

Mindscape Healthcare Toolkit



Different Paths, Same Destination

Introduction Letter

Dear Team,

This toolkit has been developed to support the inclusion and wellbeing of autistic employees within our workplace. It provides practical resources, checklists, and guidance to help create an environment where everyone can thrive.

Inside, you will find information on reasonable adjustments, communication strategies, sensory environment considerations, recruitment best practices, and career development support. The aim is to equip managers and colleagues with the tools needed to foster understanding, remove barriers, and ensure equal opportunities for all.

Thank you for your commitment to building an inclusive and supportive workplace. Together, we can make a positive difference.

Best regards,

Mindscape

Autism & Healthcare

Explanation of Autism

Autism is a lifelong neurodevelopmental difference that affects how a person communicates, interacts with others, and experiences the world. Autistic people may have unique strengths, interests, and ways of processing information. Autism is a spectrum, meaning that each individual's experiences and support needs can vary widely.

Common characteristics include:

- Differences in social communication and interaction
- Repetitive routines or behaviors
- Sensory sensitivities (to sounds, lights, textures, etc.)
- Focused interests or intense passions

Autism is not an illness or disease, but a different way of experiencing and understanding the world.

Why Autistic People May Experience Barriers in Healthcare

Autistic people can face a range of barriers when accessing healthcare, including:

- Communication differences: Difficulty understanding or expressing information, especially in stressful or unfamiliar situations
- Sensory sensitivities: Overwhelm from bright lights, loud noises, crowded waiting rooms, or strong smells
- Unfamiliar environments: Anxiety or confusion in new settings or with changes to routine
- Lack of understanding: Healthcare professionals may not be aware of autism-specific needs or how to make reasonable adjustments
- Time pressures: Short appointment times may not allow for processing information or asking questions

- Stigma and assumptions: Misunderstandings about autism can lead to incorrect assumptions about pain, symptoms, or capacity to make decisions

Removing these barriers requires awareness, flexibility, and a willingness to adapt healthcare environments and communication styles.

Myth Busting Panel

Myth

Fact

Autism is a mental illness.

Autism is a neurodevelopmental difference, not a mental illness.

All autistic people have learning disabilities.

Autistic people have a wide range of abilities; some may have learning disabilities, others do not.

Autistic people don't want social contact.

Many autistic people value social relationships, but may communicate or interact differently.

Autism can be "cured."

Autism is lifelong. Support and understanding help autistic people thrive.

Autistic people don't feel pain or emotions.

Autistic people experience pain and emotions, though they may express them differently.

There is a single "autistic behavior."

Autism is a spectrum; each person is unique with their own strengths and challenges.

Reception & Booking

Checklist for Sensory-Friendly Waiting Rooms

- Provide a quiet area or option to wait outside
- Minimize background noise (music, TVs, loud conversations)
- Use soft, natural lighting or adjustable lighting
- Offer comfortable seating with space between chairs
- Avoid strong scents (cleaners, air fresheners)
- Display clear, simple signage
- Provide access to sensory aids (ear defenders, fidget tools)
- Allow access to water and restrooms
- Keep décor uncluttered and calming
- Offer visual schedules or information about waiting times

Template: Preferred Communication Method on Patient Records

Patient Name

Date of Birth

Preferred Communication(e.g., spoken, written, email, text, visual aids)
Method

Additional (e.g., needs extra time, prefers direct
Communication Notes questions, uses assistive technology)

Support Yes / No

Person/Interpreter

Required

Date Recorded

Recorded By

Guidance on Appointment Flexibility

- Offer first or last appointment slots to reduce waiting times

- Allow patients to request longer or double appointments if needed
- Provide options for remote appointments (phone, video)
- Send appointment reminders in the patient's preferred format
- Allow patients to bring a support person
- Be flexible with rescheduling or late arrivals due to anxiety or sensory overload
- Clearly explain what to expect during the appointment and any changes to routine
- Record and respect individual preferences for appointment times and settings

Consultation Environment

Sensory Checklist

- Lighting is adjustable or uses natural light
- Noise levels are minimized (no loud equipment, alarms, or conversations nearby)
- Strong scents (cleaners, perfumes) are avoided
- Room temperature is comfortable and adjustable
- Décor is simple and uncluttered
- Visual distractions (posters, screens) are limited
- Access to sensory aids (ear defenders, fidget tools) is available
- Seating is comfortable and spaced apart
- Clear signage is present for directions and facilities
- Option for patient to wait or recover in a quiet space

Tips on Reducing Overload in Clinics and Wards

- Schedule appointments to avoid busy periods
- Offer quiet waiting areas or allow waiting outside
- Limit the number of people in consultation rooms
- Provide written and visual information alongside verbal explanations
- Allow patients to bring comfort items or support persons
- Give advance notice of any changes to routine or environment
- Allow breaks during longer consultations
- Use calm, clear communication and avoid rushing
- Check in regularly with the patient about their comfort level

Communication and Interaction

Visual and Plain Language Appointment Letter

Appointment Letter Example

What	Details
Your Appointment	You have a medical appointment.
Date	[Insert Date]
Time	[Insert Time]
Place	[Insert Clinic/Hospital Name and Address]
Who	You will see [Doctor/Nurse Name].
What Will Happen	You will talk about your health. You may have a check-up.
What to Bring	[List any items, e.g., ID, medication, support person]
If You Need Help	Call [Phone Number] or email [Email Address].
If You Need to Change the Appointment	Contact us as soon as possible.

