



The National
Autistic Society

Autism: a guide for police officers and staff

Until everyone understands

How this guide can help you

Autism affects more than 1% of the population.

You're therefore highly likely to encounter someone who is on the autism spectrum at some point in your policing career. This might include autistic people who aren't yet diagnosed.

This guide provides background information about autism and aims to help all police officers and staff who may come into contact with autistic children or adults meet their responsibilities under the *Equality Act 2010 (Disability Discrimination Act 1995, Northern Ireland)*.

It's designed to be used as a regular reference.



First published 2005 by The National Autistic Society
Revised edition 2008, 2011 and 2017
393 City Road, London EC1V 1NG
Tel: 020 7833 2299
Email: nas@nas.org.uk
www.autism.org.uk

With thanks to Laura Crane, Lucy Henry, Katie Maras and Rachel Willcock (all supported by the Economic and Social Research Council), as well as Sue Mulcahy, Nadia Ali, Trevor Borley, Dion Brown, Kleio Cossburn, Mark Crane, Chloe Hocking, Jan Jones, Michelle Mattison, John Nelson, Sharon Richardson and David Mery.

The National Autistic Society is a charity registered in England and Wales (269425) and in Scotland (SC039427) and a company limited by guarantee registered in England (No.1205298), registered office 393 City Road, London EC1V 1NG. 3372 100317

Contents

What is autism?	2
Different labels for autism	2
Characteristics of autism	2
Case study	6
Recognising and approaching autistic people	8
Indicators that someone may be autistic	8
Response officer dos and don'ts	9
Making arrests and in custody	12
Making an arrest	12
Dos and don'ts during arrest	12
Managing an autistic suspect in custody	13
Dos and don'ts in custody	14
Interviewing autistic victims, witnesses or suspects	16
Before the interview	16
Dos and don'ts for before the interview	17
Case study	18
During the interview	18
Dos and don'ts for during the interview	22
Appropriate Adults (AAs) and intermediaries	25
What is an Appropriate Adult?	25
What is an intermediary?	25
Further help and support	28
The National Autistic Society	28
National Police Autism Association (NPAA)	28



What is autism?

What is autism?

Autism is a lifelong developmental disability that affects how people perceive the world and interact with others.

Autistic people see, hear and feel the world differently to other people. If you are autistic, you are autistic for life; autism is not an illness or disease and cannot be 'cured'. Often people feel being autistic is a fundamental aspect of their identity.

Autism is a spectrum condition. All autistic people share certain difficulties, but being autistic will affect them in different ways. Some autistic people also have learning disabilities, mental health issues or other conditions, meaning people need different levels of support. All people on the autism spectrum learn and develop. With the right sort of support, all can be helped to live a more fulfilling life of their own choosing.

Different labels for autism

Over the years, different labels have been used to refer to autism, including autism spectrum disorder (ASD), autism spectrum condition (ASC), classic autism, Kanner autism, pervasive developmental disorder (PDD), high-functioning autism (HFA), Asperger syndrome and pathological demand avoidance (PDA). Some autistic adults use other terms to describe themselves, such as 'autist', 'autie' or 'aspie'.

Characteristics of autism

Autistic people often do not 'look' disabled. Some parents of autistic children say that other people simply think their child is naughty, while autistic adults find that they are misunderstood.

The characteristics of autism vary from one person to another, but in order for a diagnosis to be made, a person will usually be assessed as having had:

- persistent difficulties with social communication and social interaction
- restricted, repetitive patterns of behaviours, activities or interests since early childhood, to the extent that these 'limit and impair everyday functioning'.

Difficulties with social communication and social interaction

Autistic people have difficulties with interpreting both verbal and non-verbal language like gestures or tone of voice. Many have a very literal understanding of language, and think people always mean exactly what they say. They may find it difficult to use or understand:

- facial expressions
- tone of voice
- jokes and sarcasm.

Some may not speak, or have fairly limited speech. They will often understand more of what other people say to them than they are able to express, yet may struggle with vagueness or abstract concepts. Some autistic people benefit from using, or prefer to use, alternative means of communication, such as sign language or visual symbols. Some are able to communicate very effectively without speech.

