



AUTSCAPE

Autistic Wellbeing

10-13 August, 2010

Ammerdown Centre, Radstock, Somerset, UK

Part 1: The Autscape Experience

Table of contents	
Introduction	2
Registration	2
Getting involved: Annual General Meeting (AGM)	3
Venue.....	4
Location and setting	4
Facilities	4
Accommodation	5
Venue staff and residents	5
Services.....	6
Food service	6
Phone and Internet access	6
Merchandise	6
Getting Along	7
Autistic needs and behaviour	7
Expectations	7
Help.....	7
Social interaction	8
Sensory issues	9
Challenges.....	10
Choices	10
Sharing a room	10
Busy days	10
Unstructured time	11
Self-care	11
Orientation	12
Overload.....	12

Introduction

We hope you are looking forward to coming to Autescape. We understand how important it is, especially for autistic people, to know what to expect. In these documents, we will give you as much information as we can. The website will contain updates as they become available, and some will be given out at orientation.

This is for your information. You may print it, transfer it to a PDA, mobile or laptop, or just read it. We suggest you print the relevant sections from part 3 and carry them with you.

The information pack consists of these files:

1. **Experience:** what to expect at Autescape and how to deal with challenges
2. **Programme:** presentations and presenters' information and schedule
3. **Printing:** lists, maps and forms you may want to print for future reference

If you have any questions, feel free to contact us, preferably by e-mail: info@autescape.org. If you can't e-mail, phone: 01606 41200 or 07801 400 723

Registration

Registration is **2:30-5:30pm, Tuesday** and **9:00-9:30am Wed-Fri**. You only need to register once. Please **do not** come early. If you can't make it at those times, please contact the registrar at: registrar@autescape.org to arrange for your arrival. If you arrive earlier or later than planned, please ask at Reception for an organiser.

Registration procedure

1. Go through the main doors to Reception for registration.
2. Name badges will be laid out on a table alphabetically by badge name. Please take yours.
3. Say your name or show your name badge to the venue staff at the desk.
4. **If you are staying on site:** Venue staff will show you to your room where you will find a folder with your name on it. When you feel ready, return to the reception area.
5. **If you are not staying on site:** You will be given a conference folder.

Options

Also in the reception area you will be able to:

- Request a venue tour
- Ask questions of Autescape volunteers
- Choose a complimentary Autescape pen and pencil. Additional pens are available for 50p each and pencils for 30p each.
- Choose an alternative way to attach your badge

It is okay to go to your room or look around the venue before returning to the reception area. The choice is yours.

NB: Day participants are welcome to stay for the evening meal and to join in the evening activities.

Getting involved: Annual General Meeting (AGM)

Autscape's AGM, where the new committee will be elected, will be on the final day of Autscape. If you want to have a say in who organises the next Autscape, make sure to join in the AGM at **11:30am on 13 August 2010** in the John Todd Meeting Room at Ammerdown. You need to be a member of Autscape to vote at the AGM, so if you didn't select the membership option you will need to contact the registrar (registrar@autscape.org) and become a member. If you have missed the chance to be nominated for the committee, you can still join a sub-committee (check on the website or ask a committee member on duty if you are unsure of how to do this) or otherwise get involved.

At Autscape we need a number of volunteers to help with collecting questions at presentations, setting up rooms and various other tasks. If you would like to volunteer, please let us know before or during Autscape.

Venue

Location and setting

Autscape will take place at the Ammerdown Centre, near Radstock, Somerset, 13 miles from the Georgian city of Bath. See part 3 of this pack for the exact address and information on how to find the venue.

The venue has a peaceful and tranquil setting, nestled in the Somerset countryside. Most of the extensive grounds are available for walking in all the year round and heron, buzzards and many other birds, as well as deer, can often be seen.

There is an attractive garden area with seating where you may play games or eat meals and a small area which is a 'silent garden'.

The town of Radstock is a long walk or short drive from the centre (about 3 miles). There are no pavements or footpaths on this route. The City of Bath is 30 minutes away by car. There are no shops in the immediate vicinity, though a few essentials are available on the first floor. You are advised to bring anything you may need with you.

Facilities

Pool

There is an outdoor pool on-site which will be available from 1:30-3pm each afternoon, to coincide with afternoon leisure sessions. A minimum of 2 people must be swimming at any one time and children must be supervised by an adult. *There is no lifeguard and swimming is at your own risk.* Both the venue and Autscape require people who wish to go swimming to sign a disclaimer form (these will be available at reception). There is no fence around the pool any more.

