



Self-Advocacy Toolkit for Autistic Young People

A toolkit designed by autistic
young people for autistic young
people to support self-advocacy



The toolkit starts by focusing on you and works its way through different areas of your life to consider for self-advocating, with a tool to use for in each section.

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Self-advocacy is being able to communicate your needs and desires. Self-advocacy skills are important because they provide a person with the tools to help them to feel empowered to ask for what they need in any situation.

There are many different ways to self-advocate, and this is going to be unique to you: your ambitions, goals, strengths and differences are yours. Just as no two people are alike, this is also applicable in this case. In no particular order, below are some general points to consider when thinking about advocating for yourself. These points are applicable to all the sections in the toolkit and referring to these general guidelines as you work through each section is a method to effectively self-advocate:



1. Prioritise your needs

The reason why you are advocating for yourself is so that you are able to communicate your needs and desires. It is okay to express these to others, and prioritising yourself can feel empowering and motivating.



2. Prepare and plan

It can be helpful to prepare and plan as best as you can so that you don't feel nervous and/or say the wrong thing. You may find it useful to think about your ideas beforehand before what your next steps are. One idea could be to practice running through your points and message which can help you feel more confident.



3. Be creative

It can be helpful to be creative, so you stand out and express your ideas, thoughts and feelings in a way that suits you. On some days we may feel more creative than others, which is completely understandable. Finding inspiration from a bit of research or thinking about the specifics of what you wish to communicate might help find it again. Your imagination knows no limits!



4. Find your voice

Being independent and speaking up for yourself can be a very empowering and helpful skill. It is vital that your voice is heard when advocating for yourself; without your voice, your ambitions, needs and desires may not be accurate to what you want and need. It can take some time to confidently express yourself.



5. Know your rights and information

Doing a little research to know what you are entitled to, what support you should be getting and what to do if you are not happy with the outcome can be really helpful. It can be helpful to know what your rights are, as it can help specify what you want, help you follow procedures and effectively navigate the different ways to access support. It can also help you to make informed decisions and therefore plan out your next steps and actions.



6. Follow up and request confirmation

If you feel like it would be helpful to get a little extra context or information, it doesn't hurt to follow up and request confirmation from the person, services or provisions you are communicating with. It can also help to confirm that the person you are self-advocating to has understood what you mean.



7. Keep written records of all documents and correspondence

Written records, documents and having communication logs or chains of emails organised and kept in a safe space is a good way of remembering what you have to do, how to do it and what you have already done. It is your evidence to clear up any misunderstanding between you and someone else or a service. It is also a good point of reference should you ever feel confused.



8. Look after your wellbeing

Remember to look after your wellbeing. Your mental health is important and whilst it can be tricky to identify when we are going through any periods of heightened stress and/or anxiety, looking after your wellbeing is a helpful way to check in with yourself, identify how you feel and remain calm when self-advocating.



What is self-advocacy?

Self-advocacy can seem like a daunting prospect, especially at times of transition such as leaving school, leaving home or going into employment. It is completely natural to be worried at this time of your life. However, we hope that as you work through the different sections of the toolkit, created by the AET's [Autistic Young Experts Panel](#), we have set out some points to reflect upon and provided some tools to support you on your journey.

The toolkit has been designed in sections with accompanying tools for you to use. You are more than welcome to feel inspired by these ideas to create your own versions!



There are nine different tools included in the toolkit:

Tool 1

One Page Profile

The One Page Profile is a tool that can be used to highlight your individuality and what makes you, you! It maps out different aspects of you, your likes, dislikes, goals, ambitions, what is important to you and more.

Tool 2

My Unique Sensory Differences Map

The My Unique Sensory Differences Map tool provides a way to map out any sensory sensitivities of all kinds that are unique to you and the way in which you experience the world around you.

Tool 3

Adjustments I Can Make Independently

The Adjustments I Can Make Independently tool is designed to help you to start thinking about the different types of adjustments you can do for yourself, as well as the times when you cannot change your environment to adjust to your needs.

Tool 4

Creating an Enabling Environment

The Creating an Enabling Environment tool is a mapping and preparation tool to help you think about the different spaces you encounter and interact with in three main areas throughout your life: home, school and work.

Tool 5

My Helpful Solutions for Regulating Distress

The My Helpful Solutions for Regulating Distress tool is a tool to identify potential problems that may happen which cause you to feel worried, anxious or overwhelmed. For example, you may find using public transport particularly overwhelming for many different reasons.

Tool 6

My Support Network

The My Support Network tool is a tool to highlight different types of support you can access, what kind of support they might offer, when the support is available and how to contact and access it. The tool is designed as a method to collate your research and support options based on the needs and adjustments you may require as identified in the previous tools.

Tool 7

Talking about My Autism

The Talking about My Autism tool is a planning and reflective communication tool so you can prepare and think about the way you want to explain your autism to friends, family, partners, work colleagues and anyone else you want to have this conversation with. This is different to Tool 8 – Disclosing to Professionals in that it is less formal as these conversations tend to be more relaxed in nature.

Tool 8

Disclosing to Professionals

The Disclosing to Professionals tool is a planning and reflective communication tool to help you think about the way you want to explain your autism to professionals and prepare for this – for example, disclosing to your school, university or employer.

Tool 9

My Goals and Ambitions

The My Goals and Ambitions tool is a tool designed to help you map out what your personal targets, goals and ambitions are. It is designed so that you can record your initial thoughts and feelings on targets that are meaningful to you and to see how far you have progressed down your action list.

One of the most important things is to understand what being autistic means for you. Every person is different; each and every one of us have different life experiences, personalities, ambitions and dreams.

The toolkit does not have to be completed in order. Please feel free to work through each section in the order that you wish, although if the numbered order is how you wish to work through it is absolutely okay to do so!

There is no expectation about how long it should take to complete. It is important to remember that advocating for yourself is as unique to you as is your autism. You may feel like some sections of the toolkit may take some extra time to think about and reflect on before making decisions.

Once you have considered what kind of support is helpful to you, you can then communicate these needs to others such as family members, friends, education staff or health and social care professionals.

We have also worked in some ideas, hints and tips to get you started on thinking about what information – and how communicating this information – best works for you.



Throughout this guide to self-advocacy, we aim to support you in four key areas:



Truly understanding yourself in these four areas can help you to advocate for yourself in many areas of your life and well into the future. It is important to remember that as we change and grow throughout our lives, so too may our preferences, strengths and personalities. It can be helpful to revisit the first section later to update any information you have about yourself to better reflect who you are today.

What do the Autistic Young Experts say about being autistic?

Every autistic person is unique, with unique strengths, differences and needs. We champion a world where being different is something to be celebrated and where all autistic learners experience a positive education that supports their wellbeing.

Watch our video below to see how we talk about autism – we hope that it will help inspire you as you reflect on advocating for yourself!

Video

[Why Autism is a Difference not a Deficit](#)



Top tips

Whether you have recently discovered you are autistic or have known for a while, some of the language used to describe the experiences of autistic people can seem complex or confusing.

To help with this, terms in **bold** are included in the glossary at the end of the toolkit.

In this section we want you to focus on yourself and to work on understanding what you are good at, what you like doing, and when you might need help.

Autistic Young Experts Alice and Jessica talk about their positives of being autistic and how their ways of thinking bring a fresh perspective to the world in this video below:

Video

[Positives of Being Autistic](#)



When advocating for yourself, having a strong understanding of your strengths and what people appreciate about you can help you remain resilient and may act as a helpful reminder of all you are capable of.

