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Environment and surroundings

Here we have guidance on changes that can be made to help autistic people feel more comfortable in their surroundings. This may be a change to the physical environment so that you can [create an autism friendly space](#), by [providing structure and routine](#) or both.

This information can be used to help autistic people in their home, education setting, residential or supported living service or when they are accessing the local community.

We also talk about [funding for home adaptation](#).

Autism and sensory differences

Many autistic people have [sensory](#) issues. This can affect one or more of the senses and they can be either over-developed (hypersensitive) or under-developed (hyposensitive). Both can have an impact on how people experience different environments.

For example, autistic people may find certain background sounds, which other people ignore or block out, unbearably loud or distracting. This can cause anxiety or even physical pain.

People who are hyposensitive, meanwhile, may not feel pain or extremes of temperature.

Creating an autism friendly and safe space

You can create a non-distracting and functional area by thinking about the physical structure of a particular room or environment. Furniture, soft furnishings and flooring can all be used to create a calm space.

Labelling items can also be helpful. For example, a kitchen will usually have fitted cupboards and fixtures as standard, helping to identify it, but all areas of the kitchen could also be labelled with words and/or symbols to help someone to use the room and the equipment with minimal support. Cupboards which contain food or hazardous materials could be locked when not in use.

Here are some other things to consider.

Colour and patterns

It is generally accepted that low arousal colours such as cream (not yellow or white) should be used for walls and patterned wallpaper should be avoided. Soft furnishings should also be kept fairly plain. Single-colour, painted walls can also eliminate the possibility of wallpaper being removed. Patterned floors can be confusing to walk across and may increase anxiety or cause people to become fixated.

Lighting

Fluorescent or harsh lighting can hurt the eyes of an autistic person. Many say that they can see these types of lights flickering or hear them hum, this can be distracting. Due to these difficulties, it is best to use soft lighting where possible. Adjustable lighting in some rooms can be calming.

Curtains and blinds

It has been suggested that it's best to avoid using slatted blinds, particularly vertical ones, as these can be distracting. Curtains may be a better option, with blackout curtains helping someone who is particularly sensitive to light. If someone has a tendency to pull on curtain rails, curtains can be held up with Velcro.

Plastic stick-on covering can also be placed on windows, giving privacy while letting some light in.

Noise

Some autistic people can't filter out noises that other people simply block out or ignore.

Furnishing can help to reduce noise levels in your home. For example, carpet or soft flooring is quieter than laminated flooring which can be noisy. This type of furnishing can also create a feeling of cosiness and safety.

Smells

People on the autism spectrum can become overwhelmed by subtle smells that you may not notice, such as someone's deodorant or perfume, or the smells of fabrics. [Clements and Zarkowska \(2000\)](#) suggest using a background fragrance to block the intrusion of uncontrollable smells.

Safety

Some autistic people can have little or no awareness of danger, meaning that you may need to take special precautions with everyday objects.

Here are some things you could try:

- locks or high handles on cupboards
- having electrical sockets outside of bedrooms or locked in a cupboard

- using plug locks
- having radiator covers
- adjust your water temperature so it's not too hot
- preparing for the possibility that an autistic person may run away or wander.

Parents could try a GPS [tracker](#) for their child, adults may want to carry an [autism alert card](#).

Sensory rooms

Sensory rooms are good way to create a relaxing, calm and yet stimulating environment.

Equipment can include:

- projection equipment
- fibre optics
- bubble tubes
- mirror balls
- sound system to produce music
- bean bags.

If you don't have the money or the space to have a sensory room, try creating a sensory corner with a seat that is screened off from the room.

[Godwin Emmons and McKendry Anderson \(2005\)](#) suggested creating a sensory bag or sensory basket, containing a selection of sensory items that can travel around with an autistic person.

This could include:

- stress balls
- a whistle with the pea removed for hard blowing
- unbreakable mirror - for the person to be able to see their emotions
- scented lotions.

Providing structure and routine

Our schools and adult services use the principles of [SPELL](#) and [TEACCH](#), which you can also use in your home, school or service.

You could try making [visual supports](#) to help autistic people take ownership of their daily or weekly timetable.

In an educational setting, it may be helpful for autistic pupils to have a visual timetable, this can static, such as on a classroom wall or one that is [more versatile](#).

Read about how [architects](#) have consulted autistic people and professionals who work with them, and used this information to design autism-friendly buildings.

Funding for home adaptation

Here are sources of financial help towards home adaptations or equipment for an autistic person. This can be help from your local authority or from a charitable trust.

Disabled Facilities Grant (England, Wales and Northern Ireland)

Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs) are paid to people who have a disability to help pay for adaptations to their home. The grant is to help people with disabilities to continue living where they are.

Read more about these grants in [England, Wales](#) and [Northern Ireland](#).

Home improvement help (England)

This can be a grant or a loan given to you by your local authority to help with repairing, improving or adapting your home. Each local authority has its own application form, rules and conditions about the type of help that can be offered and also what qualifies you to access the help.

Read more about [help with home improvement](#) and find your [local council](#).

Scheme of assistance (Scotland)

In Scotland, the Housing (Scotland) Act 2006 (HAS) is the main legislation for financial and practical assistance in the home. This law introduced the 'scheme of assistance', replacing Home Improvement Grants.

Read more about [help to pay for adaptations](#).

Home improvement agencies (HIA) (UK-wide)

Home improvement agencies are local not-for-profit organisations. They provide older, disabled, vulnerable home owners and private tenants with independent advice and help to carry out repairs, adaptations and improvements on their homes.

Read more about [home improvement agencies](#).