



**Autism Accreditation
Autism Inclusion Award**
Neurodiversity Support
within a prison setting



Name of provision

Lead contact



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What is autism?

Autism is defined as a lifelong neurodevelopmental disability, which influences the way autistic people experience the world. It is recognised that autistic people will have differences in the way they communicate and interact with others and sensory processing. They may display a preference for repetitive activities and have intense, passionate interests.

Every autistic person will have different skills, strengths, challenges and needs, and each will have their own unique experience of being autistic. Autism is not a mental health condition, but we know that autistic people are at a significantly higher risk of experiencing mental health issues, with anxiety and depression being the most common.

Autism also commonly co-occurs with other neurodivergences. ADHD and dyslexia are the most commonly co-occurring, and around 33% of autistic people also have learning disabilities.

We know that, globally, at least 1 in 100 people are diagnosed as autistic but that there are many more autistic people in society who don't feel the need to seek a formal diagnosis, choose to self-identify as autistic or aren't aware they are autistic.

Terminology used in the framework

The terms used in this framework are consistent with the guidelines provided by the National Autistic Society on how to talk and write about autism. This guidance is based on research into the preferences of autistic people, their families and professionals, as well as the feedback and insight the National Autistic Society gets from our supporters and wider work.

[How to talk and write about autism](#)



Challenges for autistic people in prison settings



Autistic individuals serving a prison sentence experience unique challenges. Some of the key issues include:

1. **Increased vulnerability to bullying and abuse:** Autistic prisoners are more susceptible to bullying, manipulation and abuse due to difficulties in understanding social cues and nonverbal communication.
2. **Mental health issues:** The prison environment can exacerbate mental health problems for autistic individuals. They are at a higher risk of anxiety, depression and other mental health issues, including self-harm and suicidality.
3. **Sensory processing:** Autistic individuals with sensory processing sensitivities can face unique challenges in a prison setting. Hyper-sensitive individuals may find the environment overwhelming due to noise, bright lights and crowded spaces, leading to anxiety, irritability and potential sensory meltdown. Conversely, hypo-sensitive individuals may seek sensory stimulation through behaviours like tapping or rocking, which can be misunderstood as disruptive.
4. **Isolation and loneliness:** Due to difficulties in social interactions and the overwhelming environment, autistic people in prison may isolate themselves, leading to loneliness and further mental health deterioration.
5. **Lack of appropriate support and adjustments:** Many autistic people can struggle to get the necessary support and reasonable adjustments to help them cope with the prison environment. This lack of support can lead to misunderstandings and misinterpretations of their behavior, often resulting in punitive measures rather than supportive interventions.

These outcomes highlight the need for tailored support and interventions to better accommodate the needs of autistic individuals in the prison system.

About our Neurodiversity support within a prison setting Inclusion Award

The National Autistic Society offers an Award for specialist services for autistic people within the care, education and health sector.

This Award is intended for neurodiversity support for autistic people in prisons that do not offer a specialist provision, such as a dedicated wing. However, these prisons still seek to ensure that individuals are not disadvantaged because they are autistic. This award complements our specialist award for specialist provisions in prison settings that provide a high level of targeted support for autistic individuals.'

The Inclusion Award standards address the specific barriers that autistic people often experience in prison settings. They take into account current research into good autism practice, as well the experiences and insights of autistic people

By using our standards, your team can:

- identify what they are already doing well and where more work may be needed
- create an action plan to ensure staff are receiving adequate training and reasonable adjustments are in place for autistic people
- improve outcomes for autistic people
- support provisions in meeting their legal duties under the *Equality Act 2010*
- provide evidence of good autism practice in order to achieve the National Autistic Society's Inclusion Award.



Completing the self-audit

After registering with the programme, the next stage is for your team to complete the self-audit, which is based on our standards of good practice.

The standards are divided into four topics:

- Understanding autism
- Making our service accessible for autistic people
- Providing personalised support
- Working in partnership in the best interests of autistic people.

Each of these standards are broken down further into specific indicators, which help services identify what they can do to meet these standards.

Your team can evaluate their current provision against each indicator as a starting point, using the following RAG (Red; Amber; Green) rating:

Not applicable	This aspect of practice is not relevant or practical for the provision to address. It would be expected that only a few indicators (if any) are rated as 'not applicable', and a rationale can be given for why.
Not developed	Work has yet to be started in this area.
Developing	Work has started in this area but maybe only recently or with some inconsistency.
Developed	Work is taking place in this area.