There is no shame in asking for help and support. In having the strength to go to others and advocate for your needs, you will hopefully continue to grow in confidence!

Reminding yourself of **your likes and dislikes, what you want to achieve and how you want to achieve this** can help to focus your mind when faced with a difficult or challenging situation. Being prepared in these situations can be a big help.

Top tips

It is also important to identify the strategies and support that have worked well for you in the past. Letting others know about these will allow them to support you in ways that you know work best for you.

There are many different types of tools that you can use to record all of this information to use when advocating for yourself. You could do some research online on different types of access statements or accessibility documents that you could use yourself, or even be inspired to make your own.

For this section, we will focus on using a **one page profile**.

Top tips

There are many tools that you can use to record all of this information to use when advocating for yourself. These can include an access document (sometimes called an “access rider”) or statement that you have created yourself.

Try out researching different types of access documents for a better idea as to what layout and information you feel most comfortable with!

When creating a one page profile you consider what people appreciate about you, what is important to you and ways you prefer to be supported. These are key things to remember when you are advocating for yourself. We are going to think about these areas and so you can create a one page profile for you to utilise if you wish to. You don't have to use it, but it can be a helpful resource to keep for yourself as something you can refer to and update as things about you change throughout your life.

Other areas to focus on could be:

- **Hyper** (high) or **hypo** (low) **sensitivity** to sensory output.
- **Social interaction.**
- **Communication** style.
- Behaviour and habits.

Understanding how many of these areas can lead to you feeling overwhelmed will allow you to have more control over your daily life. Remember that these aspects can all vary depending on the environment or setting you're in and your responses can change from day to day, even hour to hour.

You should also consider your long-term and short-term goals when considering your support needs and what can help you achieve them. If you're having trouble articulating any of this you can always ask family, friends, or staff who know you well for help as well as other professionals who have a good understanding of autism.

? What is it?

The One Page Profile is a tool that can be used to highlight your individuality and what makes you, you! It maps out different aspects of you, your likes, dislikes, goals, ambitions, what is important to you and more.

🕒 When do I use it?

This tool can be a helpful resource to keep for yourself as something you can refer to, as well as update as things about you change throughout your life. It can also be used as an appendix for application forms, or as a reference document to express to someone else key bits of information about you that you would like for them to know.

As some suggestions, you may wish to use the One Page Profile:

- At interviews.
- On public transport.
- At the airport.
- Shopping centres and supermarkets.
- Unfamiliar places or places you haven't visited yet.

✅ How do I use it?

When creating and completing the One Page Profile, think about what you consider:

- People appreciate about you.
- What is important to you.
- Ways you prefer to be supported.

There are many tools that can be used to record and present this information about you and it does not have to be limited to specific categories. Thinking about how you present it can also be helpful. For example, have you considered who you are presenting it to and whether you will be sharing it electronically or as a physical copy? Does the way in which you use it affect the file format?

You will find a completed example of this tool and a template to use on the following pages. You are free to edit each section to highlight important areas you would like for someone to know about you. Your One Page Profile is yours to make how you would like it to be!



Ways to support me:

If I look like I am in pain or I am holding my hands against my ears, please help me by finding my noise cancelling equipment.

Interests and ambitions:

I love flowers and am doing a short florist course!

Skills and abilities:

I have a good understanding of colours, textures and composition.

Name

Information about my differences:

I am autistic.
My sensory differences include being sensitive to sound.
Sometimes I have very low energy.

The person I want to be:

My biggest dream is to own my own successful flower shop.
I hope to also be a more confident person.

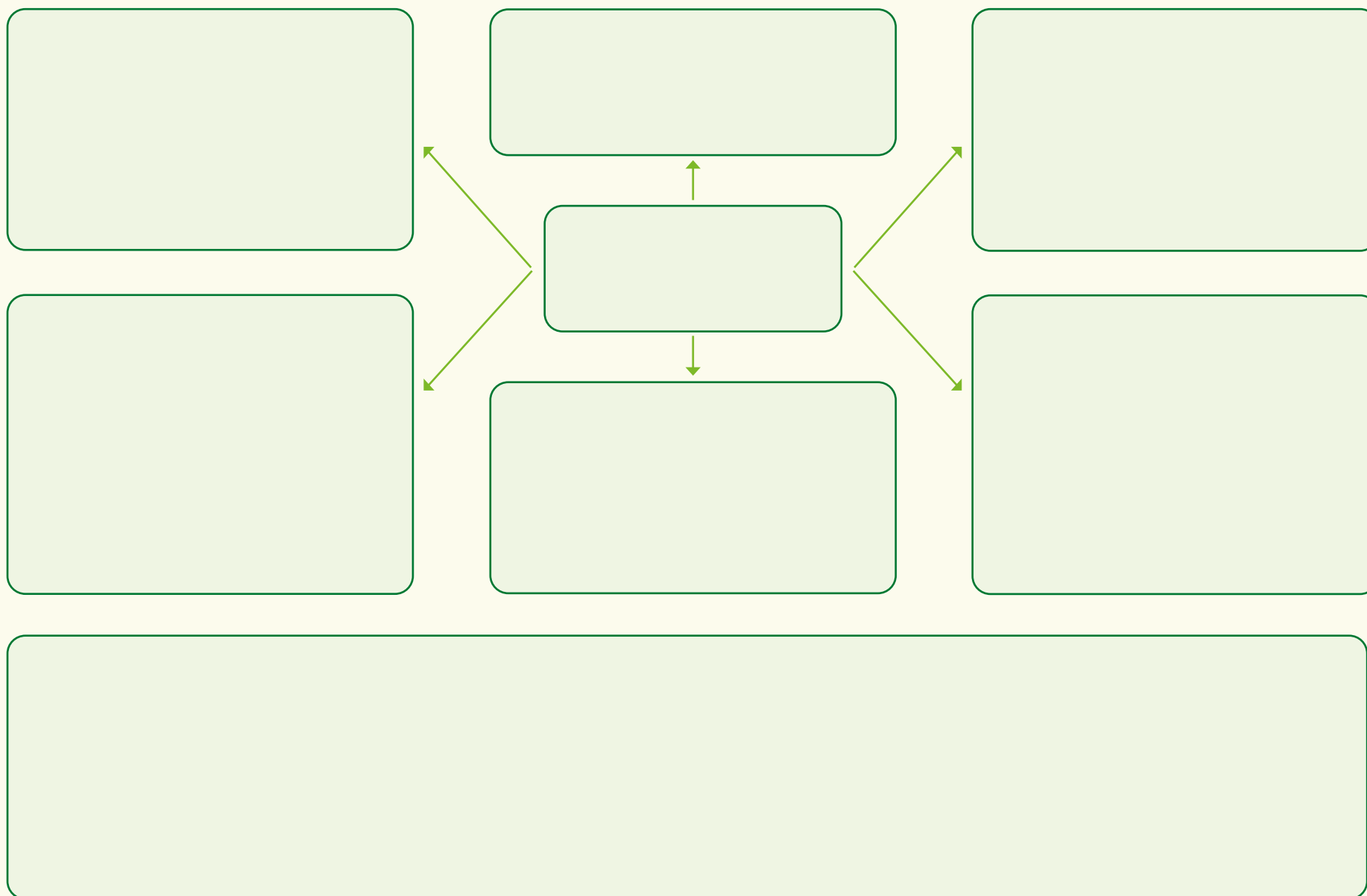
Emergency contact information:

In case of emergency, please contact my father on: 07 XXX XXX XXX

Important things about me that I would like to share are...