Others have good language skills and are very articulate, but they may still find it hard to understand the expectations of others within conversations, perhaps repeating what the other person has just said (this is called echolalia) or talking at length about their own interests. An autistic person may appear to speak fluently and understand what you are saying to them, but could still need support (eg when the conversation becomes more complicated or is about a topic that makes them very anxious). The more anxious an autistic person becomes, the more support they will need and the greater the likelihood for misunderstandings.

Autistic people may find it hard to form friendships. Some may want to interact with other people and make friends, but may be unsure how to go about it.

Restricted and repetitive patterns of behaviours, activities or interests

Repetitive behaviour and routines

The world can seem a very unpredictable and confusing place to autistic people, who often rely on a daily routine so that they know what is going

to happen every day. They may want to always travel the same way to and from school or work, or eat exactly the same food for breakfast.

The use of rules can also be important. It may be difficult for an autistic person to take a different approach to something once they have been taught the 'right' way to do it. People on the autism spectrum may not be comfortable with the idea of change, but may be able to cope better if they can prepare for changes in advance.

Highly-focused interests

Many autistic people have intense and highly-focused interests, often from a fairly young age. These can change over time or be lifelong, and can be anything from art or music, to trains or computers. An interest may sometimes be unusual.

Sensory sensitivity

Autistic people may also experience over- or under-sensitivity to sounds, touch, tastes, smells, light, colours, temperatures or pain. For example, they may find certain background sounds, which other people ignore or block out, unbearably loud or distracting. This can cause anxiety or even physical pain. Or they may be fascinated by lights or spinning objects.

Meltdowns

A meltdown is 'an intense response to overwhelming situations'. It happens when someone becomes completely overwhelmed by their current situation and temporarily loses behavioural control. This loss of control can be expressed verbally (eg shouting, screaming, crying), or physically (eg kicking, lashing out, biting).

A meltdown is not the same as a temper tantrum. It is not 'bad' behaviour. When a person is completely overwhelmed, and their condition means it is difficult to express that in an appropriate way, it is understandable that the result is a meltdown.

Meltdowns are not the only way an autistic person may express feeling overwhelmed. Other behaviours that may appear are less explosive but equally common, such as refusing to interact, withdrawing from situations they find challenging, or avoiding them altogether.

Spotting that a meltdown is going to happen

Many autistic people will show signs of distress before having a meltdown, which is sometimes referred to as the 'rumble stage'. They may start to exhibit signs of anxiety such as pacing, seek reassurance through repetitive questioning or show physical signs such as rocking.

At this stage, there may still be a chance to prevent a meltdown. Strategies to consider include distraction, diversion, helping the person use calming strategies such as fiddle toys or listening to music, removing any potential triggers, and staying calm yourself.

How to react to a meltdown

Avoid shouting direct orders and use a low-key approach:

- give the person some time; it may take them a while to recover from an information or sensory overload
- calmly ask them (or their parent or friend) if they're okay, giving them plenty of time to respond
- try to create a quiet, safe space: ask people to move along and not to stare, turn off loud music and turn down bright lights – whatever you can think of to reduce the information overload, try it.

Read more about how we define autism at www.autism.org.uk.

CASE STUDY 1: HAMPSHIRE POLICE

A young man was arrested for a series of racially-aggravated assaults against medical staff at a general hospital. He was there due to a physical health issue. Whenever a black or Asian member of staff came near him, he would lash out and start shouting at them. He was calm and compliant with white medical staff.

His mother could not explain why he had such a reaction to visible ethnic minorities.

We worked with a local autism charity who spoke to him to establish what was happening. They identified that while he could process speech from people who spoke with the same local (southern) accent as him, he had great difficulty understanding people with different accents. In the case of people speaking to him with very strong accents, he could not understand anything that was said.

The result was that when he saw someone that he thought he would be unable to understand, he would become scared and frustrated and would react by lashing out. He could not verbalise his anxiety. He linked black or Asian members of staff with being unable to communicate.

We developed a passport for him to explain he needed to speak with someone with a local accent wherever possible.



Recognising and approaching autistic victims, witnesses or suspects

Recognising and approaching autistic victims, witnesses or suspects

Every autistic person is different, and it may not always be easy at first to tell whether someone has the condition. Nevertheless, if someone's behaviour and response seems unusual, consider whether that person could be autistic.

The guidelines for approaching and speaking to autistic people are similar to those you would use for approaching any other potentially vulnerable person in a stressful situation.