Once the self-audit has been completed, you will need to create an action plan, which will help you address the standards where more development work is required. You can use the template in this document or create your own version

For this Award, the National Autistic Society will not survey autistic people within your provision. However, you would be expected to explain how you consult with them and act on their feedback. Consulting with autistic people through various methods, such as surveys, interviews and focus groups, helps identify their specific needs and challenges. Including autistic people in the process enables tailored support and interventions, improves mental health services, informs staff training and guides inclusive policy development. It can also reduce recidivism, promote equality and foster trust between prisoners and staff, contributing to a more effective prison system.

Feedback can also be obtained by various means, including surveys, interviews and focus groups. Collating feedback from autistic people will also help to identify actions for continuous improvement.'

The assessment process



Before your assessment

You should contact your consultant at the National Autistic Society to book a date for your assessment. Please give six months' notice to ensure a booking, as your consultant may not be able to accommodate an earlier date.

A few weeks before the assessment date, you will be sent a link to a confidential survey, which you can share with the autistic people you support.

Two weeks before the assessment date you will need to submit a portfolio of evidence. This will consist of:

- the completed self-audit and action plan
- individual case studies (maximum of three)
- working documents to support case studies.

The assessment day

On the day of the assessment, the assessor will interview the key person in your provision who is responsible for developing inclusive systems and processes that support autistic people. You can nominate up to three other staff members to be interviewed.

Where appropriate, interviews should also be conducted with autistic individuals themselves. Interviews will be conducted through a confidential video link.

Consideration will also be given to the outcome of the surveys and the documented evidence provided.

After your assessment

Within a month of your assessment, you will receive a letter confirming if you have achieved the award, identifying what you are doing well and where further developments could be made. If successful, the letter will be followed up with an official certificate and our Inclusion Award Quality Mark to commemorate and promote your achievement.

We recommend that you request a reassessment every three years to ensure that a good standard is maintained, and your award will be recognised as reflecting current practice.

About your service



Name of prison

Category

Prison population (eg age, gender, ethnicity)

Specific programmes or facilities

Outcome of most recent statutory inspections (HMPPS, SPS, NIPS etc)

Topic one : Understanding autism

The three core standards:

1. **Our staff understand the key challenges that autistic people may experience in prison.**
2. **Our staff are aware of what actions they can take in their job roles to help autistic individuals overcome challenges.**
3. **Our staff receive ongoing professional development to develop their knowledge and confidence in working with autistic people, including gaining insight from people with lived experience.**

Indicator	Not applicable	Not developed	Developing	Developed
Our staff know that people are born autistic and that autism is a lifelong neurodevelopmental difference that influences how people communicate and interact with the world.				
Our staff know the core characteristics of autism and common signs that a person may be autistic but also recognise that these characteristics present differently in different people and may be harder to notice in some autistic people.				
Staff know about the potential challenges and disadvantages that autistic people can experience within prison.				
Staff know how being autistic can influence a person's behaviour and how this might present differently for each person within a prison setting, including communication differences, anxiety and distressed behaviour, executive functioning and sensory processing.				
We provide our staff with guidelines on what reasonable adjustments they should consider (relevant to their role and responsibility).				
We have dedicated autism or neurodiversity champions within our staff members, who have a knowledge, interest or personal experience of autism. They are willing to support other staff in identifying and embedding good practice in working with autistic individuals. All our staff know who the autism champions are and what their role is.				
Our neurodiversity lead ensures that their professional knowledge of good practice in supporting autistic people develops and remains up-to-date. They are supporting in accessing further professional development by their line manager.				

Topic one : Understanding autism

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Indicator	Not applicable	Not developed	Developing	Developed
We have a special interest group in our service or across a group of Services to provide an opportunity for staff to share ideas about how best we can work with autistic individuals.				
Our staff know who they can ask for additional help and advice in working with autistic people if they feel they need it.				
Our staff are encouraged to access additional resources to find out more about autism 'when they need to do so				
Autistic staff or those with close relatives who are autistic are encouraged to share their expertise through experience in whatever way they feel comfortable, while taking care to recognise that each person's experience of autism is unique and may not apply to others.				
We include professional development opportunities for staff to hear or read accounts from autistic people about the challenges they face within prison. For example, inviting an autistic ex-prisoner to speak at a team meeting or showing everyone a video interview.				
We gather feedback from autistic individuals and use this feedback to improve our staff team's understanding of the experience of autistic people in our prison.				

