

AUTSCAPE 2015

Exploring Autistic Space

21 – 24 August 2015 Giggleswick School, Settle, North Yorkshire, UK

PART 1: THE AUTSCAPE EXPERIENCE

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INTRODUCTION

We hope you are looking forward to coming to Autscope. 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 phone 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 Autscope and how to deal with challenges
2. Programme: activities, 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@autscope.org**. If you can't e-mail, phone: **+44 7511 774 654**.

Registration

This year at Autscope we have four different boarding houses: Carr, Nowell, Paley and Shute. Registration will take place in the common room of your assigned house. We hope this will mean a more relaxed start to the conference with shorter queues and more time for the house registrars to answer your questions.

Each house has a PIN code that you need to get in the front door. You should have received an email telling you your house and its PIN. Please do not share your house's PIN with anyone, including other Autscope participants.

If you forget which your house is, or its PIN, or where to go on arrival, ask any organiser to help you. They will have the lists of who is where and will be happy to help. You can also call or text the registrar, Debbie, at 07596 712306.

Registration is from 14:15 to 16:15, Friday 21st August. **Please do not come early**, but also try to arrive before the end of registration so that you have time to find your bedroom (if staying on site), attend orientation and be on time for the evening meal.

Self-registration

From 16:30 to 19:00 we have self-registration. If you arrive between those times, you either self-register or wait for registration to reopen at 19:00-19:30. Pick up the envelope with your name on it; your name badge and room number will be in this envelope. Pick up your conference folder, which will include conference information and your communication initiation badge. Then please cross your name off the list.

If you arrive at times which overlap or are just before the evening meal, please eat first and then register. There is space for luggage at the side or back, or in the dining room. However, you have to register before you join in the programme after the evening meal.

Registration: day-only and taster day participants

Registration on Saturday through Monday: Please go to the Information Centre in the classroom block to register. If you told us when you plan to arrive, we will try to ensure someone is at the desk to greet you. If no one is around, please pick up the folder with your name on it.

Orientation session

Autescape Orientation will take place from 16:30 to 17:15 on Friday in the theatre. At orientation, there will be an explanation of how Autescape works and the essential rules that Autescape and the venue expect you to follow. Orientation is important and we ask you make every effort to attend. Even if you have been to Autescape before, you should come again, as it is always good to have a refresher. There will also be information that is specific to this year's venue.

Information Centre

The Information Centre is located in the classroom block; it's the first room on the right when you enter. There, you will be able to:

- Ask questions of Autescape volunteers
- Find out which organisers are currently on duty
- Get a spare clip and pin to attach your badge
- Find schedules of activities, or propose new activities when there are open spaces
- Find information about home groups and interest groups, including when and where they meet

Documenting Autescape

We understand that you might want to record or document your experience of Autescape and sometimes share things publicly, including online, either during conference or afterwards. But please remember that part of the success of Autescape lies in the fact that people are able to relax and be themselves for a few days. Be mindful of how you might record others. Not everybody who comes to Autescape may identify as being autistic in everyday life and many others have exposure anxiety.

Please make sure that any photographs you publish and videos or recordings you make available, including those taken using a smartphone or tablet computer, have the permission from everybody included. Be especially careful not to include anyone wearing the black circle symbol.

The board are always interested in receiving feedback from Autescape participants, so if you want to show us your published work, blog, YouTube video or anything else, please let us know about it by e-mailing info@autescape.org.

Getting involved: Annual General Meeting (AGM)

Autescape's AGM will be on the second day of Autescape. A discussion session where people can make suggestions and ask questions to the board and the organisers starts at 16:30; the official AGM starts at 17:00. Location: theatre. If you want to have a say in how Autescape is organised, make sure you join in the AGM! This year, two new directors are up for election.

If you would like to help organise the next Autescape in a way that is less commitment-heavy than joining the board, you can always join one of the subcommittees and working groups. Check on the website or ask an organiser on duty if you are unsure of how to do this.

Also, at Autescape itself 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 Autescape.

