

National Autistic Society

Know yourself series



A guide to:
Setting
yourself up
for success

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Welcome

Welcome to the **Setting yourself up for success** guide from our **Know yourself series**.

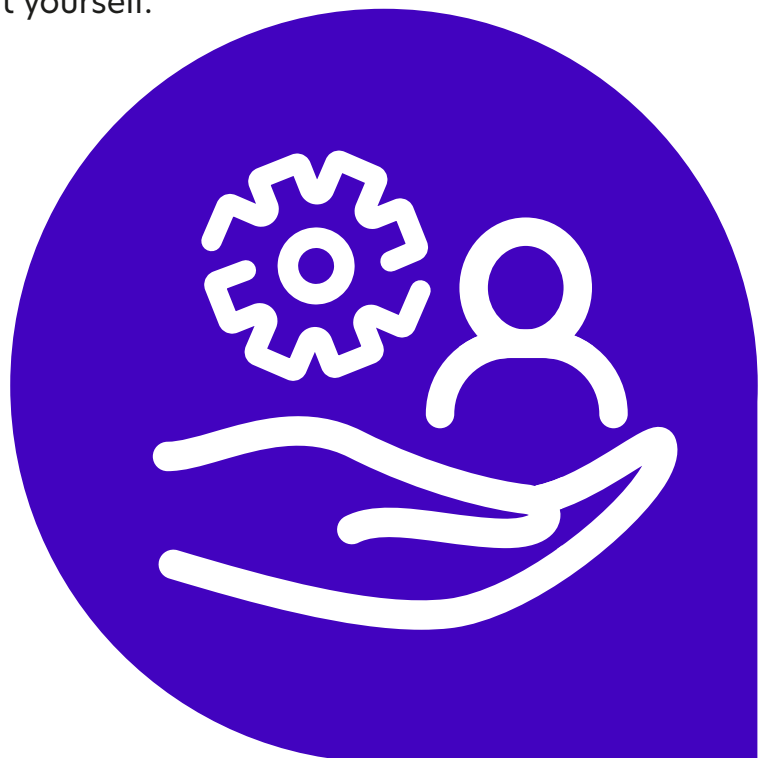
Firstly, if you haven't already seen the first three episodes in the series (Understanding yourself, Energy Accounting and Exploring your Identity) then you can [find them here](#).

We also have the accompanying **video** on **Setting yourself up for success**, which has five autistic people telling us about tools and strategies that have worked for them, which could hopefully give you some ideas for yourself.

Check it out by [clicking here](#) (or visit www.autism.org.uk/knowyourself)

Introduction

This guide is about making sure you have the tools and strategies to support yourself.

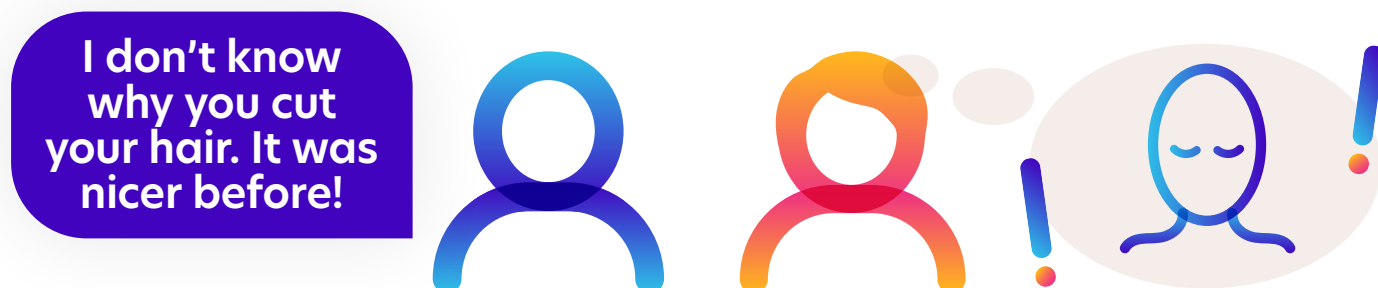
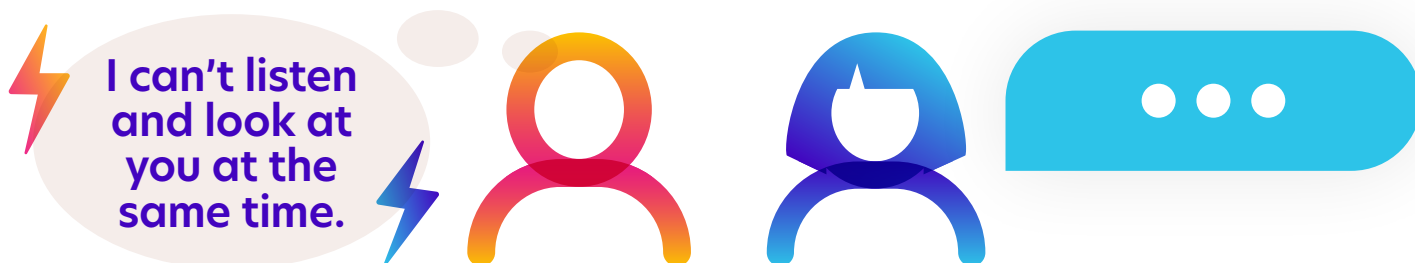
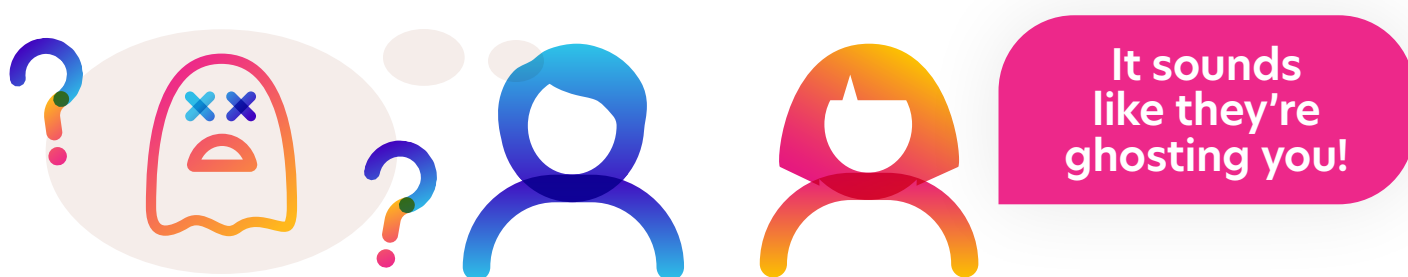