Topic one : Understanding autism

Self-assessment

What key evidence shows how we meet the three core standards?

(max 400 words)

1. Our staff understand the key challenges that autistic people may experience in prison.

Summary of how we meet this standard (max 400 words)

Topic one : Understanding autism

Self-assessment

2. Our staff are aware of what actions they can take in their job roles to help autistic individuals overcome challenges.

Summary of how we meet this standard (max 400 words)

3. Our staff receive ongoing professional development to develop their knowledge and confidence in working with autistic people, including gaining insight from people with lived experience.

Summary of how we meet this standard (max 400 words)

Topic one : Understanding autism

Assessor comments on how well these standards are met

Assessor comments (**completed by the assessor**)

Topic two: Making the prison an accessible environment for autistic people

The four core standards:

1. **We have taken reasonable steps to make the physical environment of the prison more accessible.**
2. **We provide accessible information for autistic people which helps prepare them for what is going to happen and what they can expect from us.**
3. **We adapt the ways we normally do things to make it easier for autistic people to make use of our service.**
4. **We gather and make use of feedback from autistic people to identify whether further adaptations could make our service more accessible.**

Indicator	Not applicable	Not developed	Developing	Developed
We always consider requests for reasonable adjustments and are willing to do things in a different way or to provide additional support when it is practical to do so.				
We provide autistic people with accessible information about prison processes.				
We know that autistic people may find it difficult to cope in areas which they find busy, noisy, cluttered or where there is a lot of activity. We take steps to try to reduce sensory overload, such as noise reduction methods, controlled lighting and minimising visual clutter to create a more calming environment.				
We offer designated sensory-friendly spaces with minimal sensory stimuli where individuals can retreat to calm down and avoid sensory overload.				
We offer autistic people access to communal areas during quieter times to minimize exposure to loud and busy environments.				
All our staff recognise that autistic people are likely to experience high levels of anxiety and distressed behaviour, which can be misinterpreted as defiance or non-compliance, especially when autistic people may mask.				
We actively seek and use feedback from autistic people on what we can do to support them and prevent people being disadvantaged because they are autistic.				

Topic two: Making the prison an accessible environment for autistic people

The four core standards:

1. **We have taken reasonable steps to make the physical environment of the prison more accessible.**
2. **We provide accessible information for autistic people which helps prepare them for what is going to happen and what they can expect from us.**
3. **We adapt the ways we normally do things to make it easier for autistic people to make use of our service.**
4. **We gather and make use of feedback from autistic people to identify whether further adaptations could make our service more accessible.**

Indicator	Not applicable	Not developed	Developing	Developed
<p>All our staff have been trained in approaches that can help calm an autistic person down, for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • listening to them carefully and calmly • focussing on what the person wants them to do • giving processing time • not telling the person to calm down • not giving false reassurances which later turn out not to be true. 				
<p>All our staff are trained in knowing how to adapt their communication if they know a person is autistic or if they present with having difficulties in their communication and interactions. This includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • slowing down and avoiding talking too much. • using clear language. • sticking to the point. • writing down key points and sharing them with the autistic person. 				
<p>Our staff understand that autistic people are at high risk of developing long-term psychological harm from being exposed to restrictive practices. The provision is committed to ensuring that restrictive practices are not regularly or routinely employed and that they are only ever used when absolutely necessary, such as when there is an immediate threat to the safety of the individual or others. Their use is followed by a robust investigation to identify lessons learnt.</p>				

Topic two: Making the prison an accessible environment for autistic people

Self-assessment

What key evidence shows how we meet the four core standards?

(max 400 words)

1. We have taken reasonable steps to make the physical environment of the prison more accessible.

Summary of how we meet this standard (max 400 words)

Topic two: Making the prison an accessible environment for autistic people

Self-assessment

2. We provide accessible information for autistic people which helps prepare them for what is going to happen and what they can expect from us.

Summary of how we meet this standard (max 400 words)

3. We adapt the ways we normally do things to make it easier for autistic people to make use of our service.

Summary of how we meet this standard (max 400 words)

Topic two: Making the prison an accessible environment for autistic people

Self-assessment

4. We gather and make use of feedback from autistic people to identify whether further adaptations could make our service more accessible.