VENUE

Autscape will take place in Giggleswick School, Settle, North Yorkshire. See part 3 of this pack for the exact address and information on how to find the venue.

This is Autscape's second time at Giggleswick, a boarding school which was established in 1499. The school has many buildings spread over the campus, but we will centre our activities around the classroom block, the theatre and the Dutton Centre, which are all contained in the same area. (See map in part 3.)

We will signpost the venue to help you find your way around, but if you find somewhere is not adequately signposted, please alert an organiser or use the 'action needed box' in the Information Centre to let us know. Remember the venue is also new to some of the organisers who may not be able to instantly answer your questions.

We have explained our communication badge system to the venue staff, so they 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. It is important to remember that the badge system is new to them; they may make mistakes. Please be patient.

Accommodation

We will be using the Nowell, Paley, Shute and Carr boarding houses. Their doors are secured by PIN entry systems. Please do not share your house's PIN code with anyone who is not staying in your house. Of course, you can invite a friend to join you in your room or in your house's common area, but please have them come in with you and don't give them your PIN.

The bedroom doors do not lock. The bedrooms do have lockers, but you will need to bring your own padlock if you want to use them. You may also wish to bring a torch (flashlight) or lamp. While all the rooms have ceiling lights they do not have bedside lamps.

To avoid unwelcome intrusions, bedrooms will not be cleaned during Autscape. However, communal areas will be cleaned. Please leave bins outside your door in the morning if they need emptying.

Each boarding house has its own communal bathrooms. **You must bring your own towels.**

Buildings and grounds

The presentations will take place in the Theatre which is about five minutes walk from the dining room. Classrooms and the Dutton centre will be used for discussions and other activities requiring smaller rooms.

Giggleswick School has an indoor heated swimming pool. We will have access to this between 13:30 and 15:30 on the Saturday and Sunday afternoon. There will be two lifeguards on duty while the pool is open. There are also table tennis facilities.

The grounds include courtyards, lawns, gardens, picnic tables and playing fields. However, please note that the venue has asked us not to walk on the lawn by the headmaster's house.

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.

- *Sensory room:* There will be a room which contains some sensory equipment Autescape has purchased. Please treat the equipment with respect and do not take it out of the room. 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.

Local area

The venue is in Giggleswick village. The town of Settle is just over a mile away. There are shops in both Giggleswick and Settle. Giggleswick is a quiet village, so please avoid being a noise nuisance to the villagers if you venture off site.

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.

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 outside or to your room. If you prefer, you can use the 'no interaction' table in the dining room; this table will be marked by a red sign. *No food or drink other than water may be taken into the meeting rooms. Please return any dishes you remove from the main dining room.*

Mealtimes

Breakfast	08:30
Lunch	12:30
Supper	17:30

Food will be only served for a limited time (about an hour, depending on demand), so please don't arrive too late.

There are half hour tea/coffee breaks at 10:45 and 15:30.

Phone and Internet access

Internet access is censored, because the venue is a school and they have to follow strict rules. Facebook and social networking sites should be ok.

Because the buildings are made of stone, coverage will be patchy, so you may need to walk around to find a good signal. Bedrooms are unlikely to have a signal. Please consider helping us out by recording the best places for a Wifi signal in the Information Centre.

Mobile coverage indoors is poor; mobile phones are best used outside. Pay phones are also available.

Merchandise

Autescape will have some merchandise for sale, such as mugs and sensory and light up toys. We can take UK cheques or cash. Proceeds from sale go towards keeping the costs of Autescape as low as possible.

GETTING ALONG

Autistic needs and behaviour

We take autistic needs into consideration throughout the planning and running of Autscope. Of course, there is 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 Autscope, including organisers, is also autistic. They may be struggling to cope just as much as you.

Autistic behaviour is totally normal and expected at Autscope. 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 Autscope, we expect that you can manage certain things, or will have arranged to 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.