Indicators that someone may be autistic

The person's behaviour

Many autistic people do not have a formal diagnosis of autism, or may be unaware that they are autistic. Others may choose not to disclose that they are on the autism spectrum.

You may suspect that a person is autistic because they display some of the following characteristics.

Does the person you are dealing with...

- show unusual (or no) eye contact, and behave inappropriately, unpredictably or unusually?
- seem to struggle to understand you?
- find it difficult to talk to you?
- repeat what you or another person says?
- speak honestly, to the point of bluntness or rudeness?
- seem unusually anxious, agitated or even scared of you?
- display repetitive, obsessional-type behaviour?
- show sensitivity to sound, light or touch?
- seem not to realise the consequences of what they may have done?

These are all signs that the person may be autistic.

Response officer dos and don'ts

Do

- ✓ Aim to keep the situation **calm**.
- ✓ Be aware that your **behaviour or language may be confusing** to an autistic person in the same way that some autistic behaviour may be unexpected to you.
- ✓ Turn off **sirens or flashing lights** if possible.
- ✓ Check the person for injuries, being **as non-invasive as possible**. Autistic people may not tell you about an injury or may even be unaware of it themselves, due to sensory differences.
- ✓ Clearly **explain the situation** and what you will be asking questions about. If you are taking the person somewhere else, explain clearly where you are taking them and why.
- ✓ Use **visual supports/aids**, such as drawings or photos, to explain what is happening. If they can read, it may be useful to put the information in writing. Autistic people often understand visual information better than spoken words.
- ✓ Keep language **clear, concise and simple**: use short sentences and direct commands.
- ✓ Allow **extra time** for the person to respond.
- ✓ **Use their name** at the start of each sentence so that they know you are addressing them. Give clear, slow and direct instructions; for example, "Jack, please get out of the car."
- ✓ Use questions that are **direct, clear and focused on one thing at a time** to avoid confusion. An autistic person may respond to your question without understanding the implication of what they are saying, or they may agree with you simply because they think this is what they are supposed to do.
- ✓ Not be offended if they **seem too close to you**. Autistic people may not understand the notion of personal space. They may invade your personal space, or may themselves need more personal space.

Don't

- ✗ Attempt to **stop the person from flapping**, rocking, or making other repetitive movements – this can be a self-calming strategy.
- ✗ Autistic people may carry an **object for security**, such as a piece of string or paper. Removing it may raise anxiety and cause distress, so this is not recommended unless essential.
- ✗ **Touch the person or use handcuffs** if the situation is not dangerous or life-threatening, as they may respond with extreme agitation due to their heightened and acute sensitivity.
- ✗ **Raise your voice**.
- ✗ Use **sarcasm, figures of speech or irony**. Autistic people may take things literally, causing huge misunderstandings. Examples that would cause confusion to someone who interprets language literally are "You're pulling my leg", "Have you changed your mind?" and "It caught my eye".
- ✗ Expect an **immediate response** to questions or instructions, as the person may need time to process what you've said. Give the person plenty of time to respond.
- ✗ Misconstrue the person **avoiding eye contact** as rudeness or a cause for suspicion.
- ✗ Assume that if they **parrot what you say**, they are being rude or insolent. A response like that could be echolalia (repetition of the question or phrase), so check that they have fully understood the question.



Making arrests and in custody

Making arrests and in custody

Being arrested and held in custody (particularly in a cell) for even a short time is an anxiety-provoking experience for anyone. For an autistic person who needs a routine, is frightened by uncertainty, and may have sensory needs or sensitivities, it can be especially hard.

Making an arrest

Due to sensory and communication difficulties, the distress of being arrested is likely to be much greater for autistic people.

Autistic people are vulnerable, so you need to make reasonable adjustments.

Dos and don'ts during arrest

Do

- ✓ Keep **physical contact to a minimum**, avoiding use of handcuffs or other restraints, if possible.
- ✓ Check whether the person carries any **information about their needs**, read it and follow it.
- ✓ Explain simply and calmly **where you are taking the person and why**. Tell them what they should expect on arrival to the custody suite.
- ✓ Call ahead to **warn the custody staff** if the person appears to be distressed. Ask if arrangements can be made to avoid having to wait in a busy reception area.
- ✓ **Tell the custody sergeant that the detainee is autistic** and explain any related concerns.
- ✓ Deliver the caution **slowly and clearly**.

