

Greater Manchester Autism Consortium

Reasonable adjustment guides

Introduction and Background

The autism strategy self-assessment framework (SAF) process from 2016 identified that public services across Greater Manchester were struggling to make reasonable adjustments for autistic people. To address this, in April 2017, the Greater Manchester Autism Consortium (GMAC) Project began developing guides that set out reasonable adjustments for autistic people in different settings.

The guides were put together between April 2017 and July 2017, by running three workshops. The workshops were attended by a mix of autistic adults, family members or supporters of autistic children and adults and practitioners.

What is autism?

Autism is a lifelong developmental disability that affects how people perceive the world and interact with others.

Autistic people see, hear and feel the world differently to other people. If you are autistic, you are autistic for life; autism is not an illness or disease and cannot be 'cured'. Often people feel being autistic is a fundamental aspect of their identity.

Autism is a spectrum condition. All autistic people share certain difficulties, but being autistic will affect them in different ways. Some autistic people also have learning disabilities, mental health issues or other conditions, meaning people need different levels of support. All people on the autism spectrum learn and develop. With the right sort of support, all can be helped to live a more fulfilling life of their own choosing.

Useful link on 'what is autism?' : <https://youtu.be/d4G0HTIUBII>

How common is autism?

Autism is much more common than most people think. There are around 700,000 autistic people in the UK - that's more than 1 in 100. People from all nationalities and cultural, religious and social backgrounds can be autistic, although it appears to affect more men than women.¹

Reasonable Adjustments- what are they?

The reasonable adjustment duty means that organisations have to take positive steps to make sure that disabled people can fully participate in all circumstances so that they are not disadvantaged in any way.

The Equality Act 2010

- The Act protects people from **discrimination and harassment** based on 'protected characteristics'
- The 'protected characteristics' are: **disability**, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.
- The Equality Act brought together all the previous legislation dealing with inequality and discrimination.

The Equality Act covers

- Direct Discrimination
- Indirect Discrimination
- Discrimination arising from disability
- **Reasonable adjustments & anticipating needs**
- Harassment
- Victimisation
- Positive Action

More detail about the equality act can be found at:

www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/advice-and-guidance/equality-act-guidance

How does this relate to autism?

The Statutory Guidance that was published as a result of the Autism Act 2009 explains that the public sector should make sure it is making appropriate reasonable adjustments for autistic people. The guidance highlights that in making reasonable adjustments, the public sector should look at the following:

- Their **premises**
- Their **processes like scheduling appointments**
- Alternatives to **face to face communication**
- Accessibility of **written communication**
- **Planning and preparation**

It was agreed that the statutory guidance headings set out above worked well, so these were used to organise the information from the workshops.

These guides are in no way meant to be considered exhaustive, nor to imply that all autistic adults need the same adjustments. Every autistic individual is different and services should ask individuals what adjustments would help them. However, the guides highlight the sort of issues that autistic people may experience in the settings we have chosen.

The GMAC project has also committed to develop a template for reasonable adjustments that individuals could use.

In addition people can use resources such as:

- Hospital Passports: <https://www.autism.org.uk/about/health/hospital-passport.aspx>
- One page profile: <http://helensandersonassociates.co.uk/person-centred-practice/one-page-profiles/>
- Health action plans or in a health context: <https://www.mencap.org.uk/sites/default/files/2016-06/What%20is%20a%20health%20action%20plan%3F.pdf>

Other Useful resources

Throughout this work, we have discovered other useful resources on reasonable adjustments that may also be helpful. These are listed below:

National Autistic Society information for GPs, including a poster on being autism friendly: <http://www.autism.org.uk/gp>

Aukids magazine's poster on making businesses autism friendly: <https://www.aukids.co.uk/cgi-bin/scribe?showinfo=pp045>

Department of Health and Social care training resources: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/autism-training-resources>

"Reasonably Adjusted" document on making RAs in MH services for people with autism and LD: https://www.ndti.org.uk/uploads/files/NHS_Confederation_Report.pdf