Summary of how we meet this standard (max 400 words)

Topic two: Making the prison an accessible environment for autistic people

Assessor comments on how well these standards are met

Assessor comments (**completed by the assessor**)

Topic three: Providing personalised support

The three core standards:

1. **Members of our team who provide direct support are able to find out the best way of working with individuals and make reasonable adjustments according to what each autistic person needs.**
2. **Members of our who provide direct support structure the support we offer and try to ensure consistency, preparing the autistic individual for any changes.**
3. **Members of our team who provide irect support help autistic individuals to access extra support if they want and need it.**

Indicator	Not applicable	Not developed	Developing	Developed
We conduct thorough screenings to identify prisoners who may be autistic, making use of validated assessment tools and collaborating with healthcare professionals.				
We perform detailed assessments to understand the specific strengths and challenges of each autistic prisoner. This includes evaluating their communication, sensory processing, emotional responses and executive functioning skills.				
We develop and implement individualised support plans tailored to the unique needs of each autistic prisoner and taking into account their communication, sensory processing, emotional responses and executive functioning skills.				
We conduct regular reviews of support strategies and make necessary adjustments to improve outcomes for autistic prisoners.				
We act as advocates for autistic prisoners, ensuring their needs are met and their rights are protected within the prison system.				
We implement reasonable adjustments to the prison environment and routines to accommodate the sensory and cognitive needs of neurodivergent prisoners.				

Topic three: Providing personalised support

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2. **Members of our who provide direct support structure the support we offer and try to ensure consistency, preparing the autistic individual for any changes.**
3. **Members of our team who provide irect support help autistic individuals to access extra support if they want and need it.**

Indicator	Not applicable	Not developed	Developing	Developed
Where appropriate, we involve family members in the support process to provide a broader network of care.				
We have established systems for prisoners to give feedback on the support they receive, ensuring their voices are heard and taken into account.				
We keep an open mind and avoid making assumptions about what an autistic person can or cannot do based on stereotypes and myths eg all autistic people are good at using computers, autistic people prefer to work alone rather with other people etc.				
We make sure that sanctions are not applied for reasons that relate to being autistic eg missing appointments because of issues with using public transport or misunderstanding information.				

Topic three: Providing personalised support

Self-assessment

What key evidence shows how we meet the three core standards?

(max 400 words)

1. Members of our team who provide direct support are able to find out the best way of working with individuals and make reasonable adjustments according to what each autistic person needs.

Summary of how we meet this standard (max 400 words)

Topic three: Providing personalised support

Self-assessment

2. Members of our who provide direct support structure the support we offer and try to ensure consistency, preparing the autistic individual for any changes

Summary of how we meet this standard (max 400 words)

3. Members of our team who provide direct support help autistic individuals to access extra support if they want and need it.

Summary of how we meet this standard (max 400 words)

Topic three:

Assessor comments on how well these standards are met

Assessor comments (**completed by the assessor**)

Topic four: Working in partnership in the best interests of autistic people

The three core standards:

1. **We work in partnership with other services to ensure the needs of autistic people accessing our service are addressed.**
2. **We work in partnership with other organisations to share good practice and resources in supporting autistic people.**
3. **We work in partnership with providers and other services to improve our work with autistic people.**

Indicator	Not applicable	Not developed	Developing	Developed
We work with healthcare services to ensure access to general medical care, mental health services and specialist interventions.				
We work with educational and training providers to ensure access to basic education programmes, vocational training and opportunities to pursue further education and qualifications.				
We work with probation and rehabilitation services so autistic individuals can access support for reintegration into society, including monitoring, guidance and rehabilitation programmes focussed on anger management, substance abuse recovery and life skills.				
We work with family and social services to help maintain family connections and provide support for family visits so that autistic individuals can access assistance with personal and family issues, including housing and welfare support.				
We work with legal services so autistic individuals can access legal advice and representation, as well as guidance and support through the parole process.				