I hope to one day be a florist!
I love nature and being outdoors, my favourite time of year is all year! You can find all types of different flora thriving throughout all year.
I can be very sensitive to loud noises, particularly metal clanging, engines revving up and machine line noises. Because of this, I try to avoid taking public transport as much as possible.

Tool 1 – One Page Profile



The diagram illustrates the structure of the 'One Page Profile' tool. It features a central column of three boxes: a small box at the top, a medium box in the middle, and a large box at the bottom. These three boxes are connected by double-headed arrows, indicating a reciprocal relationship. To the left of this central column are two large rectangular boxes, and to the right are two large rectangular boxes. Each of these four boxes is connected to the central column by a double-headed arrow. At the bottom of the page is a single, wide rectangular box spanning the width of the form.

Your sensory differences

Sensory differences can include hyper (high) or hypo (low) sensitivity in relation to the eight senses of sight, hearing, touch, taste, smell, **interoception** (understanding and feeling what is going on inside our bodies), balance (**vestibular system**) and body awareness (**proprioception**).

These differences can present in varying ways, including:

Being hypersensitive: not coping with strong smells or noisy environments.

Being hyposensitive: not responding to pain, hunger, or thirst in an expected way.

Having differences with filtering out irrelevant or competing **sensory information**.

Differences with taking in, processing or responding to sensory information.

Reduced body awareness: difficulty with coordination or understanding the position or movement of the body.

These differences will vary from person to person and can fluctuate in their responsiveness depending on a number of different factors (a bit like how we all have good days and bad days).

When we find ourselves feeling like it is tricky to process, use and respond to all this information coming in at the same time, autistic people have described this as being like a traffic jam in your head, with conflicting signals coming from all directions. This can make it difficult to make sense of it all.

Top tips

It is important to always remember that being autistic is not a bad thing and does not make you less than other people. Autistic people have a lot of strengths that balance the challenges and difficulties they may face.

Some of these strengths may include having exceptional attention to detail, having an increased interest in a topic that brings you joy and the ability to offer different perspectives to questions.



? What is it?

The My Unique Sensory Differences Map tool provides a way to map out any sensory sensitivities of all kinds that are unique to you and the way in which you experience the world around you.

🕒 When do I use it?

You can use this tool when thinking about any sensory differences you experience and using the sensory map as a reference document for yourself, or to share with others. For example, you may wish to attach a completed sensory map as an appendix for applications or to someone you would like for them to be aware of.

✅ How do I use it?

As a starting point, you might want to think about the different ways your unique sensory experiences are to you. Remember that we all receive sensory input differently; for some, certain smells may be too overpowering and for others the very same smells might be calming. There is a tab for each different sense, and a flowchart to work through and complete as you highlight your unique sensory differences.

You can also use the mapping tool to plan for the future and prepare ahead, particularly for unprepared events and places you haven't visited yet.

You will find a completed example of this tool and a template to use on the following pages.



Sight

Touch

Sound

Taste

Smell

Balance

Interoception

Proprioception

Sight

Input that helps me regulate:

Low level light intensity.

Input that makes me feel distressed:

Bright lights.
High light intensity.

Checklist of objects and items:

Candles.
Glowsticks.
Sunglasses to help filter out bright light.

Things to do/seek out to help regulate:

Find a darker space with less brightness.
Remember to always pack glowsticks if I need to focus on it.

What might happen if I experience this input:

Painful migraines and headaches.
I cannot focus or even think.
It sometimes makes me panic.

What is the safest and right thing to do if I experience this input:

Try to soften the light for me by closing the curtains or helping me find my sunglasses.
If I am in a public space, help me find a quiet room with dimmed lights.
Give me lots of time to process what you have said and communicate back: I will be in a lot of pain!

Tool 2 – My Unique Sensory Differences Map

Touch

Sound

Taste

Smell

Balance

Interoception

Proprioception

Sight

Input that helps me regulate:

Input that makes me feel distressed:

Checklist of objects
and items:

Things to do/seek out
to help regulate:

What might happen
if I experience this
input:

What is the safest and right
thing to do if I experience this
input:

Tool 2 – My Unique Sensory Differences Map

Sight

Touch

Sound

Taste

Smell

Balance

Interoception

Proprioception

Touch

Input that helps me regulate:

Input that makes me feel distressed:

Checklist of objects
and items:

Things to do/seek out
to help regulate:

What might happen
if I experience this
input:

What is the safest and right
thing to do if I experience this
input:

Tool 2 – My Unique Sensory Differences Map

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Input that helps me regulate:

Input that makes me feel distressed:

Checklist of objects
and items:

Things to do/seek out
to help regulate:

What might happen
if I experience this
input:

What is the safest and right
thing to do if I experience this
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Tool 2 – My Unique Sensory Differences Map

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Proprioception

Taste

Input that helps me regulate:

Input that makes me feel distressed:

Checklist of objects
and items:

Things to do/seek out
to help regulate:

What might happen
if I experience this
input:

What is the safest and right
thing to do if I experience this
input:

Sight**Touch****Sound****Taste****Smell****Balance****Interoception****Proprioception****Smell****Input that helps me regulate:****Input that makes me feel distressed:****Checklist of objects
and items:****Things to do/seek out
to help regulate:****What might happen
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and items:****Things to do/seek out
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input:****What is the safest and right
thing to do if I experience this
input:**

What works for you and what doesn't: sensory, social and communication.

Some autistic people may experience differences in social understanding and communication. This is not due to a lack of skills but being impacted by other things – for example, sensory overwhelm, not enough autism awareness or not being in an environment that is meeting your needs.

It is important to remember that your differences are exactly that: differences that are unique to you.

In this section, we will focus on thinking about different types of environments to consider as you access and interact with your community. These include creating an enabling environment for yourself, starting with your personal space. You will then work your way through to thinking about school or university, the workplace and, following that, things you can do to support for unplanned events on the go.

Creating an enabling environment for yourself

It can be helpful to start thinking about the different types of adjustments you can do for yourself when you cannot change your environment – for example, if sensitivity to noise is something you experience, think about travelling on a crowded, busy train.

Ultimately, no one can change the clanging sounds that trains make, and this may be a painful experience for some people. In this situation, it is unrealistic to adjust your environment. (Even if the scraping sound of metal is something any one of us would like to be rid of!)

Focus on the **reasonable adjustments** that you can make for yourself. Small changes often make a big difference. Reasonable adjustments should be based on what you need as an individual.

