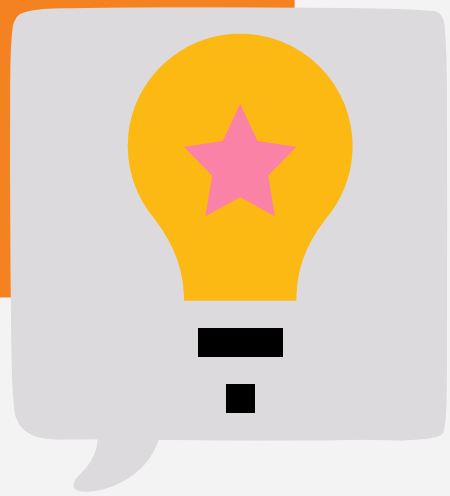
Ambitious about Autism

Top tips for communicating effectively with autistic people



Top tips

1 Don't use jargon

Complicated words might be more difficult for autistic people to understand. Try to avoid using metaphors or abstract expressions where the meaning could be taken literally.

Always use simple straightforward language if you can. If you do use a technical term or a difficult word, explain its meaning straight away.

For example, instead of using the jargon word

'brainstorm'

say:

'come up with ideas'.

2 Don't put more than one piece of information in one sentence

Always aim to use simple short sentences. If a sentence is too long or complicated, it may be difficult for autistic people to understand all the information it contains. Try breaking up long sentences to make them easier to understand.

For example, instead of:

"The webinar will be held every Thursday at 11am and at a later time at 3pm, except Thursday 22 April."

say:

"The webinar will be held every Thursday at 11am and 3pm. There will not be a webinar on Thursday 22 April."

3 Be specific

Providing too much information might be overwhelming for autistic people.

Try to stay short and specific, avoiding unnecessary information and waffle. Focus on what people actually need to know and why.

For example, instead of:

‘asap’

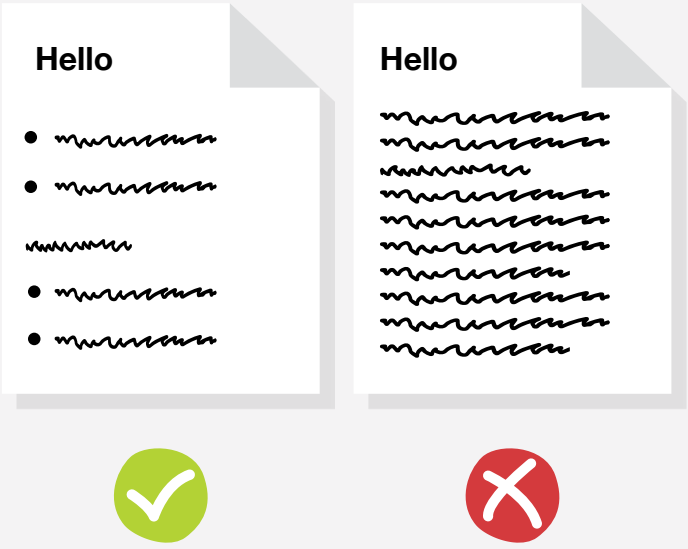
say:

“as soon as possible.”

4 Don’t use acronyms or abbreviations

Be careful when using acronyms or abbreviations. Do not assume that autistic people will know their meaning.

Always say or write acronyms out in full so listeners and readers can understand them.



5 Organise text with bullet points, subheadings, and spaces

Long chunks of text might make it difficult for autistic people to pick out and remember key information. Try to use bullet points, and subheadings to break up text and organise information.

Do not attempt to fit too much information on to one page. Use spaces between lines and paragraphs to make the text look less intimidating and easier to read.

6 Use accessible fonts and colours

Complicated fonts might be confusing for autistic readers. Always use simple, plain fonts like 'Arial' in a size that is clear and easy to read. For example, a minimum font size of 12-14 should be used.

Use colour to make key bits of text stand out. Using toned backgrounds in pastel colours can help reduce glare and make the text easier to read. Think about using colour coding to help autistic people navigate the text and keep track of different chapters or sections. When using colour, make sure it doesn't make the words harder to read.

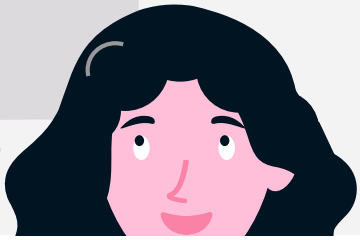
For example, instead of:

"How did you find the webinar?"

ask:

"How would you rate the webinar?

- **Very good**
- **Good**
- **Poor**
- **Very poor"**



7 Don't use open-ended questions

Avoid asking open-ended questions as it can be difficult for autistic people to answer them. Only ask the most necessary questions and keep them short and specific. It is also a good idea to structure questions with options or choices.

When asking questions in a conversation, allow time for autistic people to process information. Be patient and don't expect an immediate reply.

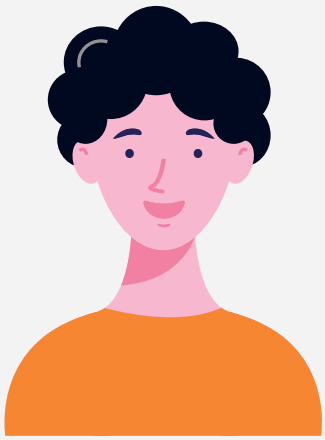
For example, if using an image of a clockface to show that an event is happening at 2pm, make sure the image shows the correct time.

8 Use simple images to support text or presentations

Use simple and specific images alongside text to help give autistic readers a good idea of what the text is about. Pictures can also make text look less intimidating and can help the reader if the text is difficult, or some words cannot be understood.

Make sure to use images that reflect the meaning of the text. Using symbols, such as arrows, ticks and crosses can help communicate the meaning of an image.

Using images in presentations or handouts can also help autistic people keep track of the things that are being discussed. Have a look at the easy read guide to the NHS Long Term Plan to see how words and pictures can be used together effectively.



9 Focus on words not gestures

Facial expressions, body language and gestures can all be hard for an autistic person to interpret. They may also struggle to make eye contact. When speaking to an autistic person try not to rely on these gestures and focus instead on words.

When using videos, use calm backgrounds and remove background noise which could be distracting for autistic viewers. Use subtitles to keep the focus on what is being said.

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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