

# Information Sheet:

## Creating a positive environment for autistic people

### Getting started

Creating a positive environment for autistic people can really make a difference to everyday life. Whether you're autistic yourself, or are caring for someone who's autistic, these guidelines can help you to see where you can make changes to improve the environment.

It's important to know that each autistic person has individual needs, so what might work for one person might not work for another.

### General Guidelines

Ensure where possible that the environment for the autistic individual provides:

- Predictability
- Meaningful communication
- Manageability

Use the following points to help you set up a positive environment:

- If you're prepared for an autistic person, it's much easier to avoid problems. Avoiding problems is easier than trying to fix them afterwards.
- Help the person understand their strengths and how to work on their weaknesses.
- Set up the environment in a way that facilitates communication and reduces frustration.
- Help individuals compensate for difficulties they may encounter or experience.
- Become aware of ways in which you may need to modify your own behaviour.
- Set realistic and achievable expectations.
- Acknowledge that there will be tough moments! Try to remember that the autistic person is probably not trying to be difficult. The world can be very confusing for them and their attempts to navigate it may cause frustration for them and you.
- Aim to teach the person strategies so they can be independent.



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## Essential tips for supporting an autistic person

1. **Structure:** rules, schedules, timetables, checklists, task-based activities, and concise questioning can all help provide a structured environment that will aid decision making and enhance task focus.

2. **Meaningful communication:** sometimes words can be very difficult for an autistic person as they tend to be visual thinkers. Communication systems such as signs, picture cards and “situational narratives” may help in getting your message across. If unsure, check that what you have communicated has been understood. Use Who, What, When, Where, and How to establish context.

3. **Predictability:** Introduce change in a clear and concrete manner, and give constant reassurance. The person's ability to generalise skills from one environment to another may not be well-developed, so don't assume a learned skill will be transferred (or punish the person for failing to transfer skills). Prepare the person. Give warning of change – tell them what will be happening next, and what they will be expecting to do when finishing and starting activities/tasks.

4. **Manageability:** it is important for autistic people that tasks are broken down into manageable steps with realistic goals. Be aware that a persons' behaviour usually has a purpose, so look for the motivation, incentive, or reward that is available to them. Teach the person an appropriate way to ask for help. Praise successful outcomes. Be mindful of the person's stress level. Teach ways to express or show feelings, so you can prompt appropriate action before an outburst or episode of withdrawal.

5. **Positive Support:** autistic people can have low self-esteem, so it's important they feel supported. It can be more effective to use a reward system for good behaviour (i.e. stars), rather one for bad behaviour (i.e. crosses), and consider changing what you say to suit this (for example, “I'd love to see how well you can hold my hand” not “You must hold my hand!”). Reinforce all attempts at positive communication.

6. **Mutual Trust:** autistic people need to trust the people who are helping them interpret their environment. Showing respect for the person and confidence in your ability can help them feel more comfortable in the environment.

## Helpful hints

- Provide a predictable environment and routine – a routine board or daily calendar can be helpful.
- Prepare the person for changes in advance.
- Where possible introduce changes gradually and with visual information.



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## Helpful hints continued

- Use visuals to aid understanding.
- Make instructions brief and concrete.
- Use everyday situations to teach appropriate behaviour.
- Encourage and praise appropriate behaviour
- Use interests or preferred activities as rewards if other rewards fail to motivate.
- As difficult as it may be, remaining consistent, persistent and calm is the best method. Allow yourself some time to build up these skills.
- Allow the autistic person some “downtime” upon returning home from school or other socially and sensory demanding activities. This downtime may be organising a favourite activity or simply allowing them to watch television or stay inside their room.
- As consistency is very important to the overall success of strategies, try to make sure that all significant adults or older siblings are aware of any new rules, strategies and consequences for the autistic person. The aim is for the autistic person to be well supported and to avoid confusion.

This information sheet was produced using advice from the lived experience of families and autistic people from the Amaze community.

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