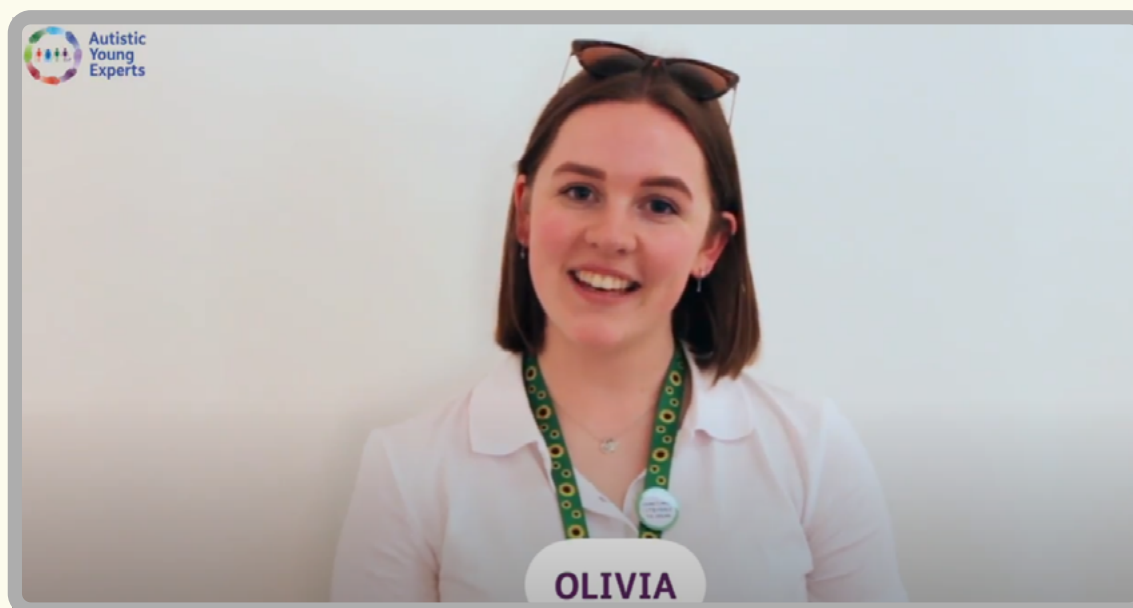
There may be situations that are out of our control and cannot change. In these cases, whilst understandably it may be stressful, it is important that you are familiar with adaptations you can control. These may include: wearing headphones to lower noise levels, sunglasses to make a brightly lit area more manageable, using a communication card or augmentative and alternative communication device to communicate your needs if you are not able to communicate verbally.

Remember that the environment is not just the physical space but also the people you encounter and the atmosphere that is created through relationships with others.

In the video below, Olivia talks through what being autistic means to her:

Video

[What Being Autistic Looks Like for Me](#)



? What is it?

The Adjustments I Can Make Independently tool is designed to help you to start thinking about the different types of adjustments you can do for yourself, as well as the times when you cannot change your environment to adjust to your needs.

🕒 When do I use it?

You can use this tool to prepare for new environments and to consider how you can make smaller adjustments for yourself that can help you, should you need it.

You can also use this tool when you want to attach additional information as an appendix for an application.

✓ How do I use it?

Think about different types of environments and how you interact with them. For example, an environment is not just a physical space, but also the people you encounter and the atmosphere that is created through relationships with others. For things in the environment that you cannot make adjustments for, it can be helpful to have a checklist to work through so you can feel assured that you have considered as many solutions possible.

This tool can also be used as a way of advocating adjustments you can make yourself and therefore may not need additional support with, as well as potential areas which are out of your control to change but would like to highlight that it is distressing somehow.

This tool is linked to **Tool 4 – Creating an Enabling Environment** and can be used as a starting point to think about solutions to different environments you cannot make adjustments to.

This tool is linked to **Tool 5 – My Helpful Solutions for Regulating Distress** and can be used as a starting point to prepare for unforeseeable events.

You will find a completed example of this tool and a template to use on the following pages.

Public transport

Environmental adjustments I can make for myself:

I am able to self-regulate my sensory differences with my noise cancelling equipment for the loud noises on the train.

How I can prepare to make these adjustments for myself:

Always ensure that I carry or pack away in my bag my noise cancelling equipment!

Environmental adjustments I cannot make for myself:

I cannot change the noises on the train.
I cannot change the amount of other people using the train.

Checklist of adjustments I need solutions for:

A plan of what to do in an emergency.
I need to build up my support network.
Find out if the public transport provider has any accessibility options.
Prepare communication cards for the public in case of emergency.

Tool 3 – Adjustments I Can Make Independently

**Environmental adjustments
I can make for myself:**

**How I can prepare to make these
adjustments for myself:**

**Environmental adjustments
I cannot make for myself:**

**Checklist of adjustments
I need solutions for:**

How to create an enabling environment at home

For many people, their home is their sanctuary and their safe space to escape the world, so consider how you can make this space work for you, whether it is big or small.

- Ensure you have your **safe foods** available to eat (if this is something that works for you).
- If you find organising your space or tidying up challenging, have a storage basket or box where you can put things so they are out of the way. Then, when you feel up to it, you can sort out this box and put things away.
- You may wish to create a sensory space with dimmable lighting, comfortable seating/blankets/cushions, your favourite smells and tastes.
- If you live with other people, you may not always control who comes and goes from your home. Make it clear to those you live with that you may not always want to socialise or be around other people and let them know what space you need to keep for yourself – for instance, your bedroom or a quiet space.

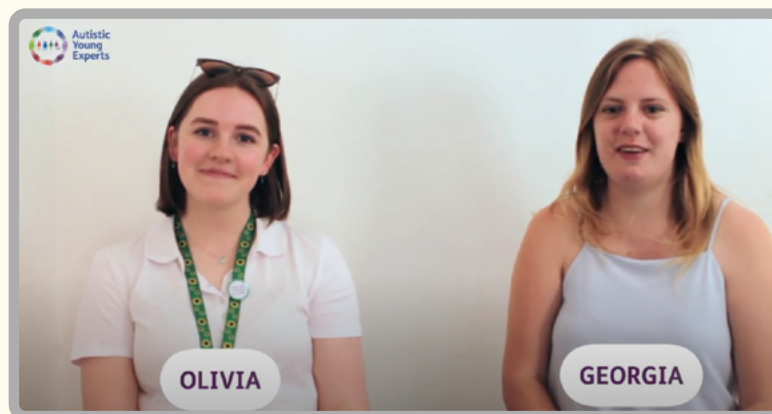


How to create an enabling environment at school, college or university

- Create a **visual timetable** for the week and each school day.
- Create a **visual checklist** for everything you may need. Keep this with you, as well as keeping a copy at home where you get ready for school.
- Try and pack your equipment the night before so that you are prepared and do not forget anything in the morning rush.
- Create a morning routine that works for you. Consider what time you need to get up to be able to do all the things on your routine before you need to leave.
- You may be allowed to bring sensory items such as ear plugs or defenders and small fidget items into the classroom. These can help you with **self-regulation** during the day. If you struggle to discuss these needs with education staff, maybe write them down or email them instead.

