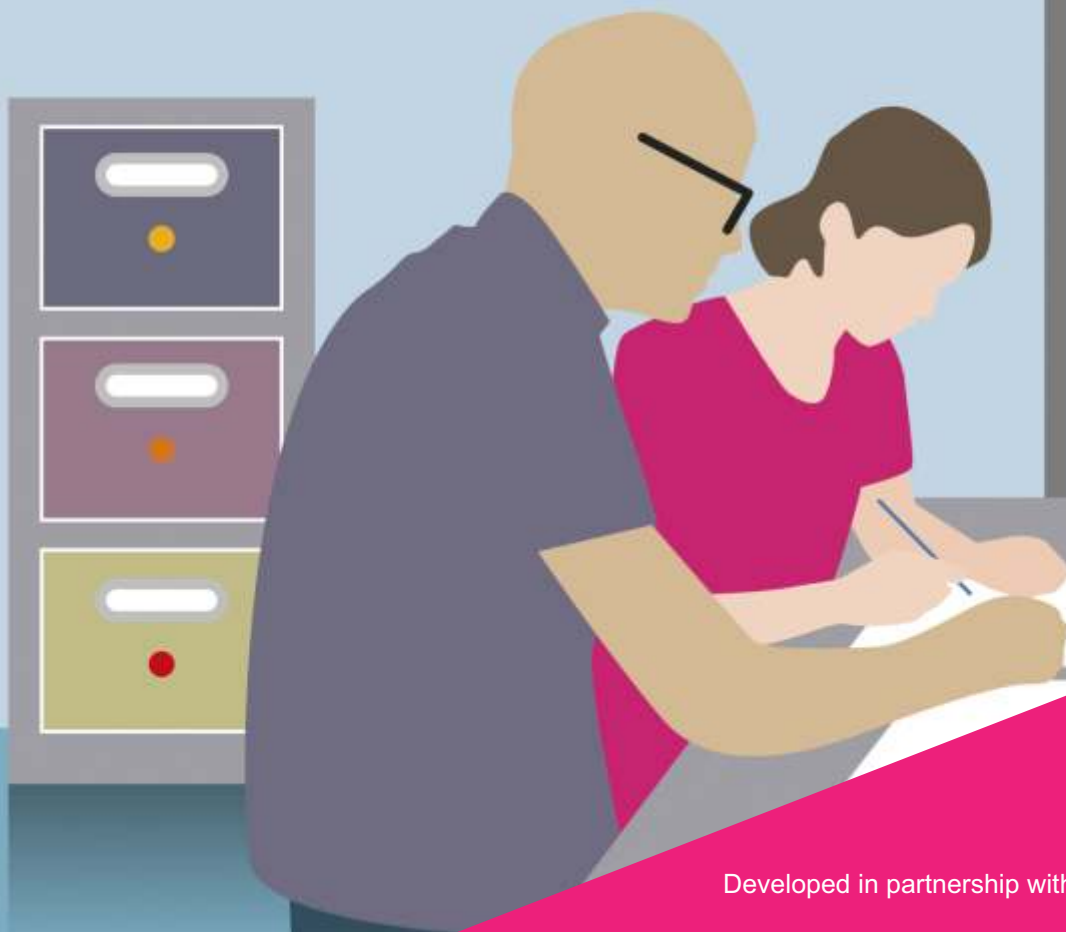


Understanding Autism - Training

Supporting Health and Social Care providers across Derbyshire to improve workforce knowledge and skills



Developed in partnership with



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Purpose of this booklet

This booklet has been written to support and help health and social care providers to improve the level of understanding of autism within their organisations.

The booklet highlights the skills levels required across each staff group as detailed in the recommendations of the Autism Statutory Guidance (2015) and provides a quick reference guide to autism training courses provided locally or online.



What is Autism?

Autism is a lifelong development disorder which affects how a person communicates with, and relates to, other people. It also affects how they make sense of the world around them – National Autistic Society

Around 1% of population are believed to be autistic, which means that there are over 700,000 people living with autism in the UK.

It is estimated there may be around 7,800 people in Derbyshire County and 2,500 people in Derby City living with autism.