How to Explain Procedures Step by Step

1. Say what will happen first
"First, you will sit on the chair."
2. Describe what you will do
"I will use this cuff to check your blood pressure. It will squeeze your arm for a few seconds."
3. Explain what the patient might feel
"You might feel a tight squeeze, but it will not hurt."
4. Say how long it will take
"This will take about one minute."
5. Say what happens next
"After that, we will talk about the results."
6. Check for understanding
"Do you have any questions? Is there anything you want me to explain again?"

Flowchart: Supporting Patients Who Become Distressed

Patient shows signs of distress | v Pause the consultation | v Ask:
"Would you like a break or some water?" | v Offer a quiet space or
sensory aids (ear defenders, fidget tool) | v Use calm, clear language:
"You are safe. We can wait until you feel ready." | v Ask if a support
person should be called | v When patient is ready, check if they want to
continue or reschedule | v Document what helped and update patient
record

Example Scripts for Explaining Medical Tests

Blood Test

"I am going to take a small sample of your blood. First, I will clean your arm. Then, you will feel a quick pinch as I use a small needle. It may feel uncomfortable, but it will be over quickly. After that, I will put a small plaster on your arm. Do you have any questions?"

X-Ray

"You need an X-ray. This is a picture of the inside of your body. You will stand or lie down near a big camera. The camera will not touch you. You

must stay still for a few seconds while the picture is taken. It does not hurt. If you feel worried, you can tell me."

Urine Sample

"We need a urine sample. This means you will pee into a small container. I will give you the container and show you where the bathroom is. When you are finished, please give the container back to me. If you need help, just ask."

Clear, step-by-step communication and visual supports help autistic patients feel safe and understood.

Reasonable Adjustments & Legal Duties

Overview: Equality Act 2010 in Healthcare

The Equality Act 2010 is UK legislation that protects individuals from discrimination based on protected characteristics, including disability. In healthcare settings, this means service providers must not discriminate against disabled patients and must take positive steps to remove barriers.

Key points:

- Autism is recognised as a disability if it has a substantial and long-term impact on daily life.
- Healthcare providers have a legal duty to make reasonable adjustments so autistic patients can access services equally.
- Reasonable adjustments are changes to policies, procedures, environments, or communication to meet individual needs.
- Failure to make reasonable adjustments is unlawful discrimination.

Sample: Reasonable Adjustment Requests Form

Patient Name

Date of Birth

NHS/Patient Number

Contact Details

Preferred Communication Method (e.g., spoken, written, email, text, visual aids)

Describe your disability or support need

What adjustments would help you access healthcare? (e.g., quiet waiting area, longer appointments, written information, support person)

Are there any sensory issues to consider? (e.g., lighting, noise, smells)

Other important information

Signature
(Patient/Family/Carer)

Date

Checklist for Staff Compliance

- Understand the Equality Act 2010 and its relevance to healthcare
- Ask all patients if they need reasonable adjustments
- Record adjustment requests clearly in patient records
- Provide accessible information in preferred formats
- Offer flexible appointment times and quiet spaces
- Make physical environments accessible (ramps, signage, sensory aids)
- Allow support persons or advocates to attend appointments
- Review and update adjustments regularly with the patient
- Ensure all staff are trained in disability awareness and legal duties
- Monitor compliance and address any barriers promptly

Making reasonable adjustments is a legal requirement and essential for providing equitable, person-centred healthcare.

Family & Carer Partnership

Tips on Working with Families as Partners in Care

- Recognise families and carers as experts in the patient's needs and preferences
- Involve families in care planning and decision-making, with patient consent
- Communicate clearly and regularly, using plain language
- Respect cultural, linguistic, and individual differences
- Provide information about services, support, and rights
- Encourage families to share concerns, observations, and suggestions
- Offer flexible visiting and support arrangements
- Value and acknowledge the emotional impact of caring roles
- Signpost to carer support groups and resources

Consent & Confidentiality Reminders

- Always seek the patient's consent before sharing information with families or carers
- Explain confidentiality policies clearly to patients and families
- Respect the patient's right to privacy and decision-making, unless there are safeguarding concerns
- Document consent decisions and any information shared
- Involve families as much as possible, within the boundaries of patient consent
- If the patient lacks capacity, follow legal frameworks for best interests decisions

Printable "About Me" Profile Form

Section

Details

Name

Date of Birth

Preferred Name/Pronouns

How I Communicate Best

Things I Like/Enjoy

Things I Find Difficult or Stressful

Sensory Sensitivities

How to Help Me if I'm Anxious or Upset

Important People (Family, Carers, Friends)

Medical Needs or Allergies

Anything Else You Should Know

Patients and families can complete this form and bring it to appointments to help staff provide personalised, effective care.