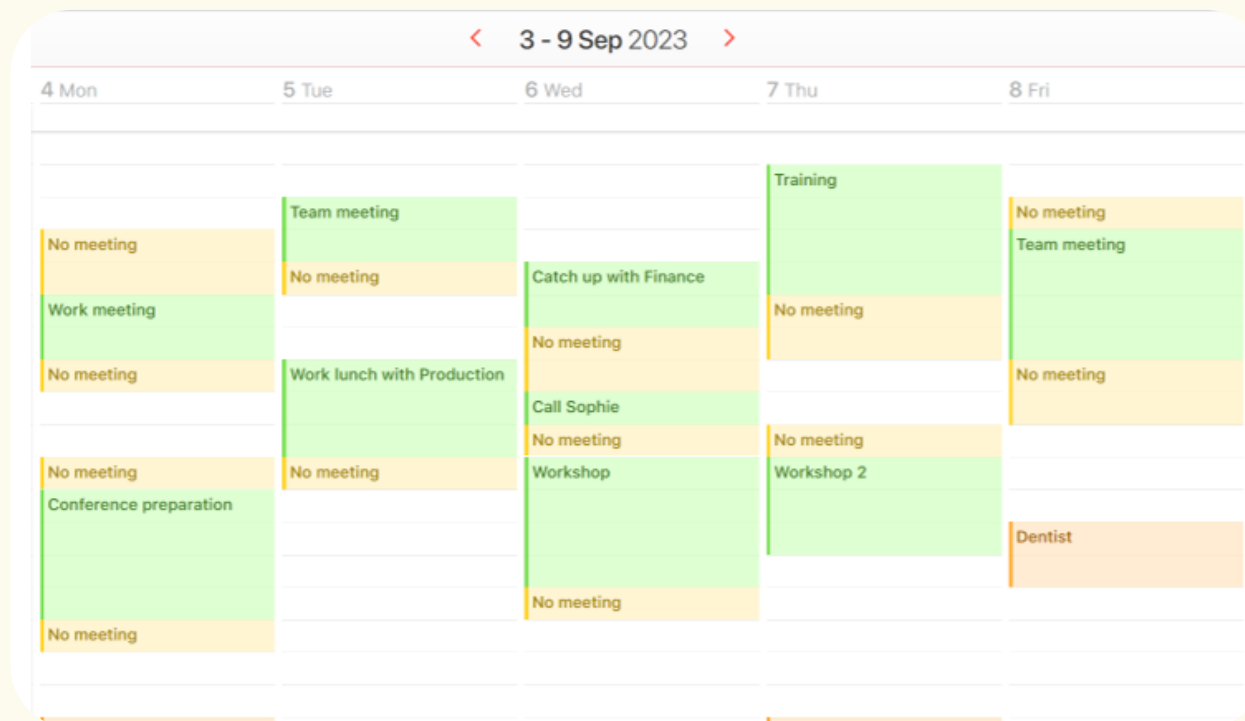
Video

What Good Support in Education Looks Like



How to create an enabling environment at work

- If you work from home, consider your work setup. This does not have to be at a set desk. It could be on the floor, at a table, stood at the kitchen counter or sat on your sofa, or a mixture of all of these places throughout the day.
- If you work in an office, requesting a permanent desk – rather than hot desking – can help to minimise anxiety. You can also request a desk in a less busy or quieter part of the office to help minimise sensory overwhelm.
- Using a visual whiteboard to create “to do” lists, and break up your day, can be helpful when managing work tasks.
- Another way to do this can be to calendar block on your digital calendar. This can look like putting in each task for the day with the amount of time it will roughly take to do it. If you prefer to have certain times that are meeting free, you could consider putting no meeting blocks in your calendars so people cannot add you to meetings that you do not need to attend!



Creating an enabling environment wherever you go

- Compile a sensory box with comforting items you can take with you. This may include items such as fidget toys, roller balls of your favourite scents, comfort items such as stuffed toys or blankets, ear defenders or headphones and your favourite snacks.
- Ask for written information ahead of time. This may include asking for information in advance of a medical appointment, an itinerary for a day out or an agenda for a meeting.
- Request detailed travel instructions and photos of building layouts. If you are travelling to an event it can help to ease anxiety if you know how you are getting there and what the building and event layouts will be once you arrive. You may also find websites such as Google Maps and Google Earth useful as a visual guide



? What is it?

The Creating an Enabling Environment tool is a mapping and preparation tool to help you think about the different spaces you encounter and interact with in three main areas throughout your life: home, school and work.

It may help you think about your environment in a different way when compared with **Tool 3 – Adjustments I Can Make Independently**.

🕒 When do I use it?

You can use this tool as another way of thinking about different environments and spaces we all move between throughout the day. It is also a helpful tool to start thinking in greater detail ways in which you can prepare for transitioning between these environments, thinking about your routine, schedules and appointments.

You can also use this tool when you want to attach additional information as an appendix for an application.



✓ How do I use it?

Focus on your safe space: your home. Starting with ourselves as a point of reference can be a familiar and easier place to begin. Even our home environments have limitations with what we can adjust to them; how do you set it up so that it works for you within these limitations? Do you organise or structure your day instead?

Think about:

- What works in this space and environment for me?
- What things do I and can I do to help shape the environment to suit my differences as best as possible?
- Have I considered my routine/ timetable/schedule and how I work/interact in these spaces?
- Have I considered adjustments I can make for myself in this environment? For example, will my sensory items be accessible?

This tool is linked to **Tool 3 – Adjustments I Can Make Independently** and can be used as a starting point to think about solutions to different environments you cannot make adjustments to.

This tool is linked to **Tool 5 – My Helpful Solutions for Regulating Distress** and can be used as a starting point to prepare for unforeseeable events.

You can use this tool to think about other spaces beyond home, school and work.

You will find a completed example of this tool and a template to use on the following pages.



Tool 4 – Creating an Enabling Environment

Creating an enabling environment at home	Creating an enabling environment at school, college or university	Creating an enabling environment at work
Information about the space: My room isn't the biggest, with one window.	Information about the space: No dogs allowed on site. The campus is very large and needs public additional travel time planned to go from building to building.	Information about the space: I work at the university student coffee shop. They are an autism friendly employer.
What currently works for me: I have storage boxes to overcome the lack of space. This helps for me to organise and locate my sensory items easier. My flat mates are all very understanding and really friendly.	What currently works for me: I am least affected by building size. Having my equipment prepared and packed the night before.	What currently works for me: I have worked at a coffee shop before, and I know my tasks. My shifts work around my lessons. I have great communication with my line manager.
How can I prepare and create an enabling environment: Try to get a fixed routine with eating and going to the supermarket to fit around my schedule for the week. Create a more calming bedroom environment with LED projector. Create a more calming bedroom environment with an essential oil diffuser.	How can I prepare and create an enabling environment: Getting photos of workspaces. Getting a map of the campus/school site? Prepare a list of contact information. For example, student services, who to ask for help, etc. Make a visual timetable of my lessons.	How can I prepare and create an enabling environment: Talk to line manager about the flexibility of my work shifts to work during quieter hours for my sensory overwhelm. Set up mini whiteboard at work to list out tasks to do for the day. Speak to team members about my workstation patterns and routines when I am at the hot drink station for the shift.

Tool 4 – Creating an Enabling Environment

Creating an enabling environment at home	Creating an enabling environment at school, college or university	Creating an enabling environment at work
Information about the space:	Information about the space:	Information about the space:
What currently works for me:	What currently works for me:	What currently works for me:
How can I prepare and create an enabling environment:	How can I prepare and create an enabling environment:	How can I prepare and create an enabling environment:

Anxiety

When a person is anxious, it is more difficult to process information. This can lead to becoming over-stimulated and experiencing **sensory overload**, heightened anxiety, panic and more.

We all experience and express anxiety in lots of different ways. Being prepared – knowing how anxiety affects you and informing others of this – can be a helpful way to receive and access the right kind of support you need in these situations.

The causes of anxiety can be many and could include:

- Differences with understanding what is happening or what the instructions were.
- Differences with understanding the social rules.
- **Sensory processing sensitivities.**

Signs of anxiety will vary from person to person, and can include:

Changes in body language or tone of voice.

Tearfulness.

Restlessness.

Flushed skin.

Sweating.

Increased heart rate and breathing.

Anxiety

Get to know your sensory triggers and what anxiety can look like for you. Once you know these, planning out solutions in greater detail is a good way of communicating your needs to others as well as having solutions to hand for you to refer to should you need them.

Things you can do for your sensory needs:

- Create a sensory box or bag to have with you. This could contain items such as blankets, fidget toys and shoulder weights.
- Use ear defenders, ear plugs or headphones to mute excess background noise.
- Use visual prompts such as whiteboards, diaries, notebooks or reminders on your phone.
- Schedule sensory breaks.
- Find opportunities for exercise and movement if this is what helps you to regulate.



