



UNIVERSITY OF  
**BATH**

What to do when...

# Interviewing an autistic person for a job



## This guide will help you conduct a job interview with an autistic person

### Who this guide is for

This guidance is for professionals who want to improve the way they interview people with autism and find out what adjustments they can make during the interview to make it more successful. It will provide you with some techniques that will help you to improve the interview process, ensuring a better experience for both you and the person being interviewed.

It's important to remember that all autistic people are different. No two autistic people are the same and adaptations should be tailored to the individual.

This guidance has been prepared by **Dr Katie Maras** from the **Centre for Applied Autism Research** and is based on over 5 years of research supporting autistic adults in interviews.

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### Why an autistic person might find it difficult to be interviewed

Many autistic people experience language and social communication issues, which might make it challenging to obtain the relevant information from them. They might find it difficult to:

- Consider others' perspectives, or what another person is thinking
- Recount an event in context, focusing instead on smaller details
- Express their feelings through their tone of voice
- Use appropriate body language or gestures
- Make or maintain eye contact
- Understand personal space

Autistic people may also struggle with:

- Sensory hypersensitivity to bright lights, loud noises, strong smells, or touch, which can be very overwhelming and distressing when in a new environment, or

- Sensory hyposensitivity, which may result in sensory-seeking behaviours (for example, seeking out touch, sound, or light)
- 'Stimming', a behaviour which usually involves repetitive movements. It is often used as a soothing mechanism so it is important not to try and stop an individual from stimming, or to take away any objects they might have (such as a fidget spinner)
- Compliance, or being more susceptible to being led, manipulated or pressured into something



### Before the interview

#### Help an autistic person to tell you about their diagnosis

To enable you to adapt your interview process and offer appropriate support, autistic individuals and their families must feel comfortable telling you about their diagnosis.

Steps should be taken to:

- Give plenty of opportunities for a person to let you know that they are autistic before you interview them
- Make it clear that disclosing their autism diagnosis will mean that they will be supported appropriately, with a statement about what sort of support and adaptations they would be eligible for
- It is also important not to rely on behavioural cues when making judgements about an autistic interviewee's abilities or credibility, as these can often be misleading.

#### Help prepare an autistic person for an interview

Research shows that many autistic and non-autistic interviewees find a face to face interview situation more motivating, and recall information more accurately when they are interviewed face to face, compared to answering questions online or on the phone.

At the same time however, people with autism face difficulties with social communication skills, so may find an in-person interview situation overwhelming. This can impact on their ability to perform at their best, or provide the information you need, and they might need adaptations to support them.

#### Things you can do to help before an interview

Where possible, these changes should be made to help an autistic person prior to an interview.

##### Pre-interview visit

Offering a pre-interview visit to the place where they will be interviewed will help to put the interviewee's mind at ease and prepare for the interview so they are more relaxed on the day.

##### Set expectations

Inform the interviewee of what's going to happen and what is expected of them ahead of time. Most people (but especially autistic people) like to know what is going to happen and what it will be like. Ideally this should be in a letter, with a visual timetable and pictures if appropriate, as well as being provided verbally.

##### Share the questions in advance

Provide the interview questions in advance. Autistic people can find it difficult to process questions and formulate a response at speed, so it's important to give them more time to prepare.

##### Minimise interruptions and waiting time

Plan to minimise interruptions and avoid unnecessary 'waiting room' time. Schedule the interview during a quiet period at a time when interruptions are unlikely (being left waiting can be extremely anxiety-provoking for an autistic person).

##### Adapt the physical environment

Adapt the environment for potential sensory issues. Is there flickering/strip lighting, noises from outside the room, echoes, a ticking clock, buzzing from lighting, fire alarm testing scheduled? If so, you may need to change these or use a different room

##### Adapt the social environment

Make changes to the social environment. This could include placing the interviewer and interviewee's chairs at 90-degree angles rather than sitting opposite one another, to reduce the pressure to maintain eye contact during the interview. Offer the interviewee the choice about where they would feel most comfortable to sit.

##### Make plans for adapting your language

Gauge the individual's level of language, to plan how you can adapt your language and questions accordingly.

##### Plan breaks

Talk to the individual and those who know them about their attention span, whether they will need a break, and for how long. Make a plan for break(s) and stick to it wherever possible.

## During the interview

Autistic people can find it difficult to know the level of detail required when they're asked open-ended questions, such as 'tell me a bit about yourself'. These sorts of questions are often too ambiguous for autistic candidates as they contain little structure, particularly regarding the need to include positive information about goals, aspirations, self-descriptions and self-evaluations. This limits their ability to give you a that shows their best attributes and most relevant experience.

Research shows that making simple adaptations to questions improves the job interview performance of people both with and without autism.

### You can help an autistic person by:

- Asking specific questions that require specific details, examples, and certain types of information
- If the question has more than one part, asking each one in turn. Autistic people sometimes find it difficult to remember lots of information at once
- Providing them with a print out of the questions, so they can refer to them during the interview. This can help them structure their responses and keep on track

## Tips for asking questions

Here are some examples of how job interview questions can be adapted for autistic candidates:

### ✗ Avoid asking

'Tell me a little bit about yourself.'

### ✓ Try asking

'I'm going to ask you to give me a short introduction about yourself. Please tell me:

- What are your best personal characteristics?
- What are your educational qualifications?
- What work experience do you have?'

### ✗ Avoid asking

'What are some of your strengths?'

### ✓ Try asking

'I'm going to ask you about your strengths. Please tell me:

- What do you consider to be the main things that you are good at?
- How have you used these strengths at work or in education?'

### ✗ Avoid asking

'Tell me about a time you've disagreed with a colleague - how did you handle it?'

### ✓ Try asking

'Think of a time you've disagreed with a colleague. Please tell me:

- What was the disagreement about?
- How did you resolve it?'

