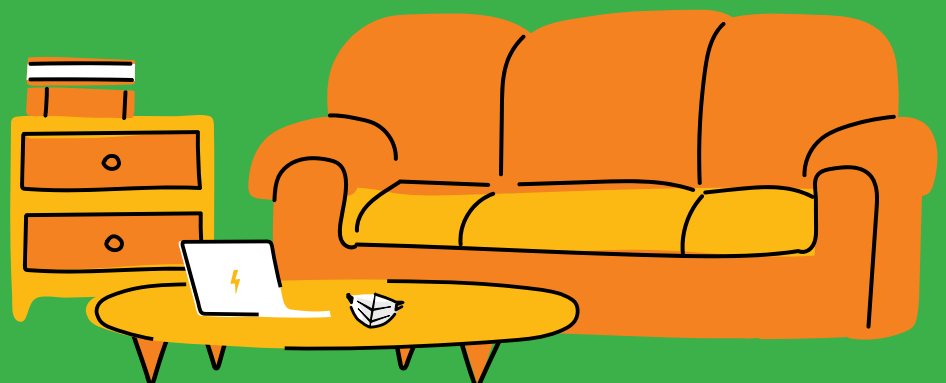




**Ambitious
about Autism**

Coronavirus and lockdown

The impact on autistic children
and young people



Before the COVID-19 pandemic, autistic children and young people and their families were among the most isolated and vulnerable in society. Now their lives have been turned upside down. Our research reveals how their already fragile support networks have been further stripped away during lockdown.

The fall-out from this pandemic will be long-lasting: affecting autistic children and young people's health, wellbeing, happiness and futures. Decision-makers must take action to protect them and ensure they can recover from this costly crisis.

“

Without support then for me, and for a lot of people, it's rock bottom. ”

Autistic young person

“

I feel overwhelmed as a parent. I feel I have to be okay for my son, but sometimes I don't feel okay. I am scared for the future. ”

Parent



Our research

We ran a survey between August – September 2020 that was completed by over 2000 autistic children and young people and their parents and carers from across the UK. 383 autistic young people filled in the survey and 1782 filled in the survey about an autistic child or young person.



“

The virus situation has caused a lot of extra anxiety, particularly with the face masks. It's extremely difficult to go to shops because even though [you're] exempt, you feel people will judge and it is very uncomfortable. ”

Autistic young person

Key findings

Mental health and wellbeing is deteriorating



I'm being forced to go back to bad coping mechanisms which are unhealthy and dangerous. ”

Autistic young person



Before Coronavirus

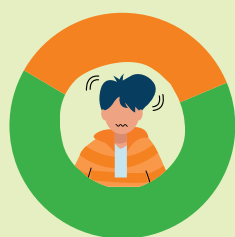
four in five

autistic children and young people were experiencing mental health issues.



Following the outbreak of the pandemic,

63%

 of autistic young people say their mental health is worse.

Describing how they felt during this period, **three quarters** said they felt anxious.



Just **over half** said they felt frustrated, stressed and overwhelmed.



Three quarters

think that they will need ongoing support for anxiety or mental health issues following the pandemic.



My daughter has become very reclusive. She hates going out, seeing people, getting dressed. We struggle just to get her into the garden. ”

Parent

Over **two thirds**

found the change in routine most difficult during the pandemic and

half feared the sense of the unknown.



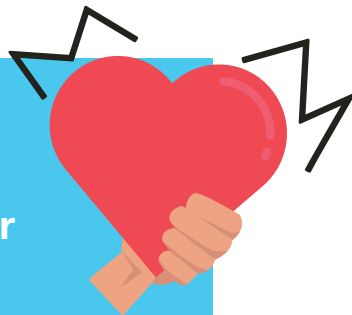
Action is needed

Young people and parents tell us their access to vital mental health services during the pandemic has been dangerously disrupted. Autistic young people are reaching crisis point and are not getting the help and support they need.



This could be a matter of life or death. ”

Autistic young person



My 11-year-old autistic daughter tried to take her own life twice in May. She spent nine weeks in a general hospital because there was nowhere else for her to go. Specialist units were closed due to COVID-19. ”

Parent



Autism is not a mental health condition, but many autistic children and young people experience mental health issues. They need timely support delivered by professionals who understand autism and the particular needs of autistic people.

Young people also tell us they want more access to online support, such as online peer groups where they can build a supportive network to cope with the current uncertainty and disruption in their lives.