? What is it?

The My Helpful Solutions for Regulating Distress tool is a tool to identify potential problems that may happen which cause you to feel worried, anxious or overwhelmed. For example, you may find using public transport particularly overwhelming for many different reasons.

🕒 When do I use it?

You can use this tool to help you think about practical adjustments and solutions to events that may cause you distress and anxiety. These events can sometimes happen at any time and if they are unpredictable in nature, this tool can be a helpful way to communicate in greater detail practical ways to support you during these times.

You can also use it as a practical document that you can refer to at these times.

✓ How do I use it?

Thinking about specific events or situations that happen during the day that cause you to feel distressed, identify any problems that happen in those events and also your needs and ideas for regulating your distress as solutions. You can use this information as a communication tool to advocate for your needs in greater detail and can be a good way of highlighting these to other individuals.

You can also use this tool as a practical list of solutions for problems that you can refer should you need to in the future.

This tool is linked to **Tool 3 – Adjustments I Can Make Independently** and can be used to expand on it further.

This tool is linked to **Tool 4 – Creating an Enabling Environment** and can be used to expand on it further.

You will find a completed example of this tool and a template to use on the following pages.

Tool 5 – My Helpful Solutions for Regulating Distress

Event or situation	Reason for distress	What to do to help
Overcrowded areas and social events.	Crowds of people.	Use headphones to play “soothing sounds” playlist.
	Meeting new people.	Talking things over in my mind to reassure myself. Find someone I may already know for reassurance.
Event or situation	Reason for distress	What to do to help
Feeling anxious about too much workload and not meeting deadlines.	I don’t want to feel like I am failing.	Speak to work buddy colleague about how I feel. Email line manager to ask for a meeting and explain I need some help. Huff and sigh.
	My anxiety levels are very high, and I am panicking.	Find a quiet space at work. Use meditation app on phone to feel calmer.
Event or situation	Reason for distress	What to do to help

Tool 5 – My Helpful Solutions for Regulating Distress

Event or situation	Reason for distress	What to do to help
Event or situation	Reason for distress	What to do to help
Event or situation	Reason for distress	What to do to help

Friendships, colleagues and working with professionals to receive support.

When building positive and effective relationships it is important to:

- Listen to and work with the people who know you best and who you trust.
- Make sure professionals know the best way to support you.

Know your rights. Where can you find this information and how can you use it?

You are not expected to understand every human or legal right but knowing where to look and how to use them when you are advocating for yourself is important.

When advocating to have support put in place it helps to have some understanding of laws and acts in place (such as the **Equality Act 2010**) to know your rights and what support you're entitled to. You could familiarise yourself with disability schemes, allowances and equipment that might be available. Keeping a record of all documents and reports with healthcare professionals and having them readily available will help you when attending appointments and meetings in which self-advocacy is key.

Top tips

Keep track of when you contact staff and other professionals through email so that you can keep up to date with discussions you have had and hold professionals you are working with accountable.

There are many charitable organisations that exist to support the community with understanding what rights they are entitled to specific to their situation.

It can take time and a lot of research, so persistence and consistency are key. Building your resilience will help to support you when advocating for yourself. It may help to refer to the section of the one page profile where you have written what people appreciate about you and remind yourself of your strengths when you feel it is a struggle or battle to advocate for your needs.



? What is it?

The My Support Network tool is a tool to highlight different types of support you can access, what kind of support they might offer, when the support is available and how to contact and access it. The tool is designed as a method to collate your research and support options based on the needs and adjustments you may require as identified in the previous tools.

🕒 When do I use it?

The tool can be used before, during and after transitioning from one stage of your life to another. For example, you may wish to use this tool when doing research on what support and social activities are available at the university you are going to. You could also use it to build up your personal support network catalogue.



✓ How do I use it?

Everyone has different support options and people in their lives. It can feel somewhat daunting to know where to begin, how to access support or even to know what is available out in your community. It is important to remember that your support network is as individual to you as you are a unique person.

As you do your research, It may help to think about the following ideas about your support network and the different types of support available for you:

- **Family and friends.**

Starting with our closest support network, who are the people in your life that you can trust, who know and who understand you? Have you had a conversation with them to let them know you consider them as part of your closest support network? What are your expectations between each other?

- **Work and school.**

Have you done your research on your college or university you're applying for? Have you enquired with your employer about what support they are able to offer you? Have you done research on the employer and what benefits they are able to offer? If it exists, do you have an identified buddy or mentor scheme set up?

- **Health and social care services.**

Are you aware of your local health and social care services? Do you know their opening hours and what support they are able to offer? Are there any named keyworkers or individuals who are happy to be contacted directly?

You will find a completed example of this tool and a template to use on the following pages.

Tool 6 – My Support Network

What do I need support with?	Where do I go to for support?	What kind of support is available?	Contact information
Employment and employment advice.	ACAS.	Free advice on employment rights, best practice, resolving workplace conflict. Have paid for services: mediation.	Website: https://www.acas.org.uk/ Helpline: 03XX XXX XXXX Opening hours: Monday to Friday 8am–6pm.
Feeling lonely and isolated.	Family and friends.	Remember that your sister and her boyfriend are available to talk things through.	Sister: 07 XXX XXX XXX Sister's boyfriend: 07XXX XXX XXX
	Samaritans.	24/7 Emotional support and wellbeing helpline	
Financial advice.			
Information for university courses.			
Wellbeing and self-care			

Tool 6 – My Support Network

What do I need support with?	Where do I go to for support?	What kind of support is available?	Contact information

Talking about being autistic

For some people, talking about being autistic can be difficult. You don't have to tell someone straight away if you are autistic; you can get to know them a little first. It can be scary to talk about being autistic as you don't always know what other people know about autism. It can be useful to find out what they know before telling them about yourself.

Some people describe autism in different ways. It can be described as “a way of seeing the world differently”.

Ultimately, telling people that you are autistic is up to you. You don't have to tell people if you don't want to. Telling people you are autistic can mean better understanding and support for when things might go wrong.



Disclosing with friends

If you feel comfortable and confident it can be really beneficial to disclose your autism and discuss this with friends.

When going into this conversation it may help to remember that your friends may have no understanding, or very little understanding, of what it means to be autistic, so explaining what it means for you can be a helpful way to give others the opportunity to understand you better.

In doing this you may alleviate some of the pressure you may feel or put on yourself if you ask for something or do something that might otherwise seem “odd”. Things like using **sensory aids** while out and about, bringing safe foods as a backup, asking lots of questions about plans, timings or travel.

Some people may dismiss your explanations, requests for **accommodations** or just not be able – or willing – to understand how big an impact these things can have on you. That may feel frustrating and hurtful in the moment. But you can use this as a helpful indicator that they are not true, supportive friends. You are not responsible for educating every person that you meet about the experience of being an autistic person.

Video

[Why Peer Support Matters When You're Autistic](#)



Disclosing at work

It can be stressful to navigate the positives and negatives of disclosing your autism at work. Remember that this doesn't need to be a formal diagnosis. However, you may not be entitled to all types of support if you do not have a formal diagnostic assessment.

Top tips

Remember to do your research and to be aware of your rights!

On the positive side, your employer is legally supposed to support you and accommodate any reasonable adjustments you may need. These reasonable adjustments can have a huge impact on your day-to-day work.