National Autistic Society Criminal Justice Guide: <http://www.autism.org.uk/professionals/others/criminal-justice.aspx>

National Autistic Society Employment section: <http://www.autism.org.uk/about/adult-life/work.aspx>

A Youtube link on five core Reasonable Adjustments for people with autism and Learning disabilities: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=umNftsB3_nU

It is also helpful to consider creating virtual tours of buildings, so that autistic visitors know what to expect when they visit. Some examples can be found on <https://accesssocial.co.uk/services/> <https://www.accessable.co.uk/> or google earth street view <https://vr.google.com/earth/>

Mari Saeki

Project Lead- Greater Manchester Autism Consortium Project

National Autistic Society

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A. GP Surgeries

Premises

- Consider introducing a quieter area to sit in the waiting room. This could include having an area slightly screened off for some privacy.
- Note that 'busy' patterns on walls can be an issue for some autistic people.
- Consider offering some space away from the waiting room where a pager system or a board can alert a patient to their appointment.
- Other options might be to offer to call people when it's their turn so they can wait nearby, outside of the waiting room.
- Make sure there is good signage in the surgery, so that it is clear where people need to go.
- Be clear that appointments are always in private as this might not be obvious to someone on the spectrum and they may worry about this.
- People often find it hard having to explain to the receptionist why they want to see the doctor as it can be hard to have a private conversation, so look at ways to create more privacy at the front desk.

Processes

- Be person centred and understand what the person with autism needs in order to be as healthy as they can be.
- If someone discloses their diagnosis listen to what this means to them and do not dismiss as "only a label"
- Consider priority appointments for autistic people.
- Make sure it is clear that same day emergency appointments are available. Autistic people may not always understand what is considered an emergency and so consider ways to communicate this to autistic patients.
- Make it easy to change GPs or to try different GPs. Consider ways to explain the system for changing GPs clearly.
- Equally make sure people have a named GP and that they can actually get to see them if they want to for consistency.
- Consider contacting autistic patients proactively with results, rather than expecting autistic people to phone in.
- Consider offering a home visit, or a telephone appointment if an autistic person is too anxious to visit the surgery.
- Consider implementing a touch screen check-in system to minimise interaction between patients and reception staff.
- Consider offering double slots with the GP, if the individual might need more time to explain their health problems or if they have a complex issue.
- Tell people they can bring someone with them for support, if they want to.

Communication

- GPs should listen to family members or support staff that attend the appointment with autistic patients.
- Ask if the person has an autism passport /communication passport or a hospital passport. These documents can help explain a person's communication difficulties and other things they find difficult related to their health needs.
- Make sure written information is provided in easy read or plain English.
- Allow people more time to communicate their needs and to process what you have said to them
- Check understanding of what you have explained.

Planning and Preparation

- If someone has disclosed that they are autistic, ask them what reasonable adjustments they may need in advance or when you meet. Some people may have filled out one page profiles or passports so ask them if they have something like this they want to share. Consider adding this information to their patient records.
- Consider introducing an online system for making appointments. This can be helpful if you are able to use this to choose the doctor you want to see; time of appointment; opt for a phone consultation.
- Provide photos of the surgery online, so that patients can understand ahead of an appointment what the rooms at the surgery might look like and who they might see.



B. General council services

Premises

- When meeting face to face, find out where the individual would prefer to meet. Consider offering alternatives to a formal meeting space, such as home or a café.
- Try and offer lighting/heating/privacy/noise adjustments for the rooms you use.
- Offer different sized rooms for interviews or meetings, if required, as some autistic people find rooms too overwhelming or too claustrophobic.
- Display clear signage in council buildings, e.g. have arrow directions and consider colour coding areas in the way that hospitals do.
- Consider autism training for front of house staff, including security staff. It can be intimidating of the first person you meet on arrival is a security guard.