Escapes

- **Quiet room:** there will be a designated Quiet Room where you can go to relax and 'chill out' if things are getting too much. No interaction or unnecessary noise is permitted in the Quiet Room and there will be some quiet sensory equipment in this room to help you relax.
- **Chapel:** there is a chapel in the grounds and participants are welcome to join the resident community for prayer at specified times, or to use the chapel for private prayer or a quiet space whenever it is not in use. An informal music group may take place in the chapel at designated times.
- **Sensory room:** there will be a room which contains some sensory equipment Autscape has purchased. Please treat the equipment with respect. We do not expect the sensory room to always be a quiet escape, but it is likely to have designated times for silence and noisy activity.

Noise levels

There will be a system to indicate the allowed noise level in different areas.

Type	Colour	Description
Silent	Red	No interaction or unnecessary noise in this area
Moderate	Yellow	Talking allowed, but please refrain from shouting. No sound amplifiers, musical instruments or stereos.
Noisy	Green	Music, films or other loud activity taking place

Some areas will always be a particular colour, while others will vary according to the activity and time.

Accommodation

Most of the accommodation is in the main building. Most rooms are shared, with a key for each person. All rooms have their own toilet and washbasin, and most have a shower. There are also communal baths and showers on the first floor of the main building. Towels are provided. To avoid unwelcome intrusions, rooms will not be cleaned during Autscape.

A few exterior doors have electronic access. A key fob for this will be included with your door key. To unlock the door, wave the black keychain/fob in front of the panel next to the door.

Venue staff and residents

Autscape has been held at Ammerdown before; however, it is possible there have been some changes since 2007. Remember the organisers will also need time to settle in and may not be able to instantly answer your questions. The venue staff and residents may also take some time to get used to our ways again. Please be patient.

We have explained our initiation badge system to the venue staff and some of them will have become familiar with our ways in previous years, so the staff will expect some people who prefer not to speak and instead use gestures such as pointing to indicate their needs; for example their lunch choice.

Services

Food service

Autescape registration includes three meals per day for those staying on site and two meals (lunch and supper) for those staying elsewhere. If you would like to purchase breakfast for an additional £3, please ask for this by supper time the day before.

Meals are served cafeteria style, with a queue and servers, in a communal dining hall. That part is not very autism friendly, but once you have your meal you may take it to a table in the dining hall, outdoors, to the lounge or to your bedroom. If you prefer to have your food in the dining room, but want to eat your meal silently, you can use the no interaction table. **No food or drink other than water may be taken into the meeting rooms.**

Mealtimes

Breakfast 7:30-9:00

Lunch starts at 12:30

Supper starts at 18:30

We are asked to please arrive punctually for meals. Each meal is followed by a half hour break to accommodate slow eaters and those who need a longer rest.

Phone and Internet access

Most of the ground floor now has a Wifi signal:

John Todd & Trevett (large meeting rooms) - very good

Lounge - available in middle section

TV room - signal is available

Russell - medium signal

Upper Dovecote and Library - good

Signal in bedrooms is very unlikely. There is also a computer in the TV room you can use for internet access.

Because of the high numbers attending Autescape this year, we ask participants not to sit browsing the internet where there is a formal presentation/discussion happening.

Mobile coverage at the venue is poor and best accessed outside or on the first floor. There is a payphone near the bottom of the stairs near the coffee area.

Merchandise

Autescape will have some merchandise for sale; the profits go towards keeping the cost of Autescape down. We hope to have the following:

- Mugs, keyrings and baseball caps with Autescape logo
- Selection of stimmy toys
- T-shirts (order it at Autescape and it will be posted to you; knowing your t-shirt size will help) – please write your address clearly for us. If you want to supply your own t-shirt to be printed with the Autescape logo please bring it with you.

We can take UK cheques or cash. Donations are also welcome.

The venue has a small number of essentials for sale on the first floor. An honesty system is in use. This means you pay for your items by putting your payment into a box. They also have a craft shop near reception.

Getting Along

Autistic needs and behaviour

We take autistic needs into consideration throughout the planning and running of Autescape. Of course, there's no way we could anticipate, let alone accommodate, every need of every autistic person. We are doing our best within the constraints of our knowledge, energy and resources. It is important to remember that nearly everyone at Autescape, including organisers, is also autistic. They may be struggling to cope just as much as you.

That said, autistic behaviour is totally normal and expected at Autescape. Stimming (repetitive movements), echolalia, distractibility, atypical body language, and perseveration (obsessiveness), to name but a few possibilities, are expected and accepted. Appearing, or indeed being, completely NT (neurologically typical, or 'normal') is also perfectly acceptable. Most importantly, **you can be yourself here!**

Expectations

By coming to Autescape, we expect that you can manage certain things, or will bring someone to help you.

- Respect others' space and property
- Follow 'house rules' about things like smoking and drinking
- Make your own choices
- Share a room (if applicable)
- Organise your time
- Take care of your health and hygiene
- Ask for help

House rules

Please help us by following these house rules and the guidelines that follow.

