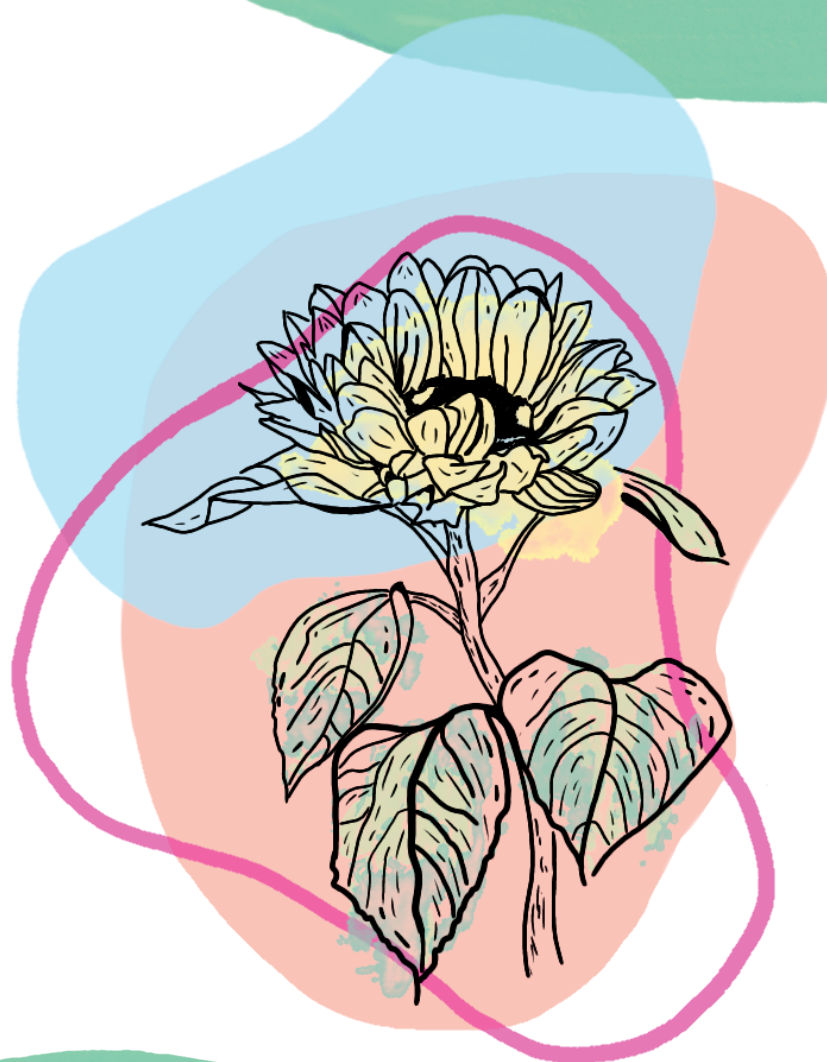


A Concrete Guidelines Package for Promoting Accessibility towards Individuals on the Autism Spectrum



**-Designed to be implemented in diverse
operative environments with a focus on
LGBTQIA+ safer spaces-**

Nerissa Demetriou

- This booklet has been implemented as part of a social services student's thesis. Laurea University of Applied Sciences 2022. Bachelor's Degree Programme in Social Services.
- The focus group of this booklet are people on the Autism spectrum. The objective of this booklet includes providing a concrete guidelines package that can be enforced within LGBTQIA+ safer spaces as a set of principles for ensuring inclusivity and accessibility towards individuals on the Autism spectrum.
- Author: Nerissa Demetriou
- Working life representatives of the thesis:
 - Autismiliitto
 - ArcoKerava.
- Working life partners of this booklet:
 - Autismiliitto
 - ArcoKerava
 - Luna Goc.
- Pictures source: CANVA elements, flaticon.com.
- Book Cover: Illustration created by Nerissa Demetriou.

Pictures below:

Picture 1: Logo of "ArcoKerava" In reference to booklet`s working life representative ArcoKerava..

Picture 2: Logo of "Autismiliitto". In reference to booklet`s working life representative Autismiliitto.

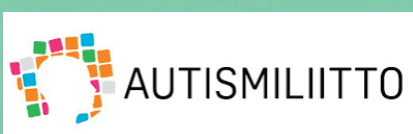
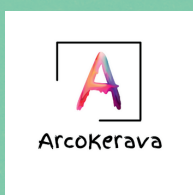


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For the reader:

- What inspired me to develop this subject matter?