Everyone on the autistic spectrum is different and unique, but all share three core social difficulties:

- social interaction
- social communication
- social imagination.

As a result people on the autistic spectrum can struggle in social situations. For example they may:

- find it hard to begin or carry on a conversation
- not understand how far to stand from somebody else
- find it difficult to make friends.

People with autism may also display restricted and/or repetitive patterns of behaviour, interests, or activities. For example they may:

- develop an overwhelming interest in something
- follow inflexible routines or rituals
- make repetitive body movements
- be hypersensitive to certain smells, tastes or sounds.

Autism is not a mental health condition; however, due to the social difficulties that people living with autism face, many may suffer with mental ill health.

Autism is not a learning disability, however, around half of people with a learning disability are also diagnosed as having autism. People with autism that do not have a learning disability may experience learning difficulties because of their autism, for example, they may find it harder to structure tasks.

Awareness of autism in society is good but understanding of the condition, and the way the condition affects communication, sensory experience and behaviour, is not as good.

Too many myths about autism still exist, including the belief autistic people lack empathy or that everyone with autism is the same.

There are neurological differences between people with autism and people who are viewed as 'normal'. Autism is an example of neurodiversity. People without autism are often referred to as 'neurotypical' by people within the autistic community. Some people with autism use these terms to explain and make sense of the neurological differences that exist between them.

Social communication

Many people living with autism have problems with communication, both verbal and non-verbal. They may find it hard to process language and could find it difficult to follow long or complex sentences, or to follow instructions. People with autism can find it difficult to interpret a person's tone of voice, their body language or their facial expression. They may also find it difficult to maintain eye contact with others.

In some cases, autistic people may have no, or very limited speech, but can understand what people say to them. They may prefer to use a different form of communication, such as symbols or sign language.

People with autism often take information very literally and they may not be able to understand sarcasm, jokes, hidden meanings, and figures of speech that people use in everyday life.

Social interaction

Many people living with autism have difficulty in understanding social rules and interactions. They find it hard to recognise and understand the emotions that other people display, and find it difficult to communicate or explain their own emotions and feelings. They may also find it difficult to manage their emotions.

People with autism may appear to behave strangely or inappropriately due to the way they express feelings, emotions or needs. They may, for example, stand too close to another person, accidentally invading their personal space.

Many people with autism prefer to spend time alone or isolate themselves from others, they may not seek comfort from other people and may not show any interest in other people's opinions or interests. This can come across as rudeness, withdrawal from, or disinterest in the people they meet, making it hard for them to make and keep friends.

Social imagination

People with autism can find it difficult to understand other people's intentions and behaviour.

They may find it difficult to imagine situations that are outside their own routine. They might find it hard to predict what will, or might happen if they are faced with change, so often limit themselves to only a small, repetitive range of activities.

Some people with autism may also have difficulty in understanding the concept of danger.

A lack of social imagination should not be confused with a lack of imagination. Many people with autism are very creative.

Sensory Differences

Many people with autism have sensory differences including heightened sensitivity (hypersensitivity) or under-sensitivity (hyposensitivity) to one or more sensory stimuli for example, sound, light, textures, smells and taste. These sensitivities can also make being touched difficult and can sometimes result in sensory overload.

People with autism may also engage in stimming (self-stimulatory behaviours), as a means of helping them to feel less anxious. Examples of stimming are flapping hands and tapping fingers.

Autism is a spectrum condition, which means that people with autism have a wide range of ways in which they may communicate and interact with people. They also have differing abilities, interests and difficulties, which can vary dependent upon the environment and stressors they are currently dealing with. Autism is sometimes called a “hidden” disability because not every person with autism presents with the same or with obvious characteristics. For example, people with autism can have good eye contact, be sociable and share normal interests. This can be particularly true in women or girls who may attempt to engage in social activity more frequently than males and may try to mask their difficulties by copying the behaviour of others. Problems may only become apparent when individuals are expected to be highly flexible and tolerate a lot of environmental demands.

It is important not to generalise or stereotype the behaviours of people with autism, otherwise we may expect and/or try to predict certain behaviours, which could have a detrimental effect on people living with autism in a number of different ways.