- **Smoking:** smoking is restricted to one of the tables in the garden, the area around a bench in front of the building, or away from the buildings altogether. Please do not smoke in the courtyard. Please use Autescape ashtrays provided (those away from the building) and be aware of smoke smells on hands, hair and clothing, which may be distressing to other participants.
- **Noise:** talking in the corridors and garden at night can disturb people trying to sleep. Please refrain from talking in the corridors outside bedrooms at all times, and keep your voices low in the garden after 10pm.
- **Alcohol:** the venue asks that you not bring your own alcohol. There is a bar in the lounge where you may purchase drinks in the evening until 10pm. You may drink alcohol in the lounge or garden, but please do not take alcohol to bedrooms or meeting rooms.
- **Consideration:** please respect initiation badges, noise level signs, and sensory sensitivities of other participants, as described in the next section.

Help

Care needs

Autescape does not provide any formal or professional individual help. It may sometimes be possible to arrange with another participant to help in small ways; for

example, your roommate may be willing to wake you in the morning. However, this kind of help must be voluntary and must not be an unfair burden on others. Due to their own limitations, others may not be available or 100% reliable, even if they wish to help. If you require extensive or essential assistance, please bring a carer who can provide that for you.

Organisers on duty

Nevertheless, we recognise that things go wrong for all of us from time to time. If you have queries or problems or need help understanding something, two organisers will be on duty at all times. A duty rota will be displayed in the Information Centre and the people on duty will wear blue headwear or a blue sash so that you can identify them. They will also be displaying a blue card in their initiation badge.

Between midnight and 8am the two people on duty will be asleep, so please only contact them at these times if it is VERY IMPORTANT. Whenever possible, please allow organisers who are not on duty to have a rest; come to one of the organisers on duty with your concerns.

Action needed box

If you are not comfortable approaching an organiser for help, you may leave a note in the 'action needed' box which will be in the information area. This box will be checked on a regular basis and the concerns acted on. If you need a personal reply, please be sure to identify yourself. Write as neatly as possible. If we can't read it, we can't help you.

First Aid

The venue provides trained first aiders on site during the day. Ask an organiser on duty if you need first aid. In the evenings and overnight we can reach a first aider by phone. Again please contact one of the organisers on duty.

Social interaction

There is no requirement to socialise at all, and there will be no disapproval of those who choose not to interact with others.

Initiation badges

Everyone will be provided with coloured badges they can use to indicate who may initiate social interaction with them.

Type	Colour	Description
No initiation	Red	Please do not initiate any interaction with me.
Prior permission	Yellow	Please do not initiate unless I have already given you permission to approach me on a yellow badge.
Please initiate	Green	I would like to socialise, but I have difficulty initiating. Please initiate with me.
Neutral	White	I am able to regulate my own interaction.

Filming and photography

Black circle: People who do not wish to be photographed or filmed will be wearing a black circle. Permission must be sought from every individual in a photograph before any publication.

Please respect all these badges for the safety and comfort of all participants.

No interaction table

At mealtimes, a 'no interaction' table will be available in the dining room. This table will be marked by a red sign.

Sensory issues

Sensory issues, and mechanisms to reduce them, will be common and totally acceptable. No one will think it odd or cause you any difficulty for wearing sunglasses, earplugs, headphones or whatever you may require. Unfortunately, some of the rooms do have fluorescent lighting, but we will keep its use to a minimum.

While you are welcome to have 'stim toys', such as something to fiddle with or lights to look at, please be aware that some people find these very distracting.

Sensory considerations for other participants

Because many autistic people have particular sensory sensitivities, we have a few special rules to avoid inadvertently causing distress.

- **Touch:** Some autistics are very sensitive to touch. Please do not touch anyone without first asking their permission – including children.
- **Noise:** Please be aware of people trying to rest, and keep noise to a minimum near bedrooms and the Quiet Room, both indoors and outside the windows. Please respect noise level signs posted on the door of different rooms. If you have noisy stims or tics, try to contain them during presentations. If this is likely to be a problem for you, please discuss it with us. Please keep noise levels to a minimum after dark as it could prevent other participants from sleeping.
- **Lights:** Before using a camera flash, you must gain the permission of everyone in the room. Under most circumstances, flashing light 'stim toys' are not a problem. However, they may be disturbing to some people, so please be respectful of that. Presenters may ask for flashing lights not to be used during their presentations.
- **Smells:** Please do not wear scented products at Autescape. If you smoke or drink alcohol, be aware that others may find this aversive. We recommend you wash your hands immediately after smoking and try not to get too close to others until the smell has dissipated.

Challenges

Choices

There are many choices to be made before and throughout the conference, ranging from what you'd like to eat, to which discussions you'd like to participate in.

