



**Ambitious  
about Autism**

# **Job interview preparation support: a guide for careers professionals working with autistic young people**



## Why can job interviews be challenging for autistic people?

Job interviews often present more barriers to autistic candidates than neurotypical candidates. Whilst every autistic person is different and may experience their own unique challenges, here are some commonly acknowledged difficulties during interviews:

- **Interpreting questions:** difficulty with vague, complex, or multi-part questions.
- **Non-verbal cues:** challenges reading eye contact, facial expressions, or tone.
- **Social cues:** uncertainty with unwritten rules like greetings or small talk.
- **Verbal communication:** trouble organising thoughts or gauging detail.
- **Sensory sensitivities:** discomfort from light, noise, smells, or textures.
- **Anxiety management:** high stress affecting communication and performance.
- **Executive function:** issues with planning, time, or remembering essentials.

When careers professionals work with jobseekers and interview candidates, they get to know them and understand their strengths, challenges, skills and lived experiences, and so they become well-placed to help them thrive at interviews.

## What is this document?

The document covers typical areas for interview preparation and offers practical strategies to help overcome the challenges often faced by autistic people at interview.

During a meeting dedicated to job interview preparation, the autistic candidate and career professional should work together, read the prompts in this guide and use the space provided to write answers/make notes. The aim is to break down the question and understand what the employer is looking for, as well as build candidate confidence and make all necessary plans in advance. Please note, it may be beneficial to offer additional sessions on this topic to avoid overwhelm.

“

**I don't think there's any part of looking for work I find more stressful than the interview. They involve so many unknowns...all this ambiguity creates a level of anxiety that can become overwhelming.”**

K, autistic young person

## Tips for professionals ahead of interview preparation meetings:



- Send this guide in advance of your meeting so participants can prepare for the questions you'll be asking.
- Ensure the room is quiet and calm to conduct the meeting.
- Use clear and direct language when explaining how the session will work and when providing interview advice.
- Supply fidget devices or invite the interviewee to bring their own.
- Don't rush for answers, schedule regular breaks throughout the session and offer multiple meetings to cover interview techniques.

### Top tip

Consider using different aids to support learning, such as flipchart paper or repetitions, depending on the preferences of the candidate.



**Every autistic person is different, so the support you offer needs to start with the individual in front of you – there's no one-size-fits-all approach. Get to know the person you're working with: their strengths, challenges, interests, and lived experiences. Let that shape how you support them."**

K, autistic young person

## Interview details

It is often beneficial for autistic interviewees to receive interview details in writing. This will include what time the interview will start and finish, who the interviewers are and the location of the interview. It will be helpful if photos are included, such as photos of the interviewers and photos of the building and room where the interview will take place. If the interviewee would find this helpful and has not received this, ask them if they would like your help in requesting this.

**Company name**

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**Job role**

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**Interviewer name(s)**

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**Location of interview**

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**Date**

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**Time**

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**The following could be areas of ambiguity for autistic candidates. Discuss each and make notes:**

**Likely level of formality**

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**Appropriate dress**

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““

**Social cues are filtered through a screen – not missing entirely, but more fragmented and harder to interpret. Intonation doesn't always come through clearly, body language is often partially obscured, and eye contact is ambiguous when you're looking at a camera rather than a face.”**

K, autistic young person

## Travel/tech: (in-person or remote)

Discuss the type of interview and how the candidate needs to prepare – each type of interview will present its own challenges which should be explored.

### In-person interview

- How will they travel to the interview?  
Plan the journey and time it'll take and identify any potential problems that could arise.

### Online interview

- Can they access the software for the video call?
- How will they resolve any IT issues?

### Notes

### Top tip

Identify sensory triggers that may be present in the interview environment (e.g., lighting, noise) – these will vary between candidates.



## Research

### The company

(What product or service does the company provide?  
What values do they have?)

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### The job

(What are the main responsibilities?  
What skills are they looking for?)

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### Detail any interview tasks and explore how the candidate will complete them:

What is challenging them and is there anything you can support them with?

