

## INTRODUCTION

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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. The following information may help you get along better and face any challenges you might come across.

If you have any questions, feel free to contact us, preferably by e-mail: [info@autscope.org](mailto:info@autscope.org). If you can't e-mail, phone: **+44 7511 774 654**.

## GETTING ALONG

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### 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.

We also expect that you can:

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

### Help

**Care needs:** Autscope 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. Organisers are actively on duty throughout the day and till the end of the evening. Organisers are also on sleeping night duty for calling in the event of an emergency.

For further information regarding the arrangements for duty organisers at the current venue please see the Venue section.

The people on duty will wear a blue initiation badge and usually some other blue item eg. A baseball cap, a sash, armband or jacket, so that you can easily identify them. The easiest place to find one will be at the desk in the Information Centre.

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, the night 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. All we ask is that you observe the initiation badges of those you may wish to interact with.

For further information about the initiation badges and any other symbols we may use see the current venue section.

## 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 strongly scented products at Autscope. 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

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### 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

You will only be sharing a room if you chose this option when you booked. In order for us to fill rooms some people may have also chosen to share 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 try to choose venues 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.