Don't

- ❌ **Rush into making an arrest** unless it is the only option.
- ❌ **Raise your voice or rush the person**, unless absolutely necessary.
- ❌ Use **sirens and flashing lights**, if you can avoid them.
- ❌ **Detain or transport an autistic person unaccompanied** in the back of a police van. They could become distressed and require your immediate attention or first aid.
- ❌ Attempt to **stop the person from rocking or making other repetitive movements** – these are self-calming mechanisms and likely to be beyond their control.
- ❌ **Remove 'comfort' items**, such as pieces of string or other small items, unless essential. This may raise anxiety.

Managing an autistic suspect in custody

Autistic people tend to find it hard to automatically recognise and protect their personal interests. In police detention, this can cause difficulties.

For this reason, the Appropriate Adult has an important role to play at all stages of the custody process (see page 24).

Some autistic people will have disabilities and medical conditions as well as their autism. These could include deafness, cerebral palsy, learning difficulties, epilepsy, ADHD and dyslexia.

Mental health problems, including stress, depression, suicidal thoughts, attempted suicide and suicide are more common among autistic people than other people. Therefore it's crucial to recognise autistic suspects and treat them as vulnerable while they're detained in police custody.

Dos and don'ts in custody

Do

- ✅ Remain alert to the possibility of **undisclosed autism**.
- ✅ Detain the person in the **quietest area possible** and try to be reassuring.
- ✅ Respond to any **sensitivity** that the person may have to particular textures such as police blankets or clothing.
- ✅ Make sure the **adequate safety measures** are in place to minimise risk of self-harm and other injury.
- ✅ Bear in mind that the signs of autism may fluctuate depending on **levels of anxiety and stress**.
- ✅ Let the person retain any **comfort item** they may have if it's not causing harm.
- ✅ Identify and appoint a **suitable Appropriate Adult** without delay.
- ✅ Consider seeking the **advice of an autism professional** if you are unable to appoint an Appropriate Adult who understands the person's particular needs and difficulties.
- ✅ **Make sure the person understands** why they are in custody, for how long and what they can expect to happen.
- ✅ **Avoid being specific about timings** if you don't have to be. "I will be with you in a minute" could be interpreted literally and cause anxiety if you don't then appear a minute later.
- ✅ Identify and meet any **dietary requirements**.

Don't

- ❌ **Overcrowd** the person. They may respond better to dealing with as few police officers and staff members as possible.
- ❌ Make **loud, sudden noises**. If an autistic person is kept in a cell, the noise of the door banging could be very distressing or shouting of other prisoners very frightening.



Interviewing autistic victims, witnesses or suspects

Interviewing autistic victims, witnesses or suspects

Before the interview

Get background information about the person

Learning more about the person's autism can help reduce their stress and improve the quality of the evidence you get. Talk to them and the people who support them (family or care workers) to find out:

- what causes them to feel stressed and anxious
- what 'special interests' they may have; think about how you could use these to help build rapport, or how to avoid them if they cause distraction
- whether they have any particular sensory difficulties or triggers, and what self-calming techniques they use that you shouldn't interrupt
- how you can adapt the environment to better suit their sensory needs.

Remember, people who know them well will know how best to support them to communicate with you. It may also be necessary to seek the advice of a psychologist or social worker who specialises in autism.

It's essential to hold several meetings prior to interview to help the interviewer build rapport, become more familiar with the person's communication needs, and ultimately improve the quality of the interview.

It's essential to get the support of an 'Appropriate Adult' (AA) for either a child or adult on the autism spectrum to help the process move forward for suspects (see page 24).

Manage stress and anxiety leading up to the interview

Autistic people can find changes in routine very difficult to handle, and will often become stressed if their routines are disturbed (for example, by being taken to a police station). Even planned events, such as the day of the video-recorded interview, may be very stressful.

If an autistic person is overwhelmed by stress, they may experience a ‘meltdown’ (see page 4).

Always outline procedures in advance and stick to them as much as possible. If changes are unavoidable, give the individual as much notice as possible.

