

Accessible services



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This resource looks at how you can adapt your customer service to support autistic people.

Autism impacts on how people communicate and interact with the world. Autistic people have difficulties with interpreting both verbal and non-verbal language, such as gestures or tone of voice. Some autistic people are unable to speak or have limited speech while other autistic people have very good language skills but struggle to understand sarcasm or tone of voice. Other challenges include:

- taking things literally
- needing extra time to process information or answer questions
- repeating what is said to them.

Autistic people often have difficulty 'reading' other people - recognising or understanding others' feeling and intentions - and expressing their own emotions. Autistic people may:

- appear to be insensitive
- appear to behave 'strangely' or in a way thought to be socially inappropriate.

Differences in communication and interaction can lead to challenges when accessing public businesses and services. There are a few simple steps that you can take to adapt your practices when working with autistic customers.



Staff training

One of the biggest barriers that autistic people face when visiting a new venue or using a new service is staff that are unsupportive because they have little or no understanding of autism. One of the best ways to support autistic people is to have staff with a good understanding of autism.

The National Autistic Society has a range of training packages available that can be found on our website, including our Understanding autism course www.autism.org.uk/understanding-autism

Alternatively, you could develop a bespoke training package.

Topics that you could consider as part of your training:

- identifying autism and how it affects people in different ways
- how to communicate with an autistic person
- sensory differences
- identifying how to change your practice and make changes within your workplace to effectively support people.

Autism champions

You could also consider having a group of staff to act as autism champions within your company or organisation, advising and supporting others.

These staff may need more in-depth training, they could:

- be the point of contact for an autistic person
- assist with any access arrangements
- answer autistic people's questions and provide information in a suitable format
- help any autistic customers who may be feeling stressed or need further support
- deliver training to new staff members.

Make sure you let both your staff and your customers know how to contact an autism champion.

Ask autistic people

Finding ways of gathering feedback from autistic people can help to inform changes. You could contact your local National Autistic Society branch, a local special school or parents' support group. You could consider using the topics within these guides to help you structure your feedback. If you have any autistic employees you could use their insight to help you adapt what you do. Ask autistic visitors or employees to comment on:

- accessibility
- customer service
- environment
- information available - including ease of use of your website.

If you already collect feedback from customers, consider including questions about disability, if you don't already, and ask specifically about autism. How you structure the questions will help autistic people to answer them and in turn help you to gain useful feedback.

- Ask specific questions that require specific details, for example, rather than how was your visit, ask did you enjoy your visit today?
- If you have questions that have more than one part, break them down into separate questions, for example: did you enjoy your visit? What did you enjoy about your visit?
- Keep language as simple and clear as possible. Only use necessary words, for example the toilets are located next to the...
- Can you include pictures or images as part of the questionnaire to act as visual supports?
- Keep questionnaires as short as possible and use rating scales.

Pre-visit information

Visitors may want information before coming to your venue. Having someone that they can talk to, to discuss the reasonable adjustments that are available can help to ease anxiety. Some visitors may want to have a pre-visit where they can come and have an initial look and leave prior to using the facilities available to them. Check out our information on making your information more accessible.

More information and useful links

Find out more about autism on the National Autistic Society's website.

➤ www.autism.org.uk/autism

Read our tips on communicating with autistic people

➤ www.autism.org.uk/communicationtips

Find out more about the training and consultancy we can offer your business.

➤ www.autism.org.uk/consultancy

National Autistic Society - branches

There are 116 volunteer led branches across the UK, covering three quarters of the country. There are also online branches for autistic people with a shared interest, identity or experience. The branches offer a range of support, information and social activities for autistic adults, children and families in their local area. You could contact your local branch for advice and support to make your business more autism-friendly or to involve autistic people in designing your services.

➤ www.autism.org.uk/branches

Northern Ireland Assembly

Read how the Northern Ireland Assembly developed its practice to achieve an Autism Friendly Award. The weblink documents some of their journey and includes appendices on notes from an autism consultation group and recommendations of things to consider when preparing for the visit of an autistic person.

➤ www.niassembly.gov.uk/visit-and-learning/autism-and-the-assembly

Next steps

Checklist

Download the checklist from www.autism.org.uk/autismfriendlyservices as a starting point to the changes you can consider to make your service more welcoming to autistic people.

Would you like recognition for the changes you have made?

The National Autistic Society can provide you with recognition for the changes you have made and the positive customer experience that autistic people can expect from your business. The Autism Friendly Award will consider the experience you offer autistic people and award those businesses that meet a high standard of autism-friendly practice. The award will not only celebrate your work but also signify to autistic customers and their families that you are committed to them having the best experience whilst they visit you.

Find out more about Autism Accreditation and the Autism Friendly Award.

➡ www.autism.org.uk/accreditation



We would like to thank the Kusuma Trust for funding the creation and publication of our autism-friendly guides, making this fantastic work possible. For more information about the Kusuma Trust and their impact in the UK, Asia and Gibraltar, please visit

➡ www.kusumatrust.org