Living in a world that is ultimately designed for neurotypicals, from social constructs and expectations, up to the structure of operative models and physical environments, the perspective and needs of neurodivergent people, are oftentimes disregarded. It is essential to declare, that this is not something inevitable. People that are in the privileged position to design and operate environments such as schools, youth spaces and safer spaces, are responsible to provide an inclusive and accessible space in consideration of a diverse range of attendees.

I consider that it is quite unfortunate that even so LGBTQIA+ safer spaces are envisioned to be an environment that enkindles support and expects diversity, they often do not reflect this reality to people that are on the Autism spectrum, as their needs are being overlooked in many cases. I grant that the meaning of diversity shall be reappraised in LGBTQIA+ safer spaces; diversity in all forms shall be expected, including diversity in the sense of neurodiversity. Furthermore, diversity shall not be just expected, but reflected within the guidelines of the operative model of LGBTQIA+ spaces; only then we can speak of true diversity, inclusivity and accessibility.

Moreover, I grant that the lack of knowledge around autistic peoples 'needs, as well as the lack of awareness around the vast prevalence of Autism within the demographic of LGBTQIA+, stands as a barrier in regards of acknowledging autistic individuals' needs within LGBTQIA+ safer spaces.

This is what brings me here, inspired and motivated to study the needs of individuals on the Autism spectrum, aiming to expand the guidelines of LGBTQIA+ safer spaces and beyond. My main aspiration includes to provide a concrete guidelines package that can potentially transform the operative model and physical environment of LGBTQIA+ safer spaces, to one that is considerate of the needs of autistic individuals.

-Nerissa Demetriou

1

Introduction to the Booklet.

Structure of the booklet:

- First section of the booklet: General introduction of the booklet, including the booklet's objectives and purpose.
- Second section of the booklet: Terms and concepts related to the booklet's subject matter. Specifically, terms and concepts related to Inclusivity, Accessibility, Autism and LGBTQIA+ safer spaces.
- Third section of the booklet: A concrete guidelines package that can help ensure inclusivity and accessibility for people on the Autism spectrum within an operative environment.

About the Booklet:

• **For whom is the booklet directed for?**

This booklet's guidelines are directed to support:

- People on the Autism spectrum.
- People who may be on the Autism spectrum but do not have an Autism diagnosis.

• **Where can the booklet be implemented in?:**

-LGBTQIA+ safer spaces.

-Potentially, this booklet can also be implemented in other operative environments, such as:

-Youth places.

-Events, workshops and activities.

-LGBTQIA+ safer spaces as the target environment of this booklet:

- The booklet's accessibility/inclusivity guidelines are designed for LGBTQIA+ safer spaces, as the booklet presents the introduction to the phenomenon of vast prevalence of people being on the Autism spectrum and being part of the LGBTQIA+ community. (read more about this on page 15)
- The booklet presents the significance of the acknowledgement of autistic peoples' needs specifically within LGBTQIA+ safer spaces. (read more about this on page 10)

-Why can this booklet be applied in other operative models besides LGBTQIA+ safer spaces?

- The booklet`s guidelines are designed to answer to autistic people needs in varying situations and operative environments.
- The subject matter of the intersection of the two identities; being on the Autism spectrum and part of the LGBTQIA+ community, is only studied at the first section of the booklet and does not interfere with the content of the guidelines package of this booklet.
- Autistic people that identify as LGBTQIA+ can be found everywhere (afar from LGBTQIA+ safer spaces), therefore the familiarization to the concepts related to autistic people that identify as LGBTQIA+ is essential in any operative environment.

• **Who should read this booklet?**

-Workers and volunteers in LGBTQIA+ safer spaces.
-Participants in LGBTQIA+ safer spaces.

- This booklet can also benefit:

-Youth workers and other employees in the social sector (as for example teachers).

-Anyone providing a service, workshop or an operative environment.

-Anyone organizing an event.

-Employers.

-Guardians, friends, family and partners of autistic people.

- How does this booklet benefit the reader?

-This booklet can help the reader understand and support people on the Autism spectrum in diverse environments and situations.

-This booklet can help the reader to prepare an environment, event or activity in a manner that supports the accessibility and inclusivity of autistic people.

- **Working partners of the booklet:**

As the booklet is implemented as part of a thesis report, the booklet was developed in collaboration with the working life representatives of the thesis, which are Autismiliitto and ArcoKerava.

