

Basic Guidelines for interviewing a person with an autism spectrum disorder

Below are some very general suggestions to consider when interviewing a person with an autism spectrum disorder (ASD).

For further information please contact the National Autistic Society Autism Helpline

Monday-Friday, 10am-4pm

Tel: 0808 800 4104

Email: autismhelpline@nas.org.uk

- It may not be possible to gather all the information you need during one interview. You may have to do several sessions to build up familiarity with the person.
- Talk to the person's family/ carers, or professionals who know the person well to seek advice on the best way to interview them.
- It may be necessary to seek the advice of a psychologist who specialises in the field of ASD.
- The person may be calmer if they are interviewed in a familiar place, with a familiar person present
- Ensure there are no background noises/bright lights or too many objects in the room that could distract the person during the interview
- Sit the person with their back facing the window to minimise distractions
- Don't expect the person to necessarily make eye contact during the interview
- People with ASD often have an attachment to particular objects. The person may wish to hold an object or possibly twiddle or flap with it during the interview. Research suggests that sometimes this helps a person to concentrate. Removing the object may cause unnecessary distress.

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The National Autistic Society produces information sheets on a wide variety of topics. The Autism Helpline has advisors available to talk through a variety of issues in depth.

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- People with ASD can be hypersensitive. Avoid touching the person.
- Talk calmly in your natural voice. Do not use arm gestures if possible and try not to exaggerate your facial expression or voice tone as this can be misinterpreted.
- Use the person's name at the start of each question so they know they are being addressed.
- Cue the person in to the language you are about to use, preparing them for instructions or questions that might follow. For example 'John, I am going to ask you a question'.
- Keep language as simple and clear as possible. Only use necessary words.
- People with ASD have a very literal understanding of language. Avoid using irony or sarcasm
- Allow the person extra thinking time to respond to each question. People with ASD often take longer to process information. If there is no response at all try rephrasing the question. A person with an ASD is unlikely to be able to inform you when they don't understand what you have asked.
- Back up questions with the use of visual supports. People with ASD often understand visual information better than words. (Please see enclosed visual supports fact sheet for further information.)
- People with ASD may have better expressive language skills than receptive language skills. Be aware that they may not understand everything they say. Some people with ASD have echolalia, they may echo and repeat accurately the words of others without understanding the meaning of the words.
- Consider asking the person to draw or write down what happened
- Some people may need to know how long the interview will last and what will be happening after the interview.
- Keep the interview as short as possible. A person with an ASD may not be able to concentrate for any longer than ten to fifteen minutes at the most.

Resources available from The Autism Helpline

Using visual support

What is autism/ Asperger syndrome leaflet

Communication and interaction

If an item is marked as available from the NAS please contact:

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If you require further information please contact the

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