

AUTSCAPE POLICY FOR MANAGING BOUNDARIES / CHALLENGING BEHAVIOUR

ETHOS

Autscape aims to provide a safe space where individuals have valued opportunities to discover and develop a healthy autistic identity and to enjoy the company of other autistics and supportive non-autistic people in an adapted environment.

We aim to create a supportive and peaceful atmosphere throughout Autscape activities, and it is hoped that participants will feel safe and comfortable.

Co-existing in a peaceful and respectful manner will assist participants to recognize that the people are as important as the environment and activities at Autscape.

PROTOCOL

There will be occasions when other participants or members of the organizing committee are concerned about an individual, or group of individuals, in respect of boundaries or behaviour. In these instances, a committee member may speak to the individual(s) concerned about their behaviour immediately if deemed appropriate by the committee member. The committee member must report his or her concerns to the chair (or if not available the vice chair) within 12 hours. The chair (or vice chair) will then, as far as possible and appropriate, consult other committee members, who will have the opportunity to meet to discuss the concerns aired. The purpose of this meeting is to discuss the situation and arrive at possible outcomes and ways of supporting the participant.

Any instances of problem behaviour should be reported to the committee members present at the next scheduled on-site meeting. The committee will

need to demonstrate sensitivity, an awareness of confidentiality, respect for the dignity of the person, reasonable understanding and tolerance of autistic behaviour, and for the inclusivity of Autscope.

Autscope's primary concern is to foster the safety, welfare and enjoyment of all participants and the satisfactory staging of the Autscope conference (both in the current year and for the future). Consequently the organizing committee will normally only intervene where these goals are in jeopardy, rather than to impose particular moral or ethical standards on participants.

Autscope believes that people should be allowed to make mistakes and learn from them in a supportive and non-judgmental environment. Consequently the organizing committee will strive to avoid retention of formal records or institutional memory of individual's past mistakes beyond that which is absolutely necessary to achieving the primary concerns stated above.

CONFIDENTIALITY

All matters will be confidential to the committee. Matters of law (sexual abuse, drugs, violence) or behaviour which gives rise to grave concerns about the physical and emotional well being of the person concerned (mental confusion, severe self-harm) may need to be referred to statutory agencies or other professionals. The committee may also override a participant's right to confidentiality in order to provide essential information to a participant's carer, but should only consider doing so against a participant's wishes in cases in which a behaviour gives rise to grave concerns about the physical and emotional well being of the person concerned or others and/or the continued attendance of the participant at Autscope is in jeopardy.

After the initial meeting of the committee, the person(s) concerned will be invited to join the process. A smaller group than the committee might deal with the matter at this stage. A committee member or other person, in consultation with the participant, should be available to support that participant during the process. The purpose of this meeting with the participant is to explore the possibilities identified and to arrive at an agreed way forward.

Where the committee decides it is appropriate to refer matters of concern to outside agencies, this is to be done with respect for the sensitive and personal nature of the concern. Whenever possible such a referral will be made by the participant themselves or with their agreement. Where it is not possible to achieve this, the chair or another person chosen by the committee will refer the matter to the appropriate agency, keeping the participant as fully informed as possible.

DEALING WITH ISSUES WHICH ARISE

As far as possible, Autscape wishes to avoid prescribing participant behaviour in order to ensure that participants feel as comfortable and uninhibited as possible. However there are three sources of limitations on the freedom of action of Autscape participants. All participants are subject to English law (just as they would be anywhere else). In addition Autscape itself has a number of internal guidelines designed to ensure the environment is safe and comfortable for all participants; we may also need to ask individuals to modify any behaviour which jeopardizes someone else's safety, comfort or enjoyment. Finally the venue where Autscape takes place usually has some guidelines and Autscape participants are expected to abide by these in order to avoid jeopardizing Autscape's welcome at the venue.

If a matter comes to the attention of the committee in which guidelines arising from any of these areas have (or are suspected to have) been broken, the following steps are suggested:

1. Minor infringements can be dealt with by individual committee members at their own discretion, but should subsequently be noted in the daily log so that organizers coming on duty know what has/has not already been dealt with. Minor matters noted in this way are not intended to form part of individual participants' records. Although the daily log is made available to future committees for training and other purposes the committee has the option to delete particularly sensitive information.
2. More major infringements should be reported to the chair (or vice chair) and, where appropriate, should be dealt with following a meeting of the committee, excepting those situations where immediate action is necessary. If not all committee members are available, those available committee members will deal with the situation.

3. In those cases arising from difficulties in understanding, attempts to resolve the situation through clarification and support of those individuals involved will be made.
4. Those cases which have been established as not arising from miscommunication or misunderstanding, should be dealt with via further action.
5. Inform/identify to the individuals those guidelines they have broken. Inform them of the current consequences of this and any future consequences arising from the continuation of the violation of guidelines.
6. Serious problems should be recorded in a location which ensures the information will be readily available both to the current committee and to the registrar in future years, allowing the committee adequate time to consider how and whether an individual might be supported to attend Autscope successfully. Such records kept about individual participants should be reviewed by the committee annually and there should be a presumption in favour of their deletion unless the committee agrees it is necessary to retain the record.
7. The consequences of breaking guidelines are decided by the collective judgment of committee members, except with regard to those situations involving legal issues or falling under the safeguarding policy, which remain absolute.
8. In cases where the committee as a whole cannot decide on consequences, the final decision rests with the chair.
9. After the matter has been dealt with, the chair (or vice chair) will then call a meeting for the whole committee to review what has happened. This meeting (which may follow on from or occur subsequently to a meeting called to deal with the matter) will re-examine the guidelines and any agreement which has been reached with the participant(s) concerned (see also next section on behaviour contracts). The chair of this meeting will guide the committee to examine the guidelines that have been broken and allow committee members to air any feelings or views. Any agreement with the participant(s) concerned can be amended as necessary, and any suggestions for the Autscope guidelines can be recorded by the secretary.
10. If committee members wish to make a formal complaint against another committee member, they should refer to, and follow, the committee members' complaints policy.

BEHAVIOUR CONTRACTS

In cases where an individual participant has engaged in serious and/or repeated infringements at one or more Autscape conferences, the committee may decide to ask that person to agree to a behaviour contract. In a case where, in the opinion of the committee, it is absolutely necessary to do so, agreement to such a contract may be made a condition of registration at future Autscapes.

LEAVING AUTSCAPE

If it proves impossible for the person to remain at Autscape, the leave-taking is to be handled sensitively and with regard to the vulnerability of the person concerned.

When it is not possible for a person to travel safely alone, they will be entrusted to the care of a person the committee considers appropriate (whenever possible a person familiar to and acceptable to the participant) or to the relevant statutory agency or other professional.

When an Autscape participant leaves, for whatever reason, this represents a loss to the entire organization. Provision is to be made for explaining the person's departure to other participants as far as confidentiality permits. Other Autscape participants may need to be assured that this event is exceptional and that they are safe and not at risk of removal.