



Mindscape: Different Paths, Same Destination

# Mindscape Community Toolkit



**Different Paths, Same Destination**



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## **Introduction to Inclusive Communities**

An inclusive community is one where everyone feels welcome, respected, and able to participate fully, regardless of differences such as disability, background, or communication style. Inclusion goes beyond physical access—it means creating environments where all people are valued, their needs are understood, and their contributions are recognized.

For autistic people, inclusive communities provide understanding, flexibility, and support. This can involve making adjustments to physical spaces, communication methods, and social expectations so that autistic individuals can engage comfortably and confidently.

Inclusive communities benefit everyone. They foster empathy, creativity, and collaboration, and help build stronger, more connected neighborhoods and workplaces. By working together to remove barriers and celebrate diversity, communities and local businesses can ensure that all members have the opportunity to thrive.



## **Autism 101: Myth Busting and Inclusive Practices**

### Understanding Autism

Autism is a lifelong neurodevelopmental difference that affects how a person experiences the world, communicates, and interacts with others.

Autistic people may have unique strengths, interests, and ways of processing information. Autism is a spectrum, meaning each person's experience is different.

### Myth Busting

#### Myth

#### Fact

Autism is caused by bad parenting or vaccines.

Autism is not caused by parenting style or vaccines. It is a natural variation in human neurodevelopment.

All autistic people have intellectual disabilities.

Autistic people have a wide range of intellectual abilities. Many have average or above-average intelligence.

Autistic people don't want friends or relationships.

Autistic people can and do want friendships and relationships, though socializing may look different.

Autism can be "cured."

Autism is a lifelong difference. Support and acceptance help autistic people thrive.



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All autistic people have Autism is a spectrum. Each person is unique, the same traits or with their own strengths and challenges. needs.

Autistic people lack Many autistic people experience deep empathy, empathy. though they may express it differently.

### Inclusive Practices

#### Physical Environment

- Provide quiet areas or sensory-friendly spaces.
- Use clear signage with symbols and simple language.
- Offer sensory-friendly times with reduced noise and lighting.

#### Communication

- Use clear, direct language and avoid idioms or sarcasm.
- Offer information in multiple formats (written, visual, easy-read).
- Allow extra time for responses and respect different communication styles.

#### Attitudes and Interactions

- Listen to autistic people's preferences and needs.
- Avoid making assumptions based on stereotypes.
- Respect personal space and sensory needs.
- Offer choices and flexibility in participation.

#### Policies and Training

- Provide autism awareness training for staff and volunteers.
- Review policies to ensure they support reasonable adjustments and inclusion.
- Involve autistic people in planning and decision-making.

Adopting inclusive practices and challenging myths helps create environments where autistic people feel valued, understood, and able to participate fully in community and business life.



## **Sensory Friendly Checklist**

Use this checklist to help make spaces more comfortable and accessible for autistic people and others with sensory sensitivities.

### **Environment**

- Quiet area available for breaks
- Noise levels kept low or adjustable
- Background music minimized or turned off during sensory-friendly times
- No sudden loud announcements or alarms
- Soft, natural, or adjustable lighting
- Avoid flashing or flickering lights
- Minimize strong smells (cleaning products, perfumes, food)
- Comfortable temperature and ventilation

### **Visual Supports**

- Clear, easy-to-read signs with symbols or pictures
- Simple, uncluttered décor
- Visual schedules or maps available
- Directions and information provided in written and visual formats

### **Seating & Space**

- Variety of seating options (soft, firm, with/without arms)
- Space for movement and personal space respected
- Quiet corners or designated sensory spaces
- Easy access to exits

### **Communication**

- Staff trained in autism awareness and sensory needs
- Staff use clear, direct language
- Alternative communication tools available (e.g., pen and paper, communication cards)
- Information about sensory-friendly features shared in advance

### **Additional Supports**



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- Fidget tools or sensory aids available
- Permission for headphones, sunglasses, or comfort items
- Flexible participation options for activities
- Feedback from autistic people and those with sensory needs regularly collected

This checklist can be printed and used to review and improve sensory accessibility in community spaces and businesses.



## **Inclusive Communication Templates: Sample Scripts**

Use these sample scripts to support clear, respectful, and inclusive communication with autistic people and others who may benefit from direct and accessible language.

### **Welcoming and Offering Support**

- “Hello, welcome! If you need any help or a quiet space, please let us know.”
- “Is there anything we can do to make you more comfortable today?”
- “Would you prefer information in writing, pictures, or spoken?”

### **Giving Instructions**

- “The meeting will start at 2:00. It will last about one hour.”
- “First, please sign in at the desk. Then, you can take a seat.”
- “If you need a break at any time, you can use the quiet room.”

### **Checking Preferences**

- “Do you prefer to be called by your first name or another name?”
- “Would you like to join the group activity, or would you rather watch?”
- “Is it okay if I sit here, or would you prefer more space?”

### **Explaining Changes**

- “There has been a change in the schedule. The event will now start at 3:00 instead of 2:00.”
- “The lights may be brighter in this area. If you need to move to a quieter space, just let us know.”
- “We will be moving to another room in five minutes. I can show you where it is.”

### **Offering Choices**



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- “Would you like to receive updates by email or on paper?”
- “You can choose to participate now or wait until you feel ready.”
- “Would you like to speak with someone privately or in a group?”

### **Responding to Requests**

- “Thank you for letting us know what you need. We will do our best to help.”
- “It’s okay to take a break whenever you need one.”
- “If you have any other requests, please tell us.”

These templates can be adapted for different situations to help ensure communication is accessible, respectful, and supportive for everyone.



## **Creating Inclusive Services**

### **Accessibility**

- Provide clear signage and directions.
- Use simple, plain language in forms and notices.
- Offer alternative formats (easy-read, digital copies).

### **Staff Training**

- Train staff on autism and ADHD awareness.
- Teach strategies for clear communication.
- Encourage patience, flexibility, and empathy.

### **Policies & Procedures**

- Allow flexibility in service rules where possible.
- Offer reasonable adjustments without unnecessary barriers.
- Ensure complaints procedures are accessible.

### **Designing Neurodiverse-Friendly Spaces**

- Provide quiet zones in public areas.
- Use natural lighting where possible.
- Offer sensory-friendly sessions (cinema, swimming, library).
- Provide seating areas away from high-traffic zones.

### **Supporting Participation & Belonging**

- Create peer support groups.
- Involve autistic and ADHD voices in planning services.
- Provide volunteering opportunities with flexible roles.
- Celebrate diversity through community events.



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## **Case Studies**

### **Case Study 1 – Local Library**

A library introduced a weekly 'quiet hour' with reduced lighting and no background noise. Autistic and ADHD community members reported feeling more comfortable and began using the library more regularly.

### **Case Study 2 – Sports Centre**

A leisure centre introduced sensory-friendly swimming sessions with fewer people, dimmed lighting, and clear poolside instructions. Families with neurodivergent children reported greatly improved experiences.



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## **Collaboration with Local Partners**

- Work with schools, charities, and advocacy groups.
- Share good practice across organisations.
- Co-design services with neurodivergent individuals.
- Seek funding for accessibility initiatives.

## **Resource Bank**

### **Guides & Books**

- The Neurodiverse Workplace by Victoria Honeybourne
- Different, Not Less by Temple Grandin
- Supporting Neurodiverse Communities (various toolkits)

### **Tools & Ideas**

- Sensory kits for community centres.
- Visual schedules for public events.
- Community feedback surveys in accessible formats.

### **Organisations**

- Local Autism Partnerships
- ADHD Foundation (UK)
- Autism-Friendly Cities initiatives