- *Venue*: Do not open fire doors (unless there's a fire); they are alarmed. Only water may be consumed in the meeting rooms; don't eat or drink anything else there. Leave all equipment (including Autscope's sensory toys) in the room in which you found it. Please don't walk on the headmaster's lawn.
- *Accommodation*: Bedrooms are a haven. Never enter someone else's bedroom unless you're specifically invited. Day boarders have access to communal areas in their boarding house only.
- *Alcohol*: The venue does not have a bar. You may bring your own alcohol if you like, however you may not sell or purchase alcohol on the premises. Consumption in the evenings and in the lounge area (Dutton) only.
- *Smoking*: There is absolutely no smoking permitted on the campus, indoors or out. This includes e-cigarettes. Smokers must go off campus to smoke. Please be aware of smoke smells on hands, hair and clothing, which may be distressing to other participants.
- *Electric devices*: For devices that you bring, only ordinary low-power equipment (\pm 500 watts or less) is allowed, such as phones or laptop computers; anything higher powered, such as hair dryers or kettles, are not allowed for safety and insurance reasons. The venue asks that you inspect your equipment for damage and modifications before use.

- *Sprays:* Aerosol sprays are not permitted; the fire alarm is very sensitive and may be triggered by these sprays.
- *Noise:* Some Autscape participants are very sensitive to noise. Please be considerate of others when engaging in noisy activities such as talking, playing instruments, closing doors or showering. Try to limit or avoid these activities in places and times where they may be a nuisance to others. Please refrain from talking in the corridors outside bedrooms *at all times* and keep voices low outdoors after 10pm.
- *Questions and complaints:* Please talk to Autscape organisers, not venue staff.
- *Consideration:* **You must respect initiation badges**, noise level signs, and sensory sensitivities of other participants, as described in the next section.

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.

Help

Care needs

Autscape 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 help must be voluntary and must not be an unfair burden on others. Due to their own limitations, others may not be available or completely reliable, even if they wish to help.

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, you can ask one of the organisers on duty. Two organisers will be on duty at all times; to see who's on duty at the moment, look at the duty rota displayed in the Information Centre. The people on duty will wear a blue initiation badge and a blue armband, sash or hat, so that you can identify them. You may also find one at the desk in the Information Centre during the breaks and mealtimes.

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. Yellow and red initiation badges **must** be respected, even when worn by an organiser. Also, 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**.

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 Centre. 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.

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. You are not required to use the badges, but *you must respect those of others*.

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 (or no badge)	I am able to regulate my own interaction.
Organiser	Blue	I am an organiser on duty, available for questions.



Orange star: People who like to be hugged or touched will be wearing an orange star on their initiation badge. This does not negate the rule to get permission before touching anyone (see below under "Sensory considerations"), however, a star means you should feel free to ask. Please be very careful not to put people without orange stars on the spot when it comes to asking for hugs or touch. If someone is not wearing an orange star, err on the side of not asking.



Black circle: People who do not wish to be photographed or filmed under any circumstances will be wearing a black circle on their initiation badge. Make very sure to not include any part of them in photographs or films. For those without a black circle, permission must be sought from every individual in a photograph before any publication.

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. It will be less disruptive to others if you could try to sit near the back or sides of the room when using these in presentations.

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. Those who are willing to be asked for touch (e.g. hugs) will be wearing an orange star on their initiation badge.

- *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 doors. 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 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.
- Be prepared to communicate your meal choices by word or gesture by the time you get to the front of the queue.

Sharing a room

Participants who booked a flexible room may be sharing a room with someone they don't know. We understand that this can be very difficult. Where interaction and noise level choices are not the same, the more restrictive level must be followed.

What we will do:

We will try to match you up with the most compatible roommate 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.

- You can choose to have a 'no interaction' room, and please respect it if your roommate 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.

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 Autscope 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. 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 time for dealing with an unfamiliar environment and having to share bathroom facilities.

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.

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 manage.

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.
- Use the initiation badge you are provided with to indicate if you are not up to socialising.
- Flap, don't clap: please show your appreciation for presentations and performances without clapping. Suggested alternatives: flap, wiggle fingers.