Remember that:

'If you have met one person with autism you have met one person with autism'



Statutory requirements regarding training and skills

The Government's vision for transforming the lives and outcomes for adults living with autism:

'All adults with autism are able to live fulfilling and rewarding lives within a society that accepts and understands them. They can get a diagnosis and access support if they need it, and they can depend on mainstream services to treat them fairly as individuals, helping them make the most of their talents.'

To achieve this, the Department of Health published 'Fulfilling and Rewarding Lives' a strategy for adults with autism in England (2010), publishing an update strategy 'Think Autism' in 2014. One of the main focuses of the strategy is about improving training for public service staff around increasing awareness and understanding of autism. The strategy states:

'If frontline staff know more about autism, they will be better able to recognise the condition and respond effectively when they are working with adults with autism.'

Think Autism highlighted the importance of staff in health and social care services understanding that a person has autism, and how this affects them.

To ensure local implementation of the national strategy objectives statutory guidance was published by the Department of Health in 2010 and refreshed in March 2015. The statutory guidance details the training requirements that each Local Authority, NHS body and NHS Foundation Trust should seek to ensure that:

- Autism awareness training is included within general equality and diversity training programmes for all staff working in health and care.
- All autism awareness training enables staff to identify signs of autism, and understand how to make reasonable adjustments in their behaviour, communication and services for people who have a diagnosis of autism or who display these characteristics.
- There is a wide range of local autism training that meets the National Institute for Care Clinical Excellence (NICE) guidelines for those staff who are likely to have contact with adults with autism.
- The posts that are highly likely to include working with adults with autism (for example personal assistants, occupational therapists, residential care workers, frontline health staff including all GP's and psychiatrists) have knowledge and skills to:
 - Use appropriate communication skills when supporting a person with autism
 - Support families and friends and make the best use of their expert knowledge of the person.
 - Recognise when a person with autism is stressed and/or anxious and support them.
 - Recognise sensory needs and differences of a person with autism and support them.
 - Support the development of social interaction skills.
 - Provide support with transitions and significant life events.
 - Understand the issues which arise from people who have both mental ill health and autism.
 - Support people with autism with gaining and maintain employment (where appropriate).

- Those in posts who make decisions about the lives of adults with autism (including, for example, psychiatrists, those conducting needs assessments) also have knowledge and skills in the areas listed above as well as a good understanding of:
 - How autism may present across lifespan and levels of ability, and are defined and diagnosed, and the relevant pathways and screening tools.
 - The common difficulties faced by individuals on the spectrum and their families/carers, including social and economic hardship.
 - Developmental trajectory of autism.
 - The impact of autism on personal, social, education and occupational functioning, and interaction with the social and physical environment.
 - Current good practice guidelines (e.g. NICE Quality standard) and local diagnostic and care pathways.
 - Available guidance for good practice in post-diagnostic support and intervention.
- Both general awareness and specialist autism training is provided on an on-going basis and that new staff or staff whose roles change are given the opportunity to update their autism training and knowledge
- There is recognition that women with autism may be missed and misdiagnosed and they may be better able to mask their social difficulties. There can also be a perception that autism is something that only men have and this can impact on women not being referred for diagnosis. Improved awareness and training can overcome this
- There is involvement of adults with autism, their families and carers and autism representative groups when commissioning or planning training. This may be in terms of inviting them to comment or contribute to training materials, or asking them to talk to staff about autism and how it affects them, or to provide or deliver the training. For example they could help put together a multi-agency plan with regards to autism training for staff.

Where to get further information

The courses contained on this list have not been quality assured and information was correct at the time of collation.

General Information regarding autism training and learning resources

Skills for Health

Learning resources and guides

Website: www.skillsforhealth.org.uk/resources/service-area/20-autism

Skills for Care

Guidance regarding skills required, resources and on-line guides

Website: www.skillsforcare.org.uk/Topics/Autism/Autism.aspx

Autism Alliance

- Network of autism charities
- Links to learning resources and research

Website: <http://www.autism-alliance.org.uk>



Royal Colleges & National bodies

Royal College of General Practitioners

- Awareness raising and level 1
- On line information pack and support tools

Website: www.rcgp.org.uk

Royal College of Nursing

- Awareness raising and level 1
- On line training courses and support tools

Website: www.rcni.com

Royal College of Psychiatrists

- Level 1 and Level 2
- One-day training course - autism spectrum disorders

Website: www.rcpsych.ac.uk



British Association of Social Workers

- Level 2
- On line information pack

Website: www.basw.co.uk

British Institute of Learning Disabilities

- Awareness raising, level 1 and level 2
- One day training courses can be delivered alongside tailored courses