What we will do:

We will try to make it easier on you by giving as much information as possible in advance so you can consider your options.

What you can do:

- Consider your options well ahead of time. If you decide what you would like to go to and what interests you, this can limit the stress of having many choices to make when you have a lot of other things to cope with.
- Study the menus in advance. A copy of the menus will be available in the information centre; you can make your food choices, or at least have something in mind, before entering the serving queue.

Sharing a room

Some participants will be sharing a room with one or more people they don't know. We understand that this can be very difficult, but it allows as many people as possible to participate in Autscope. Where interaction and noise level choices are not the same, the most restrictive level must be followed.

What we will do:

We will try to match you up with the most compatible roommate(s) we can find.

What you can do:

- If noises disturb you, earplugs may help you sleep more comfortably.
- If you are up a lot in the night, please be quiet and respectful of your sleeping roommate(s).
- You can choose to have a 'no interaction' room, and please respect it if your roommate(s) would prefer not to interact in the room.

Busy days

For many participants, the amount of activity at Autscope will be far more than they're used to. This can be exhausting.

What we will do:

We have scheduled breaks between activities, and the evenings are more relaxed, with social and entertainment activities.

What you can do:

- Remember to take time out to relax in whatever way works best for you.
- It is more difficult to cope with being busy if you're tired, so adequate rest and sleep will help you cope with as much activity as you would like.
- You always have the choice not to do a particular activity, or to leave early if you're feeling stressed. Only you can decide what you would like to do with your time at Autscope.

Unstructured time

Some autistic people don't know what to do if there is a large amount of unstructured time, especially in an unfamiliar place. Knowing what to expect and what to do all the time can help some people cope better.

What we will do:

We have tried to keep a balance between structured and unstructured time. We have avoided large blocks of totally unstructured time during the day. When there is unstructured time, there are many options for activities you could do alone or with others to fill it. Some of the options won't be determined until the event, but there will be opportunities to suggest or sign up for structured or semi-structured activities for most of the time there.

What you can do:

- If unstructured time is a problem for you, try to think ahead about how you would like to occupy yourself in the evenings.
- Bring your own entertainment, such as books, music, electronic devices, games to share, musical instruments or other interests and hobbies.
- Consider running a structured discussion one evening, and think of some topics you would like to discuss with others.

Self-care

Many autistic people have trouble taking care of themselves in various ways, such as nutrition, health and hygiene. You will have to be able to get yourself up, washed and dressed without intervention from others. You will be better able to cope with the demands of being at Autescape if you eat and sleep as regularly as possible.

What we will do:

The structure of the days will help many people with routines of rising and going to bed and taking breaks. Meals are cooked for you and served at specific times, so your nutrition should be adequately catered for as long as you partake.

What you can do:

- If you take any medication, you can get a multi-compartment box which you can fill ahead of time.
- Come to meals in good time and ready to eat. The venue ask that we are on time for meals. You may take as long as you like to eat your meal. Take your meal away somewhere quieter if you find it hard to eat with distractions.
- Bring an alarm clock if you have difficulty getting up in the morning. If you have a portable alarm or a mobile phone, you can set it to go off at bedtime or other important times of day.
- When planning how much time you will need in the morning, leave extra for dealing with an unfamiliar environment and having to share bathroom facilities.
- Be prepared to communicate your meal choices by word or gesture by the time you get to the front of the queue.

Orientation

Knowing where to be and when to be there can be difficult for autistic people, who often aren't able to just 'follow the crowd'. Remembering where things are or what time things are happening can be difficult.

What we will do:

We will provide you with a schedule, including where each event will take place. The name of the room, its function, and a schedule of its use will be posted on the door of each room. The first session of each day will be a plenary lecture, so everyone who wishes to attend will be going to the same place at the same time.

What you can do:

- Wander around the facilities as much as you need to in order to find each place you will need.
- Head to activities with plenty of time for getting lost and found again.
- Locate essential facilities such as toilets, fire escapes, and the dining hall *before* you need them.
- Keep your schedule with you.
- Prepare scripts to ask for help or directions, with gestures if necessary (for example, you could point to the name of the activity you're trying to find).

Overload

The sensory and social input of a conference can be hard to process and cope with.

What we will do:

We will minimise the use of fluorescent lighting, although it can't be avoided altogether. We have chosen a venue with many quiet areas to retreat to. The social interaction badge system exists so you can participate fully in the conference even when you don't feel up to socialising.

What you can do:

- Try taking a break from the stimulation for a while.
- Bring whatever you find helpful in reducing sensory overload, such as sunglasses, earplugs or headphones. Take breaks in peaceful places.
- Use the initiation badge you are provided with to indicate if you are not up to socialising.