Always give the person appropriately detailed information so they know what will happen, and what to expect. Send them a **personalised letter** which:

- is tailored to their communication needs
- clearly outlines procedures, explaining how long things are likely to last and what will happen
- uses clear, straightforward language and pictures.

You could also provide a **visual timetable** to further support a person’s understanding and expectations. This should include pictures and clearly show the order in which things will happen.

Dos and don’ts for before the interview

Do

- ✓ Find out about the person’s **particular needs**, including what causes them particular stress and sensory issues, from them and those closest to them.
- ✓ Consider **requesting an intermediary** to help with communication (see page 25).
- ✓ Make preparations for an interview environment that takes into account their **sensory needs**.
- ✓ Provide information **in advance** in clear and accessible formats.

Don’t

- ✗ Leave the person **unclear or confused** about what will happen and when.
- ✗ Make **sudden changes** to the procedure.
- ✗ Assume **you know best** how to communicate with them.
- ✗ Make **assumptions** about their level of understanding.

CASE STUDY 2: HAMPSHIRE POLICE

A young man was arrested for throwing stones at cars from a motorway bridge near his home. He had virtually no verbal communication skills, and when asked about why he had done it, he responded with a loud humming noise.

We called an advocate to assist, and after some time with the young man it emerged that he was highly sensitive to sound, and the noise of the motorway was incredibly intense for him at home.

His response was to go and throw stones at “the noise” to try and drive it away. He had no concept of the danger to motorists.

It also established that he had in fact been answering our questions in his own way. When asked why he had done it, his loud humming was the honest answer to our question.

During the interview

Accommodate sensory issues

Many autistic people find it difficult to process everyday sensory information such as sights, sounds and smells.

When autistic people struggle to cope with sensory information in the environment:

- they may become stressed, overloaded or anxious, and may even experience physical pain
- their anxiety may lead them to become agitated or disruptive; if their anxiety increases they may even lash out
- they may find it difficult to concentrate, listen to the questions being put to them, or to respond adequately
- they may have a 'meltdown', becoming completely overwhelmed by their current situation and temporarily losing behavioural control.

Suggested adjustments

Try interviewing the person in a different location such as a familiar place, or a room that is adapted to their needs.

Consider:

- changing the lighting, for example use a lamp rather than strip lighting
- removing any noise distractions, such as an electric fan.

You should also allow the person to hold or play with a favourite object or fiddle toy (such as a stress ball, blue tack or a piece of string) as this may help them to concentrate.

Use suitable language and communication approaches

An interviewer can help by:

- talking calmly in a natural voice
- keeping language as simple and clear as possible, using only necessary words
- avoiding the use of irony, figures of speech or sarcasm
- trying not to exaggerate facial expression or tone of voice (which can be misinterpreted)
- keeping gestures to a minimum to minimise distraction – but if necessary, accompanying them with unambiguous statements or questions that clarify their meaning

- using the person's name at the start of each question so they know they are being addressed
- telling the person what instructions or questions might follow, for example, "John, I want you to talk to me about..."
- allowing more time for the person to respond and not assuming that silence means there is no answer forthcoming
- rephrasing the question if there is no response at all
- prompting the person to gather sufficient relevant information, as they may be unable to inform the interviewer when they have not understood.

Remember that everyone on the autism spectrum is different. Autism is often referred to as a 'hidden disability'. Just because a person has good spoken language it does not mean that they have an equally good understanding of what's being said to them. Make sure an autistic person is always treated as vulnerable, regardless of how able they may outwardly appear.

Structure the interview and questions appropriately

What kind of interviewing model to use

The **cognitive interview technique** used by the police when interviewing eyewitnesses and victims about what they remember from a crime scene has been shown to be unhelpful for most autistic people.

The method aims to enable the person to recall every event that occurred, even if they feel it is trivial. However, when used with autistic people, it's likely that the series of 'context reinstatement' instructions (for example, asking the person to remember contextual details surrounding the event) are overloading.

Best practice would be to either use a simple structured interview or a drawing technique, rather than a cognitive interview. These should be done by officers, staff or intermediaries trained in the techniques, rather than a non-specialist.

It may not be possible to gather all the information needed during one interview. Keep the interview as short as possible. An autistic person may only be able to concentrate for 10-15 minutes at the most.

Before the interview begins, show the person the room where parents, carers or accompanying adults will wait during the interview, to help to manage separation anxiety.