Being able to have therapy via Zoom or other online support services will help. ”

Autistic young person



Medical services have been cancelled, routines lost, there are things we can't do and people we can't see anymore. For me this has caused trouble with an eating disorder, obsessive compulsive disorder – almost agoraphobia. ”

Young autistic person



Support has been withdrawn

Autistic children and young people were accessing some support before Coronavirus, with **more than half (58%)** receiving specialist support in education and **one fifth** receiving mental health support.

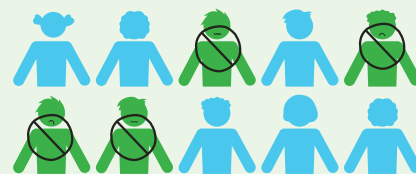


However **almost 80%** reported that this support had reduced or stopped following Coronavirus.



He has had no educational support since the lockdown. He's had no emotional support. We've been completely on our own.”

Parent



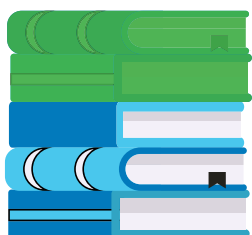
Four in ten

had their support stopped during lockdown.

Two thirds

of people did not receive any support during lockdown.

Action is needed



Three fifths

of our survey respondents want educational support to help transition back to life before lockdown.



Almost **half** want mental health support.

One third want local support groups.

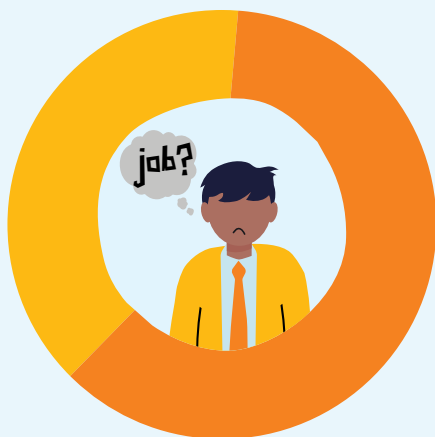


He's lost all connection with day services, clubs and respite. My son has routine. But his world has been turned upside down.”

Parent

This has been a turbulent, disruptive year. The changes to routine and normal life have been incredibly hard for autistic children and young people to manage. They and their families need the right support from education, social care and mental health services to be able to overcome setbacks and return to a position where they can achieve their potential.

Achieving ambitions will be harder



65% of autistic young people and those who support them believe it will be harder for them to find a job following Coronavirus.

Action is needed

Autistic young people were already among the most disadvantaged when it comes to getting on the job ladder, with only **16% of autistic people in full time employment**. The post COVID-19 job market will be even tougher.

Autistic people need the opportunity to prove themselves in the workplace with access to opportunities in supportive and autism-confident environments. We need decision-makers to fund specialist careers advice and employability programmes for autistic young people, such as supported internships, traineeships and apprenticeships.

“

I've been very scared to disclose my autism. I have been made redundant and I feel my chances of competing against neurotypical peers will be smaller, with so little job openings available.”

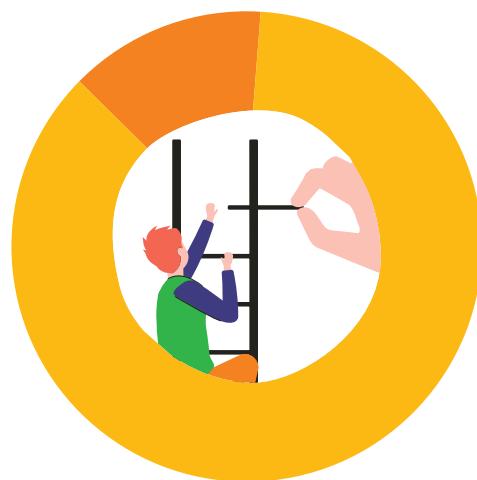
Autistic young person



“

He was struggling with university pressures before and now is struggling to find work. I worry that he will be in long term unemployment due to his lack of self-confidence and yet he is so intelligent and a very hard worker.”

Parent



Without the right support when moving from education to employment, autistic young people face falling off a cliff edge and out of the job market altogether.

We are Ambitious about Autism

Ambitious about Autism is the national charity for children and young people with autism.

We provide services, raise awareness and understanding, and campaign for social and policy change. Through TreeHouse School, The Rise School and Ambitious College, we offer specialist education and support.

Our ambition is to make the ordinary possible for more children and young people with autism.

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