Processes

- Time adjustments – make appointments at a suitable time for the person.
- Anticipate that the appointment may take more time.
- Tell people they can bring someone with them to an appointment for support, if they want to.
- Tell people they can have someone with them for support on the phone as well, if they want to.
- Try to ensure consistency and continuity in the member of staff that the autistic person sees or communicates with.
- Recognise and understand support from advocates and family members. It is often crucial to the autistic person. Don't make assumptions based on age or intellect.

Communication

- Check if the person has a 'communication passport' or similar, which sets out their communication preferences.
- Autistic people often have a different communication style to non-autistic people so it's useful to understand how the person communicates.
- Offer a variety of ways the person could communicate with you such as email, text, phone or face to face.
- Ask the person if you can share information with other agencies, as this can be a good way of getting a better understanding of the person's needs. Be honest and truthful.
- Offer easy read versions and pre information for assessment, to be sent digitally or by post.

Planning and preparation

- Make sure that staff have time to plan and prepare reasonable adjustments, if needed.
- Ask the person if they have a communication passport/one page profile or if they know what reasonable adjustments they may need before the appointment.
- Make it clear who staff are, so that an autistic person is clear who they can ask help from. Staff could wear a badge or lanyard and if they have had autism training, this could be identified by a badge or lanyard too.
- Update people on what is going on, even if nothing has changed. Chasing information can be very challenging for autistic people.
- Be clear on the complaints systems and time limits for the complaints processes. Don't assume the autistic person will know this.
- Give clear instructions on how the person can get to your offices.
- Provide photos of the premises online, so that people can understand ahead of an appointment or meeting what the rooms might look like and who they might meet.



C. Employment

This section is divided into two parts, pre interview and recruitment and maintaining employment.

Pre Interview, recruitment and selection stage

Premises

- Offer an alternative venue if the person has difficulties in negotiating unknown buildings or venues.
- Check out if the person has any sensory needs that you need to be aware of such as sensitivity to light or smell.
- If they do, ask them how they usually manage this, for example by wearing special lenses or sunglasses.

Processes

- Allow the person to have an advocate or supporter attend the interview with them, if needed.
- Try different ways of advertising job roles. For example, employers could consider working with employment support providers and ask them to role match with people they support.
- Consider where you are advertising, is this accessible to people with a disability?
- Offer a variety of ways that people can apply for jobs (see below).
- Consider offering a 'work taster'. This would involve a tour of the business by the employer and supporter where what the team are working on and what goes on can be explained.
- During the work taster, the employer should check the candidates understanding of the role and also understand any support needs. Following on from this, there could be a longer work taster, for three or four hours. This could allow the applicant to work alongside a buddy or a manager so that they can see how they work. The next part of the process could be an informal interview with the employer, candidate and supporter.
- Employers could also consider a work trial instead of interview.

Communication

- Use visuals to explain things if needed and ideally have information in easy read too.
- Ensure that job descriptions are accessible and are not open to misinterpretation.
- Offer a variety of ways that the information can be shared.

- Check if the person has a passport or communication aid.
- Consider offering the person a list of questions ahead of the interview to allow them extra processing time.
- Ensure that the person has an understanding of the structure of the interview.
- Send the person a map of the building and instructions on how to find the room.
- See the list of advance preparations below and communicate this to the person.
- Keep in touch with the person throughout the process via email re time scales etc.
- Consider using bright coloured paper (or print off alternative to the white) as it can be clearer to some people with visual sensitivities.
- Do not rush the person. They may need more time to process information that you have given them.

Planning and Preparation

- Take some extra time to get to know the person and understand where they are at in terms of job readiness.
- Get information from previous practitioners involved with person such as schools, CAMHs, or colleges (if the person gives their permission for this).
- Devise accessible job adverts with easy to read information and consider using videos of the job description.
- Send the interviewee the names and photos of the interviewers. Let them know how many people there will be on the panel.
- Tell people the dress code for the interview.
- Give at least two weeks' notice of the interview date.
- Offer the applicant a chance to meet the interviewers before it takes place.