- In addition to the thesis` s report working life representatives Autismiliitto and ArcoKerava, this booklet was developed in collaboration with Luna Goc. Luna Goc is a youth services expert that acquires personal work experience with people on the autism spectrum

Autismiliitto:

Autismiliitto is a national expert and non-governmental organization representing the autism spectrum community.

The role of Autismiliitto as a working partner of this booklet:

- Autismiliitto`s definite role throughout the development of this booklet, included administering feedback during and after the implementation process of the developmental guidelines package of this booklet, apropos of the autism spectrum associated subjects that have been examined, as well as the competence of the developed guidelines directed for individuals on the Autism spectrum.

- Autismiliitto`s perspective in connection with the final produced booklet served as a method for ratifying the success and competence of it.



Figure 1: Autismiliitto`s logo
(Autismiliitto.fi).

ArcoKerava:

ArcoKerava is a collaboration project with Kerava`s youth services that provides a safe environment directed for LGBTQIA+ youth.

The role of ArcoKerava as a working partner of this booklet:

- ArcoKerava`s definite role throughout the development of this booklet, included administering feedback during and after the implementation process of the developmental guidelines package from the perspective of a LGBTQIA+ safe-space requirements and operative model.
- The feedback and insight administered by ArcoKerava has been utilized within the implementation process of the guidelines package; any ideas and suggestions provided by them, have been taken into consideration.



Figure 2: Logo of ArcoKerava
(@ArcoKerava)

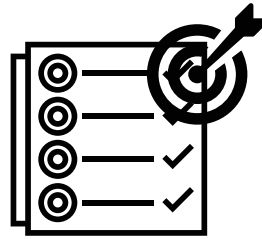
Luna Goc:

Luna Goc is a youth services expert that acquires personal work experience with people on the autism spectrum.

The role of Luna Goc as a working partner of this booklet:

- Luna Goc`s definite role throughout the development of this booklet, included administering feedback during and after the implementation process of the developmental guidelines package of this booklet, apropos of the autism spectrum associated subjects that have been examined, as well as the competence of the developed guidelines directed for individuals on the Autism spectrum.

- **Objectives of this booklet:**



This booklet aims to:

- Support autistic individuals' needs in diverse situations.
- Incorporate diverse guidelines, in order to ensure that differentiating autistic profiles are taken into consideration.
- Be enforced within LGBTQIA+ safer spaces as a set of principles for ensuring inclusivity and accessibility towards individuals on the Autism spectrum.
- Help workers, volunteers and participants within LGBTQIA+ safer spaces understand and support people on the Autism spectrum.
- Spread knowledge around Autism spectrum, accessibility and inclusivity.
- Help people create activities/workshops or events, in a way that supports the needs of people on the Autism spectrum.
- Function as a guidelines package or a checklist, that can help develop an existing environment or operative model to one that is more inclusive and accessible to people on the Autism spectrum.
- Function as a guidelines package or a checklist, through the process of creating a new environment or operative model that can help ensure inclusivity and accessibility for individuals on the Autism spectrum.

2

Introduction to basic terms



In this segment of the booklet, basic terms and concepts that are affiliated with the subject matter of Autism, Accessibility, Inclusivity and LGBTQIA+ safer spaces are going to be presented and explained.

● **Accessibility definition:**

- Autismiliitto (2022), defines accessibility of the immaterial environment significant for all persons, which refers to accessibility, from the perspective of social, psychological, and cognitive accessibility.
- In order to be accessible, one must take into account the demands of all types of individuals in their communication, daily activities, attitudes, and the creation of websites and services. (Autismiliitto 2022)

● **Accessibility from the viewpoint of autistic persons:**

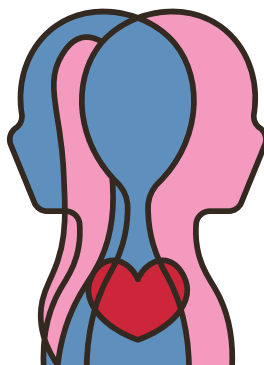
- From the viewpoint of those on the Autism spectrum, accessibility entails taking into account things like the barriers brought on by communication, interaction, the environment, and sensory stimulation. (Autismiliitto 2022)