Disclosing to your employer and colleagues can also help them to be more understanding of your needs.

There can also be negative consequences to disclosing at work. This can be due to a lack of autism awareness and understanding.

If you do decide to disclose your autism, you are protected under the Equality Act 2010 (the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 in Northern Ireland). It may be helpful for you to read this and understand your rights.

[Click here to find out more about your rights under the Equality Act 2010.](#)

Communicating your needs

Self-advocacy includes speaking up for yourself to convey or negotiate a message that may have been misunderstood. For instance, it can seem as basic as letting a server know they brought you the wrong drink or it can be more complex, like talking to your doctor about your health needs.

Hear what Sam, Ollie and Georgia want to share about the things they wish people know about autism:

Video

[Things I Wish People Knew About Autism](#)



There are many ways and contexts that require people to self-advocate and communication can be difficult, so it is important that you feel prepared.

You may experience changes in your mood and this can have a big impact on your ability to advocate for yourself. It may be helpful to explain your ups and downs to those who you trust and who may be able to support you. This may look like:

- Telling people about you as an individual.
- Recording some habits that you think are important.
- Recording your attitude and feelings when you are well.

? What is it?

The Talking about My Autism tool is a planning and reflective communication tool so you can prepare and think about the way you want to explain your autism to friends, family, partners, work colleagues and anyone else you want to have this conversation with.

This is different to **Tool 8 – Disclosing to Professionals** in that it is less formal as these conversations tend to be more relaxed in nature.

🕒 When do I use it?

You can use this tool to be as prepared as possible to communicate your needs to who you are happy to and want to have this conversation with. You don't have to tell someone you are autistic straight away – you don't have to tell anyone at all if you prefer! It is entirely up to you. However, using this tool to organise your thoughts and feelings can be a useful way to feel ready and confident beforehand.

✅ How do I use it?

Talking about being autistic will look and feel different for everyone. It can be helpful to have a think about what we want to communicate, the right time and how we want to communicate it. Thinking about each section carefully, complete them so you can feel prepared and ready before you have the conversation, regardless of what form it takes.

For some, having a conversation in person may be something that they are comfortable with. For others, writing an e-mail and communicating by writing may be more appropriate. Conversations with our friends and family tend to be more relaxed in nature compared with the conversations we have with professionals. It also can be unpredictable how someone will respond, so taking the time to work through each section and reflecting on them can be a grounding exercise.

You may also wish to use information gathered throughout this toolkit to attach as appendices or have to hand when and if you are ready to disclose to someone you trust and are comfortable sharing to.

You will find a completed example of this tool and a template to use on the following pages.

Tool 7 – Talking about My Autism

1

Who do I want to tell about my autism?

Find a darker space with less brightness.
Remember to always pack glowsticks if I need to focus on it.

What are my expectations and what am I hoping the outcome to be?

I am hoping that they will understand me better and that I will feel more comfortable being who I am when spending time together.

2

When is a good time to have this conversation?

I will feel more comfortable speaking to my partner at my home.

How will I know we are both ready to have this conversation?

I want to have this conversation when I am in a good mood and not feeling overwhelmed. I would prefer to have it at my place, so I feel more comfortable. I also want my partner to be in a good mood. I need to ask them if they are in a good mood and if they are ready to listen to something important about me that I want to share.

3

What format am I going to use to communicate?

I'm talking about this in person and in a quiet space with just the both of us.

What are the key messages I want to communicate?

I want to share what my autism means to me with my partner.

It is important to me that I feel like I can be myself completely when we are together.

I'm a private person, so I also want my partner to know that I would like for them to keep this information to themselves, as I haven't told many people in my life and feel more comfortable if only very few people know.

I want them to know how nervous talking to them about this makes me feel and I hope they are accepting and understand me for who I am.

4

Positives to focus on:

My autism is what makes me unique.

I am proud to be autistic, I'm just very shy.

What am I hoping their reaction to be?

I hope my partner is understanding and calm, I think they will be, they make me feel safe and that I can trust them.

I'm hoping that it will explain some of my interests and why I like to have things done in a specific order so that they understand even better.

5

If they do not react how I hope, what happens next?

Remember to use my support network and speak to someone about how I am feeling.

Message my best mate, he has been there for me before and I can rely on him to make me feel better.

Try to understand where they are coming from so I don't have any unanswered questions.

Checklist of additional information:

I have downloaded some information about autism that we can read together if they want more information about autism.

Tool 7 – Talking about My Autism

1

Who do I want to tell about my autism?

What are my expectations and what am I hoping the outcome to be?

2

When is a good time to have this conversation?

How will I know we are both ready to have this conversation?

3

What format am I going to use to communicate?

What are the key messages I want to communicate?

4

Positives to focus on:

What am I hoping their reaction to be?

5

If they do not react how I hope,
what happens next?

Checklist of additional information:

? What is it?

The Disclosing to Professionals tool is a planning and reflective communication tool to help you think about the way you want to explain your autism to professionals and prepare for this – for example, disclosing to your school, university or employer.

🕒 When do I use it?

You can use this tool as a way to be as prepared as possible to communicate your needs to professionals. It is important to make sure professionals know the best way to support you as well as work with the people who know you best and who you trust.

✅ How do I use it?

Talking about being autistic will look and feel different for everyone. It can be helpful to have a think about what we want to communicate, the right time and how we want to communicate it. Thinking about each section carefully, complete them so you can feel prepared and ready before you have the conversation, regardless of what form it takes.

For some, having a conversation in person may be something that they are comfortable with. For others, writing an email and communicating by writing may be more appropriate. It is also not uncommon for formal correspondence and emails to have attachments and documents to them, such as a formal diagnostic assessment report.

You may also wish to use information gathered throughout this toolkit to attach as appendices or have to hand when and if you are ready to disclose to a professional.

You will find a completed example of this tool and a template to use on the following pages.



Tool 8 – Disclosing to Professionals

1

Why am I disclosing?

I would like for my employer to know about my autism.

What are my expectations and what am I hoping the outcome to be?

I would like my employer to understand my sensory differences and why I may use headphones at my desk at very crowded and noisy times of the day as a reasonable adjustment.

2

When is a good time to have this conversation?

In private, so I think writing an email to ask for a private meeting.

How will I know I am ready?

I will know I am ready because I am feeling calm and can think clearly about what I would like to write into the email. It will also help if I get to know my line manager a bit more as I'm still new to the team.

3

What format am I going to use to communicate?

I'm writing an email first, and then explaining in more detail in person.

What are the key messages I want to communicate?

I want my employer to know about my sensory differences and why I may use headphones or need a quiet space I know I can go to if I am feeling overwhelmed.

I want my employer to know what my strengths are and what I can achieve as a result of having the option to self-regulate my sensory sensitivities.

I would like to feel supported and understood, knowing that I have a safe space where I can talk to my line manager.

I want my line manager to know that I am happy with my teammates knowing about my autism.

I am happy and comfortable to talk about my autism with my colleagues, this is something I would like to do.

4

Do I need to know what my rights are?

No, I already know them.

Where can I find out my rights?

I have done my research and used the “My Support Network” tool to get some information about my rights when disclosing to an employer. I have other organisations I can contact if I need to find out more.

5

Checklist of appendix documents:

I have some information about sensory differences from a charity. I will have this to hand when I have the conversation with my line manager in person.

I do not have a formal diagnosis yet and I am waiting for my assessment date. I can let my employer know this.

I have some videos ready to play if I feel like I need extra support with communicating.