Communication tools

Non-autistic people often use communication that is not clear and direct. It can be full of unnecessary information but can make communication feel more pleasant for some people.

For autistic people, these indirect ways of communicating can cause barriers, making it hard to understand or know what to do in certain situations. Potential challenges could include not understanding slang, sarcasm, non-literal language or even why direct honesty isn't appreciated.

Here are some examples:



Understanding and interpreting other people's communication can be difficult.

You can read more about autistic communication styles in our first guide *Understanding yourself*, available at www.autism.org.uk/knowyourself.

What can you do to support your communication needs?

Tell people you haven't understood what they mean, they may assume you understand.



Ask for communication in writing/text so you can take a bit more time to understand.

Ask any relevant, additional questions, especially to teachers, parents, mentors and employers. It's better to understand than to continue to struggle.



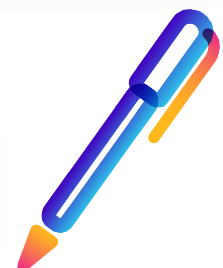
Ask for information in advance, such as interview questions, images of the room/layout, other people's expectations of you and/or timetables.

Ask for physical examples if the message isn't enough in a verbal or text form. For instance, ask if the person can show you what they mean, eg how to operate a till in a shop.



Give yourself extra time. Often you can request additional time for exams, or give yourself time after doing something tiring to process what you need to do.

If you need a break from speaking, you can use text, write things down, sign or use physical objects to show what you want or need. Some people do this at times of overwhelm.



Structure

Structure is useful for everyone. Providing yourself with a pattern of events, planning or keeping things organised can make life easier to understand and plan around.

Sometimes life can be overwhelming; it can be hard to know what the current focus should be or what is coming up next. Knowing the process to complete a task, and therefore becoming independent in that task, can be a challenge.

There are lots of ways you can try to cope with tasks by making them more structured.

Here's how you could do some preparation and structure events.

What will it be like?

- Do you know the location?
- What are the sensory aspects of that place?
- What will make this environment more tolerable?
- Can you take items with you?
- Do you know where the exits are if you want to leave?