● **Inclusion:**

- An inclusive environment is one that caters for the needs, desires and preferences of all participants, as well as subsides their anxiety, as stated by Gatfield, Hall, Isaacs and Mahony (2018, 6).
- Any activity should start out by embracing the inclusion principle. As a result, persons responsible for creating surroundings or designing activities should be very mindful. Instead of making individuals fit into the current surroundings or activities, the results of their efforts should develop activities or environments that accept differences and accommodate a range of abilities. (Renzaglia, Karvonen, Drasgow & Stoxen 2005, 2)

● Ableism:

- Ableism is the societal prejudice and discrimination against individuals with disabilities that is founded on the idea that able-bodied people have better abilities. (Eisenmenger 2019)
- Ableism defines people according to their disability and is based on the presumption that disabled people need to be "fixed." (Eisenmenger 2019)
- Ableism includes demeaning generalizations and harmful stereotypes about those who have disabilities. (Eisenmenger 2019)
- Ableism can include:
 - Failing to include accessibility in a room`s or building`s design and planning. (Eisenmenger 2019)
 - Using the accessible bathroom stall when you are able to use the non-accessible stall. (Eisenmenger 2019)
 - Wearing fragrant items in an unscented setting. (Eisenmenger 2019)
 - Addressing a person with a disability as if they were a child, speaking for them or about them rather than to them. (Eisenmenger 2019)
 - Interrogating someone with a disability about their personal or medical history. (Eisenmenger 2019)
 - Assuming that a person must have a visible disability to be considered disabled. (Eisenmenger 2019)
 - Considering whether or to what extent someone is "really" disabled. (Eisenmenger 2019)



● Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD):

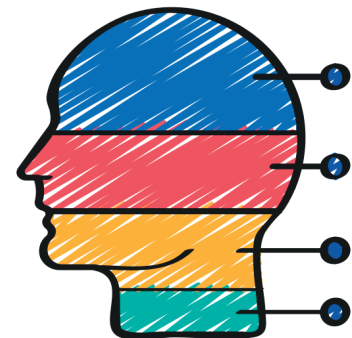


- “Autism is a spectrum condition and affects people in different ways. Like all people, autistic people have their own strengths and weaknesses.” (National autistic Society, no date)
- Weir, Allison and Baron-Cohen (2021, 1), declare that according to American Psychiatry Association (2013), Autism spectrum disorders (hence referred to as autism) are a group of neurodevelopmental conditions that last a lifetime and are characterized by distinctions in social interaction and communication, special interests, and repetitive behaviors.
- Importantly, the autistic community is diverse and may exist along the complete spectrum of intellectual capacity. autistic people may also differ in their cognitive profile, including abnormal sensory perception, information processing, and motor abilities. (Weir, Allison and Baron-Cohen 2021, 1)

● Characteristics of Autism:

In the website of National autistic Society (no date), some of the characteristics that autistic individuals may encompass, are listed as the following:

- “Social communication and interaction challenges”,
- “Repetitive and restrictive behavior”,
- “Over- or under-sensitivity to light, sound, taste or touch”,
- “Highly focused interests and hobbies”,
- “Extreme anxiety”
- “Meltdowns and shutdowns”.



- When it comes to social communication and interaction challenges, the website of National autistic Society (no date), discloses that people on the autism spectrum may have trouble understanding both verbal and non-verbal cues, such as gestures or voice inflection. (National autistic Society, no date)

- Some autistic persons have minimal or no speech, while others have excellent language abilities but may have trouble understanding sarcasm or tone of voice. (National autistic Society, no date)

- People with autism frequently struggle to "read" other people, or to identify or comprehend their intents and feelings, as well as to convey their own emotions. This can make navigating the social sphere quite challenging [...].(National autistic Society, no date)

- The National autistic Society`s website (no date) defines autistic individuals` "repetitive and restrictive behavior" in the following way: "With its unwritten rules, the world can seem a very unpredictable and confusing place to autistic people. This is why they often prefer to have routines so that they know what is going to happen." Changes in routine can sometimes cause great discomfort and anxiety in autistic persons. (National autistic Society, no date)

- Aside from repetitive gestures like hand flapping and rocking, autistic persons may also utilize objects repeatedly, such as spinning pens or opening and closing doors. When they are nervous or anxious, autistic persons frequently participate in these behaviors to help them relax, but many autistic people also do it because they love it. (National autistic Society, no date)

- People with Autism may have excessive or inadequate sensitivity to pain, noises, touch, tastes, scents, light, colors, or temperatures. For instance, individuals could find certain background noise, like the music in a restaurant, tolerably loud or bothersome while other people ignore or filter it out. This may result in anxiety or even physical pain. (National autistic Society, no date)