Maintaining the job

Premises

- Look into whether the person needs adjustments be made to lighting, seating, or the position of seat or desk. Don't rely on the individual to tell you, be proactive and identify things that could be an issue.
- If the person is having difficulties in the role, consider the impact that the environment may be having on them.
- Consider any changes that might be affecting the person's stress levels e.g. an increase in people and noise or change of colour scheme in the room.

Processes

- Accept that many autistic people do not always like to 'chit chat'. Explain this to other staff so that nobody takes offence.

- If person is struggling with lunch breaks give them a “process” to follow, e.g. ‘at midday, go to the break room and eat lunch. Come back to your desk at 1pm’.
- Some autistic people may benefit from being told some of the ‘unwritten rules’ of the workplace e.g. if people are paying in to a kitty for hot drinks – explain this to them.
- Offer different formats for training; face to face and online.
- Find the best way to include the person at meetings. If they have difficulties in making and finishing their contributions, find a way to support them. For example, can the agenda be shared sooner so that the person has time to think about their contribution in advance? Or can they submit their contribution in writing rather than contributing verbally?
- Managers should have a discussion with the autistic person to establish how it is best to communicate with them about work matters.
- Create a buddy/mentor system that enables the autistic person to seek out support and advice from a colleague who is not their manager.
- Many autistic people may gain comfort from doing the same thing or repeating tasks. Don’t assume they will get bored – ask the individual how they are finding the role. If a change is needed, discuss it beforehand.
- Regular formal team meetings can be clearer than informal meetings that do not have a clear agenda or notes.
- Inclusion in social situations such as lunch plans are often made informally and the autistic person may miss out. Make sure that the autistic person is invited, but let them know that it is also OK to say no. Try to keep offering inclusion for other occasions in case they change their mind.

Communication

- Make sure that you give clear instructions. Check with the individual if they prefer verbal instructions, written instructions or both.
- Offer easy read if the person needs it.
- Always check that the person understands what you are asking of them.
- Allow the person extra time to process new information.

Planning and Preparation

- Generally, try not to change an autistic person’s job if you don’t have to.
- Consider job carving i.e. look at tasks required across an organisation that might be suitable for an individual
- If a change of role is required, consider a ‘work-taster’ to help the individual understand what the new role might involve
- Use timetables and/or timelines to help an individual plan their time.
- Consider buying or developing easy read job cards.

Premises

- Check sensory needs such as lighting/ room size/noise/smell in advance of an appointment and check in with them when they arrive.
- If possible, always offer a private space to meet with the individual.
- Consider offering appointments at quieter times of the day
- Consider introducing a quieter area to sit in the waiting room. This could include having an area slightly screened off.

Processes

- Make sure the staff member meeting with an autistic person has received training in autism.
- Check if the person has a communication passport or similar.
- Offer the person the chance to come to an appointment with a supporter or advocate. Make it clear that this is allowed.
- If appointments are delayed, offer the autistic person the chance to leave and be texted or phoned nearer the time of their appointment so that they have less time to wait inside the building.
- Offer options for meeting or discussing key issues that suit the individual. Some autistic people are better on the phone. Others will be better face to face.
- Make any security staff or front of house staff aware that the person coming in for the appointment is autistic and what that might mean for communication.

Communication

- Send out as much information as possible in advance about what the process of a meeting, and what people can expect.
- Offer Easy Read information, if available, about the processes and what will happen at a meeting.
- Check that the person can verbally communicate.
- Send out a list of questions beforehand if possible, and make the person aware that this will be done.
- Allow people more time to communicate and to process what you have said to them
- Check understanding of what you have explained.

Planning and Preparation

- Provide photos of the premises online, so that people can understand ahead of an appointment or meeting what the rooms might look like and who they might meet
- GPs have told us that if an autistic person can write a draft letter, describing their needs for the GP to sign, this can ensure the content is correct. The GP is also less likely to charge for the letter as it takes less time to do. Tell the person this.
- Ask the person if they have a communication passport/one page profile or if they know what reasonable adjustments they may need before the appointment.
- Make sure that staff have time to plan and prepare reasonable adjustments, if needed.
- Update people on what is going on, even if nothing has changed. Chasing information can be very challenging for autistic people.
- Give clear instructions on how the person can get to offices.
- If people bring external evidence with them, consider this carefully. It would be good to tell people that they can bring this with them.



