

This packet is intended for staff, officers, and officials who interact with autistic members of the public. It is an educational reference, not a policy document.

WHAT IS AUTISM?

Autism is a neurological difference — not a disease, disorder of behaviour, or mental illness. Autistic people process sensory information, language, and social interaction differently. These differences are not deficits; they are variations in how a person experiences and communicates with the world.

COMMON COMMUNICATION DIFFERENCES

1 Processing delay

An autistic person may need extra time to process a question before responding. Silence is not refusal.

3 Eye contact

Avoiding eye contact is common and does not indicate dishonesty, disrespect, or non-compliance.

5 Repetitive speech

Repeating words or phrases (echolalia) is a communication strategy, not mockery or confusion.

2 Literal interpretation

Idioms, sarcasm, and implied meaning may not be understood. Use plain, direct language.

4 Tone and volume

Flat affect or unusual tone does not reflect emotional state or intent. Do not interpret it as aggression.

6 Sensory sensitivity

Loud environments, bright lights, or physical contact can cause genuine distress and affect communication.

INTERACTION BEST PRACTICES

DO

- Speak slowly, clearly, and one instruction at a time.
- Allow extra time for the person to respond.
- Offer written instructions as an alternative.
- Use plain, literal language — avoid idioms.
- Reduce background noise and sensory stimuli where possible.
- Ask yes/no questions if verbal response is limited.

AVOID

- Interpret silence or slow response as non-compliance.
- Raise your voice or repeat rapidly — this increases distress.
- Use physical contact without clear consent.
- Assume unusual behaviour indicates deception or aggression.
- Dismiss a request for a support person or quiet space.
- Use jargon, acronyms, or implied instructions.

REASONABLE ACCOMMODATIONS

- Providing written copies of verbal instructions or decisions.
- Allowing a support person to be present during interactions.
- Offering a quieter space or reduced-stimulation environment.
- Extending response time for forms, questions, or procedures.
- Accepting written communication in place of verbal responses.