- Many autistic individuals struggle with anxiety, especially in social circumstances or while dealing with change. The quality of life for persons with Autism and their family may be impacted, in addition to psychological and physical effects. (National autistic Society, no date)

- It's crucial for autistic persons to discover coping skills and learn to identify their triggers in order to lessen their anxiety. However, a lot of autistic persons have trouble identifying and controlling their emotions. Too many autistic individuals are being neglected by mental health care, and more than one-third of autistic persons have major mental health problems. (National autistic Society, no date)

3

INCLUSIVITY AND ACCESSIBILITY GUIDELINES



Within this segment of the booklet, the guidelines package that can help ensure inclusivity and accessibility for people on the Autism spectrum within an operative environment is presented. The guidelines package includes:

- An introduction to the guidelines package and its content.
- The concrete guidelines package (divided in categories and sub-categories that take into consideration diverse aspects).
- An accessibility/inclusivity protocol checklist at the end of every category`s section that can function as a summary for each accessibility category in question, as well as a concrete checklist for operative environments, events, activities and workshops.

INTRODUCTION:

Autism Spectrum Disorder affects different people in different ways, in different degrees, and is therefore a spectrum. There is no one way to encapsulate one single autistic profile. That means, that there is no one-size-fits-all approach that can guarantee an absolute paradigm for ensuring inclusivity for all individuals that are on the Autism spectrum.

As this booklet`s objective entails generating inclusivity and accessibility for all individuals on the Autism spectrum, it will incorporate diverse guidelines, in order to ensure that differentiating autistic profiles are taken into consideration.

Everyone should be able to act and engage equally with others, regardless of their characteristics, in order to be considered accessible. Because each person on the Autism spectrum is unique, accessibility does not mean the same things to them all. The most crucial step is to establish an atmosphere where everyone has an equal opportunity to participate. (Autismiliitto 2022)

Introduction to the guidelines package basic categories

Within this segment of the booklet, the concrete guidelines package will be presented.

- The presented guidelines can be implemented within an operative environment, event or activity.
- The guidelines package is divided in different categories, in aim of ensuring that differentiating accessibility and inclusivity factors are taken into consideration (for example physical accessibility, social accessibility and other).
- Each category is divided in sub-categories (for example, the category of physical accessibility is divided in sub-categories such as lighting, sounds, odors and other).
- Each category will have a protocol checklist (what to ask participants/ provide to participants: A) Before an event and B) During an event), in aim of summarizing the accessibility of the category in question.
- In order to ensure utmost accessibility and inclusivity for individuals on the Autism spectrum, all the presented categories of the guidelines package shall be taken into consideration.

The guidelines package is divided in the four following categories:

Physical accessibility

Social accessibility

Cognitive accessibility

Mental accessibility

The categories above (Physical accessibility, Social accessibility, Cognitive accessibility and Mental accessibility) are defined by Autismiliitto (2022) and refer to the four categories that shall be considered when promoting accessibility towards people on the Autism spectrum.

At the end of each category`s segment (Physical accessibility, Social accessibility, Cognitive accessibility and Mental accessibility), there will be a presented table of further active protocols in aim of ensuring the accessibility and inclusivity related to the category in question. The protocols will be divided in the following sections:

- What to provide/ask participants:
 - A) Before an event/activity
 - B) During an event/activity



The inclusive protocol of asking participants supporting questions and providing participants tools or information before and during an activity, is introduced by Gatfield et al. (2018).

Note that providing information to participants before an event or activity can be achieved through:

- A mutual message platform shared within participants (when possible).
- A social media outlet that represents the operative environment in question.
- The website of the operative environment in question.

Asking questions from a participant prior to their first attendance to the event/activity in question, may not be possible if the event/activity does not require registration for attendance (as for instances, most youth spaces). In this case, the questions can be asked within the first attendance of the participant.

During a participant`s attendance to the event or activity or event in question information can be gathered through:

- A printed questionnaire that can be left in a sealed box or to a person in charge of the event/activity.
- A digital questionnaire that can be filled through electronic devices.
- Verbal questionnaire (keep in mind that the person(s) in charge of the event/activity shall transcribe the gathered information).