I have completed a one page profile and want to give this to my line manager.

6

Important notes:

Remember that you have done this before!

Speak to brother if you are feeling overwhelmed or nervous.

Remember to take fidget toy for the meeting!

Tool 8 – Disclosing to Professionals

1

Why am I disclosing?

What are my expectations and what am I hoping
the outcome to be?

2

When is a good time to have
this conversation?

How will I know I am ready?

3

What format am I going to use
to communicate?

What are the key messages I want to communicate?

4

Do I need to know what my rights are?

Where can I find out my rights?

5

Checklist of appendix documents:

6

Important notes:

Your goals and how you work to achieve them.

When considering your goals and how you wish to achieve them, it is important to set achievable goals that are meaningful to you and that help you see how well you are doing.

It is important to feel empowered to ask for changes and adjustments in settings such as college, university or your place of work. Everyone finds it easier to work in different ways so understanding the adjustments that can be made so you can achieve your goals is so important.

Consider the ways you find most helpful to engage with work or learning and what works for you. It could seemingly be a small adaptation or a reasonable adjustment that makes the biggest difference so you should not be afraid of asking.

Planning for transition and change

Differences in **flexibility, information processing** and understanding mean that what is happening now and next can be unpredictable. This can result in an increase in your anxiety, frustration – and, sometimes, to distressed behaviours.

However, this doesn't mean that any change or unpredictability is impossible to manage. By ensuring you ask for as much warning as possible about an upcoming change, or by keeping to a daily routine, you are much more likely to stay regulated and less anxious.

- Ensure you have plans for times you are **dysregulated**, for whatever reason, to take breaks from activities.
- Develop self-regulation strategies. These could include yoga or mindfulness techniques.
- Keep a to-do list, calendar or whiteboard to create a visual timetable to record what you have coming up. This can allow you to plan not just what you are doing but so you can be mentally and physically prepared for each activity.
- Plan in breaks and rest periods to ensure minimal **burnout**.

? What is it?

The My Goals and Ambitions tool is a tool designed to help you map out what your personal targets, goals and ambitions are. It is designed so that you can record your initial thoughts and feelings on targets that are meaningful to you and to see how far you have progressed down your action list.

🕒 When do I use it?

You can use the tool for when you are considering your goals and how you wish to achieve them. Everyone is different and so too are your life experiences and ambitions. When you should set out your goals will be specific to you; there is no right time! You can use this tool as a way of expressing your ambitions to others as a way for them to understand you better.



✓ How do I use it?

Having somewhere to start can feel empowering and motivating to act out on your dreams and aspirations. You can use this tool as a starting point to map out your initial thoughts and choose to expand on them later! You may even wish to incorporate them into a larger, monthly or annual plan if this is something you are inspired to do.

As you complete and work through the planning tool, consider the ways you find most helpful to engage with work or what works for your learning strengths:

- Have I set out realistic and achievable targets?
- Have I considered how long it will take?
- Have I factored in room for unexpected changes or delays to my plan?
- How will the information I have gathered about myself be helpful throughout this journey?
- Have I given enough consideration for my wellbeing?
- Would this work in a different format for me?
- Do I need to do any research or information gathering before knowing what my next steps are?

You will find a completed example of this tool and a template to use on the following pages.



Tool 9 – My Goals and Ambitions

What is my aim?	Actions I need to do in order to achieve this	
To pass my driving test and get my licence.	1. Research local driving schools: look at reviews, costs, do you know someone who you can recommend?	☒
	2. Finish saving up enough money to pay for driving school course.	☒
When do I want to achieve this by?	3. Contact driving school and find a driving instructor I am happy and comfortable with.	☒
End of year 2025.	4. Start driving lessons with driving instructor.	☐
	5. Book and do the driving test.	☐
This is important to me because...	I prefer driving in a car to taking public transport. I also want to be more independent now, and I think knowing how to drive will really help me in the future.	
How will I know I have achieved this?	I will know I have achieved this because I will have checked off my action list as each one gets completed. I have also set myself a realistic deadline of when I hope to pass my driving test by, as I know that it can take more than one try from hearing it from friends and family. I will be driving by myself in my very own car!	
Notes		
Money.	Plan out how much I need to save and how long for so that I can pay for my lessons and test. Set up direct debit to savings account each month to help with this.	
Worry and anxiety.	Remember why I want to do this! Speak to sister to remind me of my motivation. I know there will be days where I am not feeling my best and others will be better.	

Tool 9 – My Goals and Ambitions

What is my aim?	Actions I need to do in order to achieve this	
When do I want to achieve this by?		
This is important to me because...		
How will I know I have achieved this?		
Notes		

One final message

We hope that you have found the toolkit useful on your self-advocacy journey and will continue to do so.

It is very common to experience ups and downs in your confidence, especially when advocating for yourself, but it is important to keep going. This may feel incredibly difficult but to reach your goals, **consistency is key**.

Just remember why you are advocating for yourself and all you have achieved up to this point. The more you advocate for yourself, the more you will feel able to do it. It may be a case of **allowing yourself some time to practise and increase your skills**.

It is likely that you will find some things more difficult to advocate for than others. This is to be expected. Always remind yourself of how far you have come: every little thing counts. Don't take your new self-advocacy skills for granted. Even what feels like the smallest step towards your goals is a fantastic achievement.



Accommodations

Adaptions or adjustments that you can ask for.

Burnout

The state of extreme physical and mental tiredness, heightened stress and less capacity to manage life skills, sensory input, and/or social interactions.

Communication

To share information with another person. There are many ways to communicate such as verbally (with your voice), written, signing or the use of electronic devices.

Dysregulated

When you cannot control a process in the body in the way you usually can – for example, uncontrollable crying, feeling agitated or not being able to speak.

Equality Act 2010

The Equality Act 2010 is the law relating to disability and your rights as a disabled person. [For more information and guidance, see the UK Government website.](#)

Flexibility

To change or make a compromise.

Hypersensitivity

Feeling high sensitivity to a sensory input.

Hyposensitivity

Feeling low sensitivity to a sensory input.

Information processing

how you take on and process information.

Interoception

To be able to feel signals from the body like your heartbeat, breathing, if you are hungry or need to use the toilet.

One page profile

A simple, structured summary of what is important to you and how you want to be supported.

Proprioception

To be able to feel the parts of your body such as arms, legs and feet.

Reasonable adjustments

Changes that organisations or services – for example, your place of work – have to make for you if your disability puts you at a disadvantage compared with other people who are not disabled.

Safe/same foods

Foods you know you will enjoy or are happy to eat frequently. You may choose these when you are feeling overwhelmed or in an unknown place to make yourself feel better.

Self-regulation

To be able to manage the sensory input your body receives.

Sensory aids

Different items that can help you to stim or manage your feelings – for example, fidget spinners or weighted blankets.

Sensory information

The information your body receives through your senses – for example, touch, taste, sight, sound and smell.

Sensory overload

When your body receives too much sensory information for you to cope with.

Sensory processing sensitivities

How sensitive you are to sensory information you receive.

Social interaction

When you are with or speak to another person.

Vestibular system

The feeling of balance and where your body is in the space around you.

Visual timetable/checklist

Shows what is happening over a certain period of time in a visual way. It might use real photographs, cartoon pictures or symbols.



**Autistic
Young
Experts**



**Autism
Education
Trust**

The Autistic Young Experts and the Autism Education Trust would like to express their gratitude to the pupils at The Rise School for their contributions and support in developing the toolkit.

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