## Disclosure and reasonable adjustments

Disclosure is when a candidate informs the employer that they require adjustments. The candidate does not need to disclose the nature of their disability, and it is entirely their choice whether to share this information. If the candidate chooses to disclose at the interview stage, they can request that adjustments be put in place.



Examples of adjustments include:

- providing interview questions in advance
- allowing extra time to complete tasks or answer interview questions
- sharing an interview agenda
- and/or ensuring a quiet space is available for the candidate to use before or after the interview.

Further adjustment ideas can be researched with the candidate.

**List any adjustments that the candidate would like and support them to make these requests.**

“

**Being forced to choose between sharing something deeply personal or going without the support I need adds yet another layer of pressure to an already difficult and overwhelming experience.”**

K, autistic young person

## Interview questions



By getting the interview questions in advance, autistic candidates can process questions and prepare their answers. This can reduce anxiety. If the candidate has had questions sent to them, these can be practised.

Alternatively, below are a few commonly asked interview questions. Help the candidate know what the employer is trying to get from the question and support them to prepare answers.

**Tell me a bit about yourself.**

Answer:

**Why do you want this job?**

Answer:

**What are your strengths?**

Answer:

**What are your weaknesses?**

Answer:

## STAR Method



Here is an explanation of the STAR method which you can use in careers sessions:

In an interview you might be asked to describe a time you have used a skill — this is called a competency-based question. The employer wants to hear a real example that shows how you've used a skill in the past. The STAR method is a helpful way to make your answer clear and structured. As you go through each letter of the acronym STAR, you'll tell a short story about something you've done to show the employer you have the skill they're looking for.

### Example question:

**“Can you tell me about a time you worked as part of a team?”**

#### Situation

The beginning of the story - What was happening? Where were you? Who was involved?

**“In college, I worked on a group presentation about climate change with fellow students.”**

#### Task

What did you need to do? What was the goal or problem to fix?

**“We clearly defined each person’s responsibilities – my responsibility was to help gather data on recent extreme weather and support with the presentation. Our goal was to research and present clear, engaging information.”**

#### Action

What did you do? What steps did you take?

**“I found data from reliable sources, wrote short summaries, and presented with my group with confidence.”**

#### Result

The end of the story - What happened in the end? What changed because of what you did?

**“The presentation was clear and on time. Our teacher gave us good feedback. I felt proud that I helped the group stay on track and that my research was useful.”**

Pick a skill from the job description and use the STAR method to structure your answer:

## Prepare some questions for the interviewer

1

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2

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3

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## Planning the day checklist

Using a checklist increases predictability for the candidate. Discuss each topic below with the candidate and ensure they have the document on interview day to tick off.

Ensured there is nothing else planned on day of interview to avoid overwhelm.

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Planned a route to the interview, how they will travel and how long it will take.

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Completed a trial run, if needed.

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Planned an appropriate interview outfit.

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Created a wellbeing plan – participant knows how to look after themselves before and after interview i.e. food/drink, good sleep, stress management techniques.

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Packed their bag – interview notes and any forms of ID required.

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Notes

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## Next steps

- Set expectations for what will happen after the interview i.e. follow-up emails, managing uncertainty.
- Share this document with the participant to review in their own time.
- Confirm any 'next steps' or agreed actions with the autistic young person.

“

**Beyond everything we covered in our sessions, it was my adviser's kind and open-minded approach that made the biggest difference”**

K, autistic young person

# We are Ambitious about Autism

Ambitious about Autism is the national charity standing with autistic children and young people.

We believe every autistic child and young person has the right to be themselves and realise their ambitions.

We started as one school and have become a movement for change. We champion rights, campaign for change and create opportunities.

## Contact us

The Pears National Centre for Autism Education  
Woodside Avenue, London N10 3JA

☎ 020 8815 5444

✉ [info@ambitiousaboutautism.org.uk](mailto:info@ambitiousaboutautism.org.uk)

🌐 [ambitiousaboutautism.org.uk](http://ambitiousaboutautism.org.uk)

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