Starting with practice questions

Many autistic people are better able to communicate when they can control the frequency and duration of questioning and breaks. A clear visual aid such as a sand timer can assist with this.

Before beginning the official interview, ask the person to tell you about a neutral event (which is not related to the case). Doing this can:

- help you to build rapport
- help you to introduce communication rules
- give you the chance to see how the person responds to different types of question.

What kind of questions to use

Autistic people may remember very small details and have to recall them in order, rather than jump to what you feel are the key points. This means they may need more support and patience to help them to recall the relevant details.

Open, ‘unsupported’ questions or cues (such as ‘tell me what happened’) are unhelpful, because they require the autistic person to second-guess what information you are looking for. This means it’s likely you’ll get answers which are irrelevant to the matter at hand. Specific, clear questions (such as “when you got to the shop at 4pm yesterday, what did the shopkeeper say to you?”) are far more likely to result in useful answers.

If you are using questions which require fixed option answers, such as yes/no questions, always include a third alternative such as “I don’t know”. It can also help to list these questions starting with the least likely alternatives. For example, if the offence relates to the father, a set of yes/no questions could be:

- “Is the person somebody at school?”
- “Is the person your brother/sister?”
- “Is the person your mum?”
- “Is the person your dad?”

Use relevant evidence which is not in dispute to support your questions, for example, “the man who grabbed your bag – was he shorter or taller than me when I’m standing up? Or are you not sure?”

Finally, it is really important not to use leading questions. Autistic people (unless they also have accompanying intellectual impairment) are not more suggestible than non-autistic people. However, they may be more likely to agree with the interviewer’s suggestions or to statements that are untrue, and not understand the consequences of this.

For example asking, “Has your laptop got anything on it about plans for any terrorism acts?” is likely to elicit agreement, as a web browser or a text editor could be used to plan anything.

Visual aids

Autistic people often understand visual information better than words, and so it can be helpful to:

- back up questions with visual aids or supports
- ask the person to draw or write down what happened
- create topic cards relating to elements of the event(s) in question.

For more information about questioning autistic people, the Advocate’s Gateway has toolkits about autism for advocates. See www.theadvocatesgateway.org/toolkits.

Dos and don’ts for during the interview

Do

- ✓ Consider the use of **drawings and diagrams**.
- ✓ Offer **frequent breaks** and ‘time out’ if needed.
- ✓ **Tailor** language to the individual.

- ✓ Start sentences with the **person's name** where appropriate.
- ✓ Be aware of what the person understands as well as what the person can say themselves – these skills may be **mismatched**.
- ✓ Frequently **check understanding** and summarise answers.
- ✓ Ask one **point per question**, for example, “Was the shopkeeper on the phone when you arrived?”, and avoid stacked and multi-part questions, for example, “Was the shopkeeper on the phone when you arrived and did he hang up?”
- ✓ Use the **past tense for events that have already happened**, such as “Think about when you were in the shop. Did you speak to Simon?”
- ✓ Ask **direct, literal questions** such as “Did you know at that time that Simon was running late?”, and avoid questions or statements that use insinuation or that require inference or deduction such as, “You knew he was late but you still went to the shop in the morning?”

Don'ts

- ✗ Try to stop **repetitive behaviours** – they may be a coping mechanism.
- ✗ Take away **comfort items**.
- ✗ Misinterpret **echolalia (repeating what you say) or silence** for insolence or evasion of questions.
- ✗ Move too quickly – allow enough time to **process questions** and verbalise an answer.
- ✗ Use questions that are statements such as, “You went to the shop?”, or **use intonation** to indicate a question.
- ✗ Use **‘tag’ questions** such as “You went to the shop, didn’t you?”, or encouraging tags such as “That’s correct”.
- ✗ Use questions posed in the present tense, such as “So, now are you in the shop and talking to Simon?”

Appropriate Adults (AAs) and intermediaries

Appropriate Adults (AAs) and intermediaries

What is an Appropriate Adult?

An AA must be called to the police station to act as a safeguard and provide independent support to a vulnerable suspect.

Appointment of an AA should be based upon a person's vulnerability and not on their perceived intellect. An autistic person may have clear and fluent speech, but may still find communicating verbally and non-verbally very difficult, especially in stressful situations and with strangers.