The first segment of the guidelines package will present guidelines related to the category of:

- **Physical accessibility.**

Physical accessibility refers to the environmental requirements of people on the Autism spectrum. Although each person on the Autism spectrum will have unique environmental requirements, there are some broad questions we may ask to establish a physical setting that will lessen rather than heighten anxiety. (Matusiak, no date)

Visual, auditory, olfactory, taste, touch, vestibular, and proprioceptive senses are only a few of the seven that demand our attention. The usage of space is something else that needs our attention. (Matusiak, no date)

- **Physical accessibility** for individuals on the Autism spectrum can be promoted with the following guidelines:

The environmental aspects that shall be taken into consideration in light of ensuring the physical accessibility of an operative environment includes:

1. Décor
2. Lighting
3. Odors
4. Sound
5. Materials

Four of the environmental aspects 'categories that are presented above (Décor, Lighting, Odors and Sound) are defined by Gatfield et al. (2018), of which divide the accessibility adaptations of the physical environment in these sections.

The first collection of guidelines introduced in the physical environment's segment of the guidelines package, involves accessibility aspects in relation to an operative environment's:

1) Décor.

Accessibility aspects that shall be taken into consideration within an operative environment's space in regards of décor:

- Avoid having brightly colored or intricately patterned furniture, rugs, curtains, blinds, walls, ceilings, or artwork (Gatfield et al. 2018). These may cause overstimulation to some people on the Autism spectrum, which can result to discomfort, anxiety or even physical pain.
- Avoid having multiple flags (or other colorful decorations) exposed around the room. When it comes to LGBTQIA+ safer spaces/events, even though LGBTQIA+ flags may promote representation towards the participants within the spaces, the bright contrast of the colors and patterns may result to overstimulation to some people on the Autism spectrum.
- Avoid operating ceiling fans; These may be loud as well as aesthetically disturbing. (Gatfield et al. 2018).



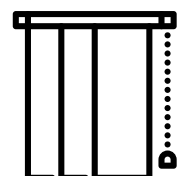
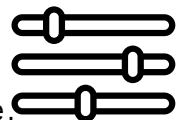
The second collection of guidelines introduced in the physical environment` segment of the guidelines package involves accessibility aspects in relation to an operative environment`s:

2) Lighting.



Accessibility aspects that shall be taken into consideration within an operative environment`s space in regards of lighting:

- Insert adjustable lighting. Adjustable lighting allows adjustability to direction, dimming, brightening (Autismiliitto 2022). Some autistic people may be hypersensitive or hyposensitive to lighting, therefore, adjustable lighting is a good solution to answer to differentiating needs. This is important as certain lighting can result to discomfort, anxiety or even physical pain to some autistic people.
- Insert individually adjustable blinds that allow for more flexibility to accommodate participants' differing needs (Gatfield et al. 2018, 9).
- Check that no lights or bulbs are flickering. (Gatfield et al. 2018, 9).



- Replace fluorescent lights with other type of lamps within the space. (Gatfield et al. 2018, 9). Fluorescent lights lighting can result to discomfort, anxiety or even physical pain to some autistic people.
- Maximize the use of natural light; lowering curtains to lessen glare and other visual distractions (Gatfield et al. 2018, 9).

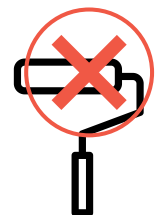
The third collection of guidelines introduced in the physical environment's segment of the guidelines package, involves accessibility aspects in relation to an operative environment's:

3) Odors.



Accessibility aspects that shall be taken into consideration within an operative environment's space in regards of odors:

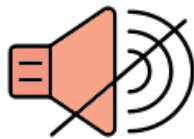
- Do not use perfumes or deodorants with strong scents. Before the event, make sure to let everyone know about this (Gatfield et al. 2018, 10,11). Some autistic individuals are hypersensitive to scents. Hypersensitivity to scents can result to discomfort, anxiety or even physical pain.
- Examine the cleaning schedule and the intended cleaning supplies because the scent of cleaning chemicals can be overpowering and this procedure may need to be taken into consideration and prepared for (Gatfield et al. 2018, 10,11).
- Ensure that the hand-soaps in the toilets and other hand sanitizers in the space are scentless.
- Check to be sure there won't be any new furnishings, paint, carpet, or curtains within a month of the event because the scents from these materials might be quite distressing to some autistic people. (Gatfield et al. 2018, 10,11).
- Abstain from bringing food with intense smells to the operative environment and inform the participants to abstain from doing so as well.



- Abstain from smoking (tobacco, vape or other substances) before attending the event/activity.