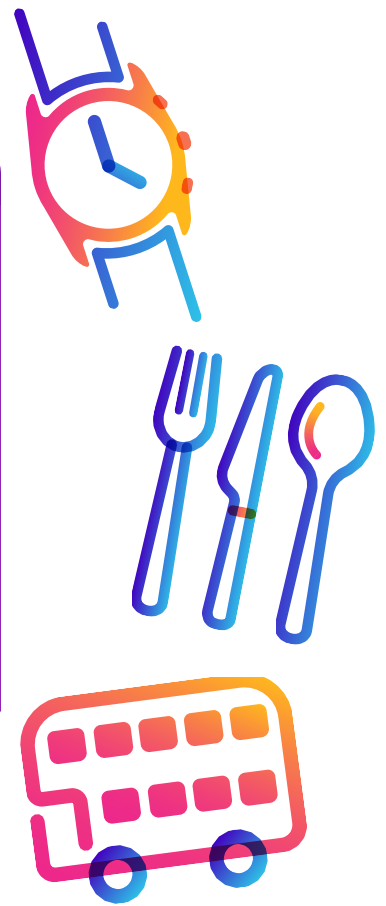
What will you eat?

- Is there going to be food available there?
- Is there somewhere to eat nearby?
- If you have specific foods you like to eat, or foods you cannot tolerate, then you might want to plan ahead and either take your own food if you can, or find places you can eat nearby.



Timings

- What time do you need to be there?
- Do you want to be a little early so you can be seated first or familiarise yourself?
- If so, set yourself an earlier arrival time to allow for that. If you are likely to get stuck on public transport, factor in some extra travel time too.
- Do you need to have a larger breakfast if you are having a later lunch than usual?
- Find out all the timings that are important to you and plan for travel and any other things that might add on time.



What are you going to do?

- Find out a plan for the day and what is expected from you. What is the order of events if there is one? Asking for this kind of information can help you plan for your own needs around breaks, sensory items and making sure you are fuelled until mealtimes.

Structure looks different for everyone.

Structure could include having set routines or a set way in which to do things. It might be eating similar or the same foods each day or wearing the same style clothing for certain activities. Some people like to listen to the same song(s) on repeat whilst doing a specific activity, and some may use timetables to structure their day or week.

Sensory strategies

We have already discussed some of the sensory experiences that you might have in our Understanding yourself resources – so you can have a look at the [Understanding yourself video and guide](#) for more information on this topic.

Working out what your sensory experiences and preferences are can then help you start to find ways to keep yourself feeling okay.

There are lots of sensory toys and items of equipment out there that people use to help keep themselves regulated by providing them with sensory input or blocking it out (or both), eg playing music on noise cancelling headphones. Other people may prefer to stim or to explore their environment freely.

Some people may want more subtle ways of supporting their needs.

Let's explore some ways of supporting your sensory needs...



Sensory toys or fidget toys



Loose or seamless clothing



Earplugs or ear defenders



Time alone, time outside or movement breaks




Having your own familiar snacks



“I have discovered that when I have to go to hospital appointments, I can cope better in the waiting rooms if I eat something I like the flavour of, (usually my favourite sweets or chocolate) and also have fidget toys to keep my hands busy.”

Autistic girl, Autism Understood website, 2023



“I prefer to have that element of flexibility in terms of opening and closing my own curtains (so I can control the lighting rather than it keep changing).”

Joseph, 2024




“We might quite like quite bland foods or manufactured foods that stay the same each time we eat them.”

Nellie Allsop, 2024




“I prefer to wear sliders so my feet don’t feel constricted. I have a smart water bottle that glows up and sends me a notification on my phone so I don’t ever forget to drink.”

Connor Ward, 2024



“I always wear jewellery I can play with – rings that I can spin round my finger, a necklace I can fiddle with, an engraved bracelet I can read the words on to calm me down.”

Helen Ellis, 2024



“I use a spinner ring to fidget with when I’m anxious, and I have sunglasses on me at ALL times just in case I need to shield from any light.”