Training & Staff Awareness

Step-by-Step Plan: Basic Autism-Awareness Briefing for Staff

1. Introduction (5 minutes)
 - Explain the purpose of the briefing: to improve understanding and support for autistic patients.
2. What is Autism? (5 minutes)
 - Define autism as a neurodevelopmental difference.
 - Highlight the diversity of the autism spectrum.
3. Common Characteristics (5 minutes)
 - Discuss differences in communication, social interaction, sensory processing, and routines.
4. Barriers in Healthcare (5 minutes)
 - Outline common challenges autistic people face in healthcare settings (communication, sensory overload, anxiety).
5. Reasonable Adjustments (5 minutes)
 - Explain legal duties under the Equality Act 2010.
 - Give examples of reasonable adjustments (quiet spaces, clear communication, flexible appointments).
6. Practical Strategies (10 minutes)
 - Share tips for clear communication, reducing sensory overload, and involving families/carers.
 - Use real-life scenarios or role-play.
7. Resources and Further Learning (5 minutes)
 - Signpost to further training and support materials.
8. Q&A and Feedback (5 minutes)
 - Allow staff to ask questions and share experiences.

Free Training Modules

- NHS England: Oliver McGowan Mandatory Training on Learning Disability and Autism
nhs.uk/conditions/autism/autism-training-healthcare-professionals
- National Autistic Society: Free Autism E-learning Modules
autism.org.uk/what-we-do/professional-development/training-and-conferences/online-training

Poster: 10 Autism-Friendly Practices for Healthcare Teams

10 Autism-Friendly Practices for Healthcare Teams

1. Use clear, simple language
2. Provide written and visual information
3. Offer quiet waiting areas
4. Allow flexible appointment times
5. Ask about and record preferred communication methods
6. Minimise sensory distractions (noise, lights, smells)
7. Involve families and carers (with consent)
8. Allow extra time for processing and responses
9. Explain procedures step by step
10. Respect individual preferences and needs

Small changes make a big difference. Inclusive care benefits everyone.

Emergency & Inpatient Settings

Strategies for Triage and A&E

- Ask all patients if they have any communication or sensory needs on arrival
- Use clear, calm language and avoid medical jargon
- Allow a support person to stay with the patient whenever possible
- Offer a quiet waiting area or allow waiting outside if safe
- Prioritise autistic patients for triage if waiting is distressing
- Provide written or visual explanations of what will happen next
- Minimise changes in staff and explain any handovers
- Allow extra time for questions and responses
- Check understanding and repeat information as needed
- Document adjustments and preferences in the patient record

Communication Passports and Sensory Kits

Communication Passport Contents:

- Patient's preferred name and pronouns
- How the patient communicates best (spoken, written, visual, assistive tech)
- Sensory sensitivities (noise, light, touch, smells)
- Triggers and calming strategies
- Support needs (e.g., help with forms, extra time)
- Emergency contacts
- Medical needs and allergies
- Things that help if anxious or distressed

Sensory Kit Suggestions:

- Ear defenders or noise-cancelling headphones
- Sunglasses or eye masks
- Fidget toys or stress balls
- Weighted lap pad or small blanket
- Unscented wipes
- Visual schedule cards
- Comfort items (small soft toy, familiar object)

Example: Autism-Friendly Hospital Stay Checklist

Item	Completed (✓/X)	Notes
Communication passport reviewed and attached to notes		
Sensory kit offered and accessible		
Quiet room or low-stimulation area provided		
Support person allowed to stay		
Preferred communication method used		
Written/visual information about procedures given		
Staff introduced and roles explained		
Patient involved in care decisions		
Flexible meal and routine options offered		
Regular check-ins for comfort and understanding		
Adjustments documented in patient record		
Proactive adjustments in emergency and inpatient settings help autistic patients feel safe, understood, and supported.		

Resources & Support

UK Organisations

- National Autistic Society
autism.org.uk
- Ambitious about Autism
ambitiousaboutautism.org.uk
- Autistica
autistica.org.uk
- Autism Alliance UK
autism-alliance.org.uk
- Scottish Autism
scottishautism.org
- Autism NI (Northern Ireland)
autismni.org
- Autism Wales
autismwales.org

Helplines

- National Autistic Society Helpline
0808 800 4104
- Autism Helpline (Scotland)
01259 222022
- Carers UK Helpline
0808 808 7777
- Mencap Learning Disability Helpline
0808 808 1111

Online Resources

- NHS: Autism
nhs.uk/conditions/autism
- National Autistic Society: Information and Advice
autism.org.uk/advice-and-guidance
- Ambitious about Autism: Resources
ambitiousaboutautism.org.uk/information-about-autism
- Autistica: Research and Support
autistica.org.uk/our-research
- Contact (for families with disabled children)
contact.org.uk

- Carers UK: Support and Advice
carersuk.org

These organisations provide information, support, advocacy, and resources for autistic people, families, and professionals across the UK.