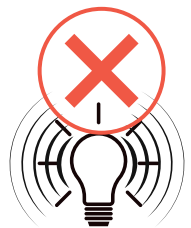
The fourth collection of guidelines introduced in the physical environment`s segment of the guidelines package, involves accessibility aspects in relation to an operative environment`s

4) Sounds.



Accessibility aspects that shall be taken into consideration within an operative environment`s space in regards of sounds:

- Use sound-absorbing surface materials (Autismiliitto 2022). Sound-absorbing surface materials can reduce excess noise within a space. Excess noise can result to their discomfort, anxiety or even physical pain to participants with hypersensitivity to sounds therefore it should be avoided.
- Avoid having light bulbs that hum. For instance, older fluorescent bulbs may hum. If possible, replace them and instead utilize natural light or other types of illumination (Gatfield et al. 2018, 14, 15).
- Make sure there is no background noise coming from outside the room, such as traffic, music, or construction, or coming from inside the room, such a ticking clock or air conditioner (Gatfield et al. 2018, 14, 15).
- Avoid forming noise-inducing activities in multiple groups, as it may be very loud. Break-out rooms are ideal. If this is not a possibility, make sure the groups are as far apart as you can (Gatfield et al. 2018, 14, 15).



- Abstain from opening windows and doors for air throughout the session, as it may bring outside noise (Gatfield et al. 2018, 14, 15).
- Disconnect the hand drier in bathrooms, or post a "out of order" notice on it. For drying the hands, provide paper towels and a trash instead (Gatfield et al. 2018, 14, 15).

- Do not bring any items in the operative environment, that may induce intense or sudden noise. Some examples of sound inducing items include: balloons (sudden pop induces loud noise), whistles, noise-inducing timers in board games or other.



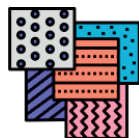
- If possible, offer noise-cancelling headsets or earbuds to the participants during the event/activity. Participants that are hypersensitive to sounds may find these helpful.



- If possible, include a separated room within the space of the operative environment, that is designated as a "quiet room". This room would provide an alternative space for participants that wish to be in a space without any noise (either for a shorter period of time or even during the whole duration of the activity/event). The quiet room can function as a place where people with hypersensitivity to sounds can go to prevent themselves from experiencing discomfort, anxiety or even physical pain.

The fifth collection of guidelines introduced in the physical environment's segment of the guidelines package, involves accessibility aspects in relation to an operative environment's:

5) Materials.



Accessibility aspects that shall be taken into consideration within an operative environment's space in regards of materials:

- Offer a variety of seating options that are made of different materials in between them, as some autistic people may find certain materials and textures distressing, which may result to their discomfort, anxiety or even physical pain.

- Do not obligate participants to take off their shoes in indoors spaces as some participants may find the material of the floor distressing which may result to their discomfort, anxiety or even physical pain. If taking off shoes is unavoidable, inform the participants about this beforehand and suggest them to bring another pair of indoor shoes of which they can switch to during their participation within the operative environment in question.

Physical Accessibility Protocol Checklist:



- What to ask/provide to participants:

What to ask and provide to participants in regards of ensuring physical accessibility within the operative environment in question:

A) Before an activity/event:

- Take pictures of the operative environment`s spaces and elements (including the operative environment`s décor, lighting, furniture and all its amenities including bathrooms).
 - The pictures should illustrate clearly the space`s layout.
 - The pictures should accommodate descriptive captions of what each picture represents (for example if you there is a picture of a room, include a description of the room`s function and type of lighting. If there is a picture of the space`s furniture, include a description of the furniture`s material and so on).
 - Share these pictures with all the participants before their attendance and/or post these pictures to your operative environment`s internet platform(s) (its website, Instagram page and/or other platform).
 - Provide all the further necessary information to the participants, in regards of the operative environment`s physical environment`s characteristics (characteristics related to the space`s décor, lighting, odors, sound, materials). This is done in aim of preparing the participants for any possible environmental aspects that may be uncomfortable, anxiety-provoking or triggering to them in any other way.
 - Ask the participants in advance, whether they have any possible hypersensitivities, hypo-sensitivities, triggers or preferences in regards of aspects that relate to the physical environment of a space. Mention that these can involve aspects related to a space`s décor, lighting, odors, sound, materials or any other possible aspect. Mention that the participants` triggers, sensitivities and preferences will be taken into consideration during their attendance.