Connor Ward, 2024

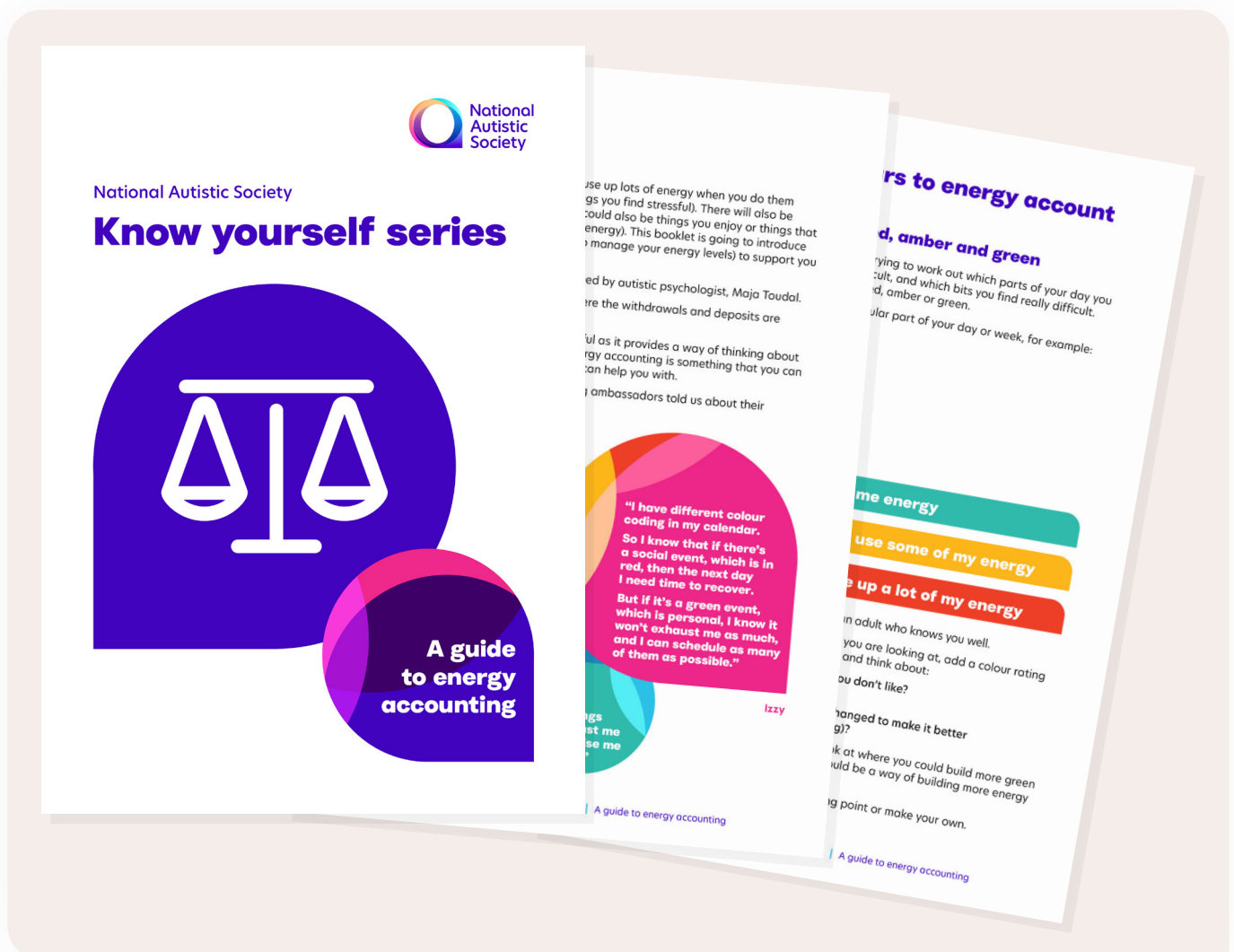
Energy accounting

Autistic people may find everyday life more tiring than their non-autistic peers, because there is a lot of information and extra processing for autistic people to do. You may find that you need to think about your energy levels differently to other people.

How you use your energy accounting is completely up to you. Different things rejuvenate or energise different people.

Many non-autistic people are re-energised by spending time with other people, whereas autistic people may enjoy that but find that it drains their energy.

Have a look at the **Know yourself** [Energy accounting](#) video and guide for some helpful information in this area.



Support with managing your environment

Have a think about what things are in your environment:

- What can you control?
- What can you bring into your environment?
- What can you ask for?
- What could you avoid?

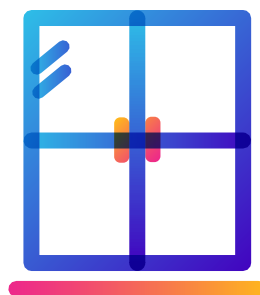
Here's an example of how you might manage being in an environment you are finding overwhelming:



Can you ask to switch the lights off if there is enough natural lighting in the room?

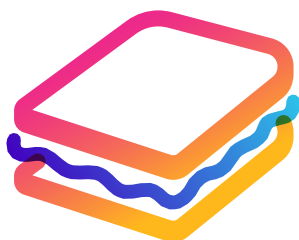


Could you ask for a digital clock or for one with no second hand so it's not ticking?



Can you sit near a window and avoid overhead lighting?

Can you take your own food?



Can you ask for a visual timetable or another way to show the daily structure?



Let people know if signs are incorrect or out of date if they are bothering you.



Can you ask for a break area, where you can relax away from others?

What could you take with you so you are always prepared?



You might remember some of these items from earlier on in this guide!

Summary

Now that we have explored some supportive strategies, you can work out what is best to support your own needs.

If you are interested in finding out more, please look at our “**Other resources that might be useful**” document at www.autism.org.uk/knowyourself.





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