Contact tel: 0121 4156970

Email: learning@bild.org.uk

British Psychological Society

- Level 1 and Level 2
- E-learning modules

Website: www.bps.org.uk/events/e-learning/e-learning

Local Higher Education Providers

Sheffield Hallam University

- Level 2
- MA/PgDip/PgCert Autism Spectrum
- PgCert Autism & Asperger's Syndrome

Website: www.shu.ac.uk/

Open University

- Level 2
- Understanding the autistic spectrum

Website: www.open.ac.uk

Open College

- Level 1 / 2
- Autism Awareness Course
- Level 1 / 2
- Asperger's course

Website: www.opencollege.co.uk

Local Providers of Bespoke Autism Training Courses

Autism East Midlands

- Awareness raising, Level 1 and Level 2

Website: www.autismeastmidlands.org.uk/learning-development/corporate-training/

Autism Plus

- Awareness raising, Level 1 and Level 2

Website: www.autismplus.org/training/bespoke-training-packages

Derbyshire Autism Group

- Awareness raising, Level 1 and Level 2

Website: www.derbyshireautismservices.org

Derbyshire Healthcare NHS FT

- Level 1 and Level 2

Website: <http://www.derbyshirehealthcareft.nhs.uk>

On Line Free Access Support Packs

Autism Connect

- Funded by Department of Health. Provides a range of resources including fact sheets and on-line training

Website: www.autism-connect.org.uk

Social Care Institute for Excellence

- Support Guides and Information packs
- Films raising awareness of issues faced by people living with autism

Website: www.scie.org.uk

British Association of Social Workers

- On line information pack

Website: www.basw.co.uk

National Autistic Society

- Support guidance, information sheets and packs
- Films raising awareness of issues faced by people living with autism

Website: www.autism.org.uk

Royal College of Nurses

- Guide providing information on autism illustrated by case studies
- Use of simple assessment tools

Website: www.rcni.com

Royal College of General Practitioners

- Autism 'toolkit' to support primary care professionals

Website: www.rcgp.org.uk

Royal College of Psychiatrists

- A range of information guides suitable for service user, carers and professionals

Website: www.rcpsych.ac.uk

Open University

- Interactive quiz – “What do you really know about autism?”

Website: www.open.edu/openlearn/body-mind/health/health-studies/autism-quiz

Research Autism

- Information sheets and links to research papers

Website: www.researchautism.net/





Top tips to help you communicate with someone living with autism

- 1) **Be clear and precise with your language; using plain English**
 - do not rely on the person to pick up on the meaning of your questions and body language
 - avoid using open questions, words with double meaning and humour that could be misunderstood
- 2) **Give the person enough time to process and understand the information you are sharing**
- 3) **Ask them what help they need**
- 4) **Explain at every stage what you are about to do, what will happen next and when**
- 5) **Be consistent in your actions and do what you say you will do**
- 6) **Don't be surprised if there is lack of eye contact, unusual body language or if inappropriate language is used**
- 7) **Respect repetitive behaviours; they might be someone's coping mechanism**
- 8) **Think about the environment and be aware that some things cause sensory overload (for example, light, movement, sounds, smell and touch)**
- 9) **Back things up in writing**
- 10) **Always consider the person's behaviour in terms of his or her autism, even if it becomes challenging**

- Derbyshire County Council: www.derbyshire.gov.uk/adultswithautism
- National Autistic Society: www.autism.org.uk
- Derbyshire Autism Services: www.derbyshireautismservices.org
- NHS Choices: www.nhs.uk/conditions/Autistic-spectrum-disorder

The Adult Care Information Promise, a **FACT** you can rely on.

We promise to provide you with:



Free information
Accurate information
Clear information
Trustworthy information

If you think we have broken our **FACT** promise, please let us know so we can make improvements.