- Ensure that all volunteers and workers of the operative environment are familiarized with the topic of hypersensitivity and are aware of how to support a person that experiences hypersensitivity in diverse situations.
- Encourage the participants of the operative environment to familiarize themselves with the topic of hypersensitivity. This way, everyone can be more aware that some things (as for example certain lighting or sounds) can be distressing to people with hypersensitivities, as a result, increasing their support and understanding towards people with hypersensitivities.

1. Providing information to participants in regards of the décor of the operative environment:

- If there is brightly colored or intricately patterned furniture, rugs, curtains, blinds, walls, ceilings, or artwork that cannot be removed from the operative environment`s space, let participants know in advance in aim of preparing them for possible precautions. Some participants may choose to not attend the event/activity if the space is too overstimulating to them.
- If there is operating ceiling fans within the operative environment`s space, let the participants know in advance in aim of preparing them for possible precautions. In case a participant finds ceiling fans triggering in any way, you may want to offer the option to not operate the ceiling fans during their attendance.

2. Providing information to participants in regards of the lighting of the operative environment:

- Let participants know in advance to carry their own cap, sunglasses, or tinted eyewear if they are sensitive to lighting in case the operative environment in question does not provide these within their space.
- If there is fluorescent lighting, let participants know in advance as there may not always be an alternative. (Gatfield et al. 2018, 9)
- Let participants know in advance whether the lighting of the space is adjustable.
- Let participants know in advance about any other possible triggers in the lighting of the operative environment`s space, as for example, flickering lights, non-adjustable blinds or other.

3. Providing information to participants in regards of the odors of the operative environment:

- If the space of the operative environment has been recently cleaned and the scent of cleaning supplies is still prevalent, make sure to inform the participants of the event/activity beforehand.
- If the space of the operative environment has assembled any new furnishings, paint, carpet, or curtains within a month of the event/activity make sure to inform the participants beforehand because the scents from these materials might be quite distressing to some autistic people. (Gatfield et al. 2018, 10,11).
- Inform all participants to abstain from smoking (tobacco, vape or other substances) before attending the event/activity. Explain to them that the scents from these can be very overwhelming and can result to discomfort, anxiety or even physical pain to participants with hypersensitivity to scents.
- Inform all participants to not use perfumes or deodorants with strong scents when attending the event/activity in question. Explain to them that the scents from these can be very overwhelming and can result to discomfort, anxiety or even physical pain to participants with hypersensitivity to scents.
- Inform all participants to abstain from bringing food with intense smells to the operative environment. Explain to them that the scents from these can be very overwhelming and can result to discomfort, anxiety or even physical pain to participants with hypersensitivity to scents.

4. Providing information to participants in regards of the sounds of the operative environment:

- Inform participants beforehand to bring their own noise-cancelling headset or earbuds if you do not offer these within the operative environment. Participants that are hypersensitive to sounds may find noise-cancelling headset/earbuds necessary for the participation in an activity/event.
- It is recommended to advice participants to not induce any sudden noises or raise their voice during the event/activity of the operative environment, as these acts may be disturbing to participants with hypersensitivity to sounds, which can result to their discomfort, anxiety or even physical pain.

- Inform the participants beforehand about the operative environment`s possible disturbing sounds that may be induced during the event/activity. For instance, these may include:
 - Loud group activities
 - Bulbs that hum
 - Ticking clocks
 - Background noises such as traffic
 - Music
 - Hand driers Or other.
- Inform all the participants of the event/activity beforehand that it is important to abstain from inducing sudden, loud or intense sounds within the operative environment due to the possibility of having participants that are hypersensitive to sounds. Explain that participants that are hypersensitive to sounds may find sudden, loud or intense sounds disturbing, which can result to their discomfort, anxiety or even physical pain.

5. Providing information to participants in regards of the materials of the operative environment:

- If taking off shoes is unavoidable within the spaces, inform the participants about this beforehand and suggest them to bring another pair of indoor shoes of which they can switch to during their participation within the operative environment in question. This is important, as some participants may find the material of the floor distressing which may result to their discomfort, anxiety or even physical pain.
- What to ask and provide to participants in regards of ensuring physical accessibility within the operative environment in question:

B) During and event/activity:

- During an event or activity, people that are in charge of the operative environment, shall persist to ask the participants` needs and check up on their well-being, if for instance any changes may occur within the physical environment that some may find triggering in any way.
- As each autistic person with sensory sensitivity to light is different, you should ask for each individuals` needs and therefore, adjust the lighting accordingly.
- If at all possible, accommodate cap