neurotypical

This is the term used to describe people who are not autistic, that is, whose neurodevelopment has been typical and whose brain functioning is considered 'normal' according to societal norms.

## P

### post-16 professional

A qualified professional who supports young people to think about their future career, as well as learning and training opportunities to fulfil employment opportunities. A young person would meet them during a pre-placement discussion meeting. 'Post-16 professional' is an umbrella term we have used for this toolkit. A relevant professional is likely to have one of the following job titles: Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) Officer, Employment Coach, Job Coach, Employability Coach, Careers Adviser, Employment Specialist or Employability Specialist. It is best practice for a post-16 professional to be registered with a professional body and have a qualification at Level 4 or above.

### pathological demand avoidance (PDA)

Individuals with PDA experience an extreme resistance to and avoidance of everyday demands. PDA is described as all-encompassing for an individual. At present PDA is not identified as a separate diagnosis or a subtype in the autism spectrum disorder diagnosis in diagnostic manuals used in the UK or internationally. Therefore, there is no consensus regarding PDA, and the academic and clinical debates continue about the condition and how best to support individuals with PDA.

### physical health conditions

These are conditions for which an autistic person may also receive a diagnosis, and are therefore defined as co-occurring conditions. Physical health conditions can include diabetes, asthma or irritable bowel syndrome, to name a few. An individual will need to be supported by medical professionals who are experts in these conditions and receive appropriate support and interventions, possibly including medication, to reduce the impact of the condition (or conditions).

### pre-placement discussion

A meeting with a young person to explore information, advice and guidance on education, training and work opportunities, to develop their employability skills, preparing them for their future career. The session would be conducted by a post-16 professional, to help a young person make informed choices about their future.

A session would normally take place at a time of transition for a young person, for example, a move from school into further education, employment or an apprenticeship.



## Glossary of terms (continued)

### pre-placement discussion summary

A form to guide the discussions between a young person and a post-16 professional during a pre-placement discussion. The form includes questions to ask a young person about their education, training and past experiences, future employment aspirations and their interests, and to explore future work placement opportunities.

## R

### repetitive behaviour

An intense preoccupation with one subject or activity; distress about change; insistence on routines or rituals with no purpose; or repetitive movements, such as hand-flapping.

### routine

Some autistic people have very strict routines that they like to stick to. Having a predictable routine helps them to manage anxiety.

## S

### self-stimulatory (stimming) behaviour

Stimming is short for 'self-stimulatory behaviour'. Stimming can involve a repetitive movement, repeating words, hand movements and making noises. Some stims are barely noticeable and some are very visible. Stimming behaviours are a way of self-regulating and shouldn't be stopped or reduced as they are an autistic person's way of managing a situation. Some individuals may use a 'stim toy' (see definition).

### sensory processing and sensitivity

Sensory processing is how we take in and perceive sensory information. This may include hyper (high) or hypo (low) sensitivity to the five senses (taste, touch, sight, smell and sounds), as well as balance and body awareness.

### shutdown

Shutdowns are similar to meltdowns but are not as visible or loud. A person may withdraw instead of being their usual self.

### social communication

This is the way individuals communicate, understand and use language with others. Autistic people may show differences in understanding and expressing communication and language.

### social interaction

This is how individuals interact with other people, develop relationships and socialise with other people. Autistic people may differ in their ability to understand social behaviour and the feelings of others, which informs the development of friendships and relationships.

### special interest

This is an intense and passionate level of focus on things of interest on a specific subject. For some people, this can be a game or TV show, a type of animal, a type of machine or a country. Special interests are varied and can bring the person joy.

### STEPS (sensory, timely, explicit, predictable, social)

A checklist tool developed by the Centre for Applied Autism Research at the University of Bath to create a neurodiverse inclusive environment, for neurotypical and neurodivergent individuals; an autistic individual could identify as neurodivergent. The tool provides a structure to aid discussion and evaluation of a current environment, with examples of adaptations to consider, ensuring environments are fully inclusive.

### stim toy

An object used for stimming or fiddling with when a person is feeling anxious. Stim toys come in a range of different types and can include fidget spinners, play dough, tangles, pens, soft toys and balls. Each person's preference is unique and personal; using their preferred stim toy can help them to feel comfortable and engage in the situation they are in.

## W

### workplace adjustments

Employers are required under the governance of law to make reasonable adjustments to ensure that workers (including trainees and interns) with disabilities, or physical or mental health conditions, are not substantially disadvantaged when doing their jobs. Reasonable adjustments can include changing the recruitment process, physical changes to the workplace and adaptations to equipment.

The [Equality Act 2010](#) defines a disability as a physical or mental impairment that has a 'substantial' and 'long-term' negative effect on an individual's ability to do normal daily activities. To align with the Equality Act a diagnosis of autism would be classified as a disability, to ensure an individual receives reasonable adjustments in the workplace.





Supported by:



Department  
for Education

## Department for Education

This project was supported by the Department for Education.

The Department for Education is responsible for children's services and education, including early years, schools, higher and further education policy, apprenticeships and wider skills in England.

[gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-education](http://gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-education)



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## Ambitious about Autism Youth Network

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**Abigail Odell**, Digital Participation Assistant

For further information about the work of the Ambitious Youth Network, or if you would like to become involved, [visit our website](#) or email [participation@ambitiousaboutautism.org.uk](mailto:participation@ambitiousaboutautism.org.uk)



## Creased Puddle

Thank you to Creased Puddle for its support and expertise with the development of the toolkit. Creased Puddle works closely with organisations to formulate communication strategies, provide training tools, carry out workplace assessments and put people with autism in the right jobs.

[creasedpuddle.co.uk](http://creasedpuddle.co.uk)



## Bath University

Thank you to Bath University Centre for Applied Autism Research (CAAR) and Natalie Jenkins and Sue Fletcher-Watson for giving us use of the STEPS Inclusivity questionnaire.

[bath.ac.uk/research-centres/centre-for-applied-autism-research](http://bath.ac.uk/research-centres/centre-for-applied-autism-research)



## Discover Autism Research & Employment (DARE)

Thank you to Discover Autism Research & Employment (DARE) for giving us use of the DARE Adjustment Report.

[dareuk.org](http://dareuk.org)

## Additional contributors

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# We are Ambitious about Autism

Ambitious about Autism is the national charity for children and young people with autism.

We provide services, raise awareness and understanding, and campaign for social and policy change. Through TreeHouse School, The Rise School and Ambitious College, we offer specialist education and support.

Our ambition is to make the ordinary possible for more children and young people with autism.

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