The role of the AA is to support, advise and assist the detainee to make sure they understand what is happening at the police station during the interview and investigative stages. The AA also facilitates communication between the detainee and police, and makes sure the rights of the detainee are respected.

The AA must be present when the custody officer informs the detainee of their rights and entitlements and during the caution. If either of these have already been carried out before their arrival they must be repeated in their presence. The AA must also be present during interviews, and may intervene if they feel communication needs to improve, advise that a break is needed or recommend that the detainee should seek legal advice. Finally, they should also be present when the detainee is asked to agree and/or sign any documentation.

What is an intermediary?

An intermediary is an impartial expert in communication who can assist the police and the court in obtaining evidence from vulnerable witnesses and defendants, including autistic children and adults.

An intermediary's role includes conducting an assessment of the person's communication needs, and providing person-specific recommendations and strategies about:

- i. how police and the court can communicate information and questions effectively and appropriately (prior to and during questioning)
- ii. how best to communicate when preparing the person for the various stages of the criminal justice process
- iii. how to monitor and manage anxiety associated with giving evidence where it impacts upon communication
- iv. how to appropriately use communication aids and/or devices to support communication ('props').

Ultimately, the intermediary's role is to help the person communicate with the police and vice versa and to assist the police and the court to achieve best evidence.

An intermediary can be appointed for witnesses at the investigation stage or pre-trial. It may be possible to acquire the assistance of an intermediary for a suspect interview, but if this is not possible, an intermediary may be appointed at the trial stage if the case proceeds and the court permits.

For information on how to get an intermediary, visit www.intermediaries-for-justice.org.



Further help and support

Further help and support

Any autistic person who encounters the Criminal Justice System is likely to experience higher than usual levels of anxiety. It's likely to be a stressful experience because of the circumstances leading to their involvement. But in addition, for many the anxiety of having their routine changed, their actions questioned or their circumstances scrutinised, can lead to unmanageable outbursts of frustration or equally inexplicable silences.

The reactions that autistic people show are all different. Professionals involved in their care and support during contact with the Criminal Justice System should be prepared and able to assist them as much as possible.

Autism is a hidden disability but, with knowledge and understanding, we can support the people it affects, helping to make sure that they play a full role in society and are afforded the rights and protection they need.

The National Autistic Society

You can find further information about autism, including the latest information on legislative frameworks at www.autism.org.uk/cjp or by calling our Information Centre on **0845 070 4004**.

National Police Autism Association (NPAA)

The National Police Autism Association was founded in 2015 to support UK police officers, staff and volunteers who are affected by autism spectrum condition (including Asperger syndrome) and other hidden conditions including dyslexia, dyspraxia and ADHD. The NPAA supports those who are affected personally by these conditions, carers for children and family members, and those with a professional interest. They maintain a network of force champions, and run a closed web forum for members of the police and criminal justice family.

The NPAA is also working to achieve a uniform high standard of service for autistic members of the public who come into contact with the police, either as victims, witnesses or suspects. They promote training for frontline officers and supervisors, and share best practices between forces.

The NPAA is run by a team of volunteer police officers and staff members from forces across the UK. It is supported by the National Police Chiefs' Council, the Disabled Police Association and The National Autistic Society.

For more information, visit the NPAA website at www.npaa.org.uk, and follow us on Twitter at "Police Autism UK" (@npaa_uk).

Autism affects more than 1% of the population. As a police officer, you're therefore highly likely to encounter someone who is on the autism spectrum at some point in your career.

This guide will give you essential guidance and practical advice for how to work effectively with autistic children or adults, including out in public, during arrest, in custody and during interviews.

About The National Autistic Society

We are the UK's leading autism charity. Since we began over 50 years ago, we have been pioneering new ways to support people and understand autism. We continue to learn every day from the children and adults we support in our schools and care services.

Based on our experience, and with support from our members, donors and volunteers, we provide life-changing information and advice to millions of autistic people, their families and friends. And we support professionals, politicians and the public to understand autism better so that more autistic people of all ages can be understood, supported and appreciated for who they are.

Until everyone understands.



The National Autistic Society
393 City Road
London
EC1V 1NG

Switchboard: 020 7833 2299
Minicom: 0845 070 4003
Fax: 020 7833 9666
Email: nas@nas.org.uk
Website: www.autism.org.uk