E) Housing

Premises

- Understand the sensory challenges that the autistic person faces. This particularly applies to noise, smells and lighting, as these are directly relevant to maintaining a tenancy.
- Consider the impact of hypersensitivity in dealing with issues such as noise nuisance.
- Understand the fears that autistic adults may have in relation to processes such as annual PAT tests/ regular maintenance and try and reduce the anxiety about such events.

Processes

- Consistent support by staff is crucial. Ideally, the person should have one designated key worker.
- Find out if there are any autism friendly initiatives in the area, so that staff can link isolated individuals to services that could help them.
- Consider avoiding automated letters about issues such as rent arrears as they can often be misunderstood and cause distress.

- Consider handling issues such as complaints more informally to stop them escalating.
- If the person is vulnerable and/or falling out with neighbors due to misunderstandings, discuss if the tenant feels that disclosing their diagnosis, with your support, might help the situation. This needs careful handling and discussion with both the tenant and their close supporters before going ahead.

Communication

- Check if the person has a communication passport, or similar.
- Talk to people that knows the individual such as family members, with permission of the autistic person, as they can often give crucial information.
- Make the tenancy rules clear about noise levels/ bins etc, as well as the more formal tenancy rules.
- Ensure that the forms record diagnosis and support needs clearly.
- Make sure that any written communication is clear, and check the person's understanding of the content, especially for important issues.
- Offer alternative ways to communicate such as emails or text messages.

Planning and Preparation

- Prepare the tenant for changes, mandatory inspections or safety tests with as much warning as possible.
- Allow a longer timeframe for tenancies to be taken up as moving is a major transition that will be particularly challenging to some autistic people.



F) Police

Premises

- Consider the best place to carry out the interview and the most suited person to do the interview.
- Consider carrying out any interviews or meetings in a person's home or somewhere they feel comfortable, rather than at the police station. This is especially important if they are the victim.
- Look at the environment. Can you find a quieter space to speak to the person if they appear anxious?
- Minimise noise such as doors slamming or people raising their voices.
- Unless absolutely necessary, do not grab hold of or touch the person without their permission. Many autistic people are hyper sensitive to touch.

- The autistic person may carry an object for security such as a piece of string, or paper. Be aware that removing it may raise anxiety and cause distress.
- Be aware of the person's personal space and don't sit or stand too close to the person.
- Equally, sometimes the autistic person may stand too close as they have an under-sensitivity to personal space and awareness of distance.

Processes

- Allow time for breaks and make sure the person has been offered food and drink if necessary.
- Consider turning down your radio so that the autistic person is not distracted by what is on the radio.
- Check if the person needs a supporter/appropriate adult.
- Some people may be afraid of uniform or very interested in uniforms/police stations etc. Be aware that these issues can be distractions.
- If known, explain the length of time of the interview will take and what will happen at the end of the session.
- Use video links or other adaptations where court procedures allow this.

Communication

- Check if the person has a communication passport, or similar.
- Check if the person has an E card or an autism alert card with the name of a support person to contact. It's worth asking, as the person may not remember to show it if they are under stress. They may also forget to say if they have a social worker or other support staff.
- Give them more time to answer questions – don't get impatient with silences. The person may not have understood the question or their processing time may be longer – listen to what they are trying to say and be prepared to adapt your communication style accordingly.
- Don't assume that alert cards are being used as an "excuse" - take the time to ask what that means if you are not sure. Everyone will be affected by autism in different ways – check out how this affects the individual in front of you.
- Provide plain English and or Easy Read information in custody.
- Look at how you communicate. Be aware of voice volume and avoid giving lots of information at once. Avoid sarcasm or too much humour as this could be misunderstood. Be aware of your body language and non-verbal communication and make sure it matches what you are saying.
- Use the person's name to attract their attention and provide reassurance.
- Keep gestures to a minimum, as they may be a distraction. If gestures are necessary, use with unambiguous statements or questions.
- Give the person an opportunity to write things down if they are struggling to communicate.
- Check the person's understanding of what they are being told and be aware that if you are using jargon/phrases that you might be understood.

