



Autism-friendly interviewing

The media provides a platform for Autistic people to share their life experiences, and generate widespread and greater understanding and acceptance of autism and Autistic people. This information sheet provides some advice on setting up an interview with an Autistic person along with language guidelines and some hints and tips for a successful interview.

Our purpose a different brilliant®

Understanding, engaging
and celebrating the strengths,
interests and aspirations of people
on the autism spectrum.

Preparing for an interview

- When scheduling an interview, give the interviewee as much notice as possible. Avoid changing plans at the last minute to decrease anxiety. If plans do change, make sure you take the time to explain the changes and ensure the interviewee understands the information and new schedule.
- Provide the option to conduct the interview in person, or via video call, phone or email.
- If possible, schedule the interview at a time that causes minimal disruption to the interviewee's routine.
- Ask how the interviewee would like to be described and their preferred pronouns and terminology.

Send an interview confirmation email to:

- Advise the interviewee who is interviewing them and anyone else who will be present, their job titles and if possible, send photos of the interviewer.
- Include a copy of the interview questions. Make sure the questions are specific and logical.
- Ask the interviewee what accommodations, sensory aids, or supports they may need.
- If the interview is face to face, give the interviewee clear information about how to get there (public transport options, parking, access points).
- If the interview is conducted via teleconference, include detailed instructions about how to log on and use the online software.
- Provide the interviewee with a guide of what to wear.
- Provide best contact for any questions.



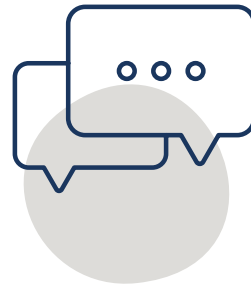
During an interview

During an interview, make sure you are focused on the interviewee, particularly if a carer or family member tries to answer on their behalf. It is important the Autistic individual is heard and respected.

If interview questions have been sent to the interviewee in advance, stick with those questions and their order.



The characteristics of autism are widely varied. Knowing about some of the more common characteristics (see table on the next page), may help you in interviewing or reporting on Autistic people.



After an interview

- Once the interview is concluded, ask the interviewee if they have any questions or concerns.
- Consider providing the interviewee with a contact email or phone number in case they want to follow up about the story.
- If possible, allow the interviewee to review the story or their quotes before publishing.

Based on the idea of a different brilliant®, Aspect's approach:

- Respects difference and diversity
- Builds a person's skills based on their strengths, interests, aspirations and support needs
- Develops autism-friendly environments
- Supports others to understand and embrace autism and to develop respectful supportive interactions.



COMMUNICATIONS

Some (but not all) Autistic people:

- Communicate honestly and directly.
- Dislike or have difficulties with small talk, sarcasm or understanding jokes.
- Repeat words or phrases in a way that can seem out of context.
- Use sounds, signs, gestures, pictures or speech–generating devices to communicate instead of spoken words.
- Take extra time to understand spoken information.

Interview tip

- Use clear, direct language.
- Avoid irony, sarcasm, figurative language, rhetorical questions, idioms or exaggerations.
- Give the interviewee time and space to respond.
- Pose questions that contain one idea/concept at a time.
- If there are multiple interviewees, use their name at the start of the question so they know the question is directed to them.
- If the interview is being conducted online, enable closed captions.
- If the person doesn't understand what you're saying, be prepared to re–phrase a question or repeat instructions.
- Be open to interviewees communicating in ways other than the spoken word.

STRENGTHS AND INTERESTS

Some (but not all) Autistic people:

- Have outstanding strengths, e.g. logical or visual thinking, good technological skills, memory for facts and figures.
- Have deep interests, e.g. Pokémon, Disney, air conditioners, bins.

Interview tip

- Give the interviewee a chance to discuss their strengths and interests if relevant to the interview, but do not push if they do not want to.

SOCIAL INTERACTIONS

Some (but not all) Autistic people:

- Feel uncomfortable in busy and/or complex social situations.
- Possess an ability to pay attention without making eye contact.
- Use or respond to body language differently.
- Misunderstand particular social interactions.
- Prefer to do things in the same way.
- Are comfortable socialising through technology such as phones, video conferencing or online chat.

Interview tip

- Give the interviewee time and space to respond.
- Understand that no eye contact does not mean they are not listening.
- Be respectful and empathetic.

SENSORY

Some (but not all) Autistic people:

- Are constantly aware or more aware of some sensations (sound, smell, taste, touch etc.).
- Feel distressed or overwhelmed if there are too many sensations at once.
- Work hard to avoid distress by covering ears, or hiding in quiet places to block out sensations.
- Seek sensory experiences (e.g. smelling food or flicking fingers in front of light)

Interview tip

- If you need to be close to the interviewee (e.g. to place a microphone), ask first if you are able to do so or if they would prefer to do so themselves with instructions.
- Conduct the interview in a place that is comfortable and free from distractions.
- Minimise sensory exposure where possible – dim lights, soundproofed room, no perfume etc.
- Allow the interviewee to use sensory aids (e.g. fidget cubes, squishies).
- Check in regularly with the interviewee to make sure they are comfortable or see if they would like to take a break.

THINKING

Some (but not all) Autistic people:

- Possess an uneven pattern of thinking abilities.
- Are able to focus on one thing for a long time.
- Find it difficult to switch from one thing to another.
- Are able to notice specific details, patterns or changes that other people may be unaware of.

Interview tip

- Be aware interviewee may focus on one topic for a long time, and find it difficult to switch from one topic to another, so give them time to do this.

EXPERIENCING AND DISPLAYING EMOTION

Some (but not all) Autistic people:

- Repeat movements (stimming) such as flapping hands or pacing around to show excitement or to help cope with stress.
- Have difficulty in understanding how non–Autistic people think in some situations (just as non–Autistic people have difficulty understanding Autistic people).

Interview tip

- Allow interviewee to stim; do not question stimming or ask the interviewee to stop.
- Have patience during the interview and be empathetic.
- Be open to different ways of thinking, communicating and behaving.