Topic four: Working in partnership in the best interests of autistic people

The three core standards:

1. **We work in partnership with other services to ensure the needs of autistic people accessing our service are addressed.**
2. **We work in partnership with other organisations to share good practice and resources in supporting autistic people.**
3. **We work in partnership with providers and other services to improve our work with autistic people.**

Indicator	Not applicable	Not developed	Developing	Developed
We help autistic individuals access support from organisations such as the Prison Advice and Care Trust (PACT), which offers services like family support and resettlement assistance. Additionally, we connect them with faith-based organisations that provide spiritual support and counselling.				
We conduct regular joint case reviews with other services to ensure the needs of autistic individuals are being met comprehensively.				
We share good practice with other organisations.				
We work in partnership with autism advocacy groups that provide resources, training and support for autistic individuals and those who work with them.				

Topic four: Working in partnership in the best interests of autistic people

Self-assessment

What key evidence shows how we meet the three core standards?

(max 400 words)

1. We work in partnership with other services to ensure the needs of autistic people accessing our service are addressed.

Summary of how we meet this standard (max 400 words)

Topic four: Working in partnership in the best interests of autistic people

Self-assessment

2. We work in partnership with other organisations to share good practice and resources in supporting autistic people.

Summary of how we meet this standard (max 400 words)

3. We work in partnership with providers and other services to improve our work with autistic people.

Summary of how we meet this standard (max 400 words)

Topic four: Working in partnership in the best interests of autistic people
Assessor comments on how well these standards are met

Assessor comments (completed by the assessor)



Action plan

Topic one: Understanding autism

- Our staff understand the key challenges that autistic people may experience in prison.
- Our staff are aware of what actions they can take in their job roles to help autistic individuals overcome challenges.
- Our staff receive ongoing professional development to develop their knowledge and confidence in working with autistic people, including gaining insight from people with lived experience.

Action	Completed



Action plan

Topic two: Making the prison an accessible environment for autistic people

- We have taken reasonable steps to make the physical environment of the prison more accessible.
- We provide accessible information for autistic people which helps prepare them for what is going to happen and what they can expect from us.
- We adapt the ways we normally do things to make it easier for autistic people to make use of our service.
- We gather and make use of feedback from autistic people to identify whether further adaptations could make our service more accessible.

Action	Completed



Action plan

Topic three: Providing personalised support

- Members of our team who provide direct support are able to find out the best way of working with individuals and make reasonable adjustments according to what each autistic person needs.
- Members of our who provide direct support structure the support we offer and try to ensure consistency, preparing the autistic individual for any changes.
- Members of our team who provide irect support help autistic individuals to access extra support if they want and need it.

Action	Completed



Action plan

Topic four: Working in partnership in the best interests of autistic people

- We work in partnership with other services to ensure the needs of autistic people accessing our service are addressed.
- We work in partnership with other organisations to share good practice and resources in supporting autistic people.
- We work in partnership with providers and other services to improve our work with autistic people.

Action	Completed

Case study one



Brief description of the skills and challenges experienced by the autistic person.
(Do not use their real name or any specific information that could personally identify them.)

What reasonable adjustments have been made by your service?

What additional support has been provided to them in helping them access your service?

What outcomes have been achieved?

Any other relevant information

Case study two



Brief description of the skills and challenges experienced by the autistic person.
(Do not use their real name or any specific information that could personally identify them.)

What reasonable adjustments have been made by your service?

What additional support has been provided to them in helping them access your service?

What outcomes have been achieved?

Any other relevant information

Case study three



Brief description of the skills and challenges experienced by the autistic person.
(Do not use their real name or any specific information that could personally identify them.)

What reasonable adjustments have been made by your service?

What additional support has been provided to them in helping them access your service?

What outcomes have been achieved?

Any other relevant information

Summary of the assessment

(to be completed by the assessor)

Date of assessment:	
Assessor:	
Outcome:	

What your service does well:

Next steps:



Thank you for completing your application and creating better support for autistic people!

If you have any questions about your application, please contact our team any time. Thank you!

About the National Autistic Society

The National Autistic Society is the UK's leading charity for autistic people. We are here to transform lives, change attitudes and create a society that works for autistic people.

We transform lives by providing support, guidance and practical advice for the 700,000 autistic adults and children in the UK, as well as their three million family members and carers. Since 1962, autistic people have turned to us at key moments or challenging times in their lives, be it getting a diagnosis, going to school or finding work.

We change attitudes by improving public understanding of autism and the difficulties many autistic people face. We also work closely with businesses, local authorities and Government to help them provide more autism-friendly spaces, deliver better services and change legislation.

We have come a long way but there is still so much we can do to increase opportunities, reduce social isolation and build a brighter future for autistic people. With your help, we can make it happen.