- Break information down and provide written information, if possible, so that the person look at what you have told them at a later time.
- Be clear who you are and what your role is.
- Ask specific questions - not open ones.
- Explain clearly what the 'Appropriate Adult' role is and make sure people understand how they can help.
- Support questions with visual aids or ask them to draw or write down what happened.
- Be aware that some autistic people have echolalia: repeating the words of others, without understanding the meaning of the words. It is important to check understanding.
- Be aware that autistic people can struggle with eye contact,
- Be aware that some autistic people may speak in a monotone, and/or use very stilted language.

Planning and Preparation

- Check ahead of meeting with someone if they are flagged as vulnerable or autistic
- Ensure that interviews have plenty of breaks and if possible, can be carried out over a number of sessions.
- Check the communication needs of the autistic person and if they are highly verbal don't presume that they have the same level of understanding.
- Listen to parents, carers or professionals supporting the person. Ask them about the best approach to take.



G) Probation

Premises

- If meeting face to face with an autistic person consider the following:
 - The lighting of the room. Is it too bright or too dull? Check if the individual has a preference for natural light.
 - The layout of the room and seating arrangements. Some people have strong views and anxieties about where they sit in relation to a door/the other person/ windows etc. and this can impact on communication.
 - Consider the furniture. If there is a choice, would a sofa, settee or solid chairs be better? Check an individual's preference.
 - Noise levels. Sounds from corridors or adjoining rooms can be distracting. Some autistic people can be hyper sensitive to noise.

- The colour of the room. Some rooms can be too bright and distracting.
 - The use of posters and information on the walls. Too much can be distracting.
 - Is the room is tidy and free from clutter? Clutter can also be a distraction.
 - The temperature of the room. Is it too hot or too cold? Some autistic people may be over sensitive to heat.
 - Your own clothing and/or perfume. Is it distracting?
- Some autistic people may have a communication passport or one page profile that outlines some of the issues they find difficult or distracting in the environment.

Processes

- Routine can be important and it can cause anxiety if this is disrupted. It is therefore important to be on time for appointments. If you are going to be late then let the person know.
- If possible and appropriate it would be good to meet regularly on the same time and same day. This will not always be possible but explain why.

Communication

- Check if the person has a communication passport which explains the persons needs and communications styles.
- Provide plain English and or Easy Read information about processes and what has been agreed.
- Allow people more time to process verbal and written communication
- Look at how you communicate. Be aware of voice volume, avoid giving lots of information at once. Avoid sarcasm or too much humour, as this could be misunderstood. Be aware of your body language and non -verbal communication and make sure it matches what you are saying.
- Use the person's name to attract their attention and provide reassurance.
- Keep gestures to a minimum, as they may be a distraction. If gestures are necessary, use with unambiguous statements or questions.
- Give the person an opportunity to write things down if they are struggling to communicate.
- Avoid metaphorical language.
- Check understanding and be aware of when you are using jargon or phrases that might not be understood.
- Break information down and provide written information if possible so that the person can go over what you have told them at a later time.
- Be clear who you are and what your role is.
- Ask specific questions not open ones.
- Support questions with visual aids or ask them to draw or write down what happened.
- Some autistic people have echolalia: repeating the words of others without understanding the meaning of the words.

- Don't expect the individual to necessarily make eye contact during the interview
- Some autistic people may speak in a monotone, and/or use very stilted language.
- Give the person the opportunity to write down what they want to communicate to you.

Planning and Preparation

- Listen to parents or carers or paid professionals who know the individual well. Ask them about the best approach to take in terms of communication.
- Send summaries of what you agreed at each meeting to check understanding (for example; the consequences of breaching an order).

ⁱ The National Autistic Society (2018) What is autism? Retrieved from: <https://www.autism.org.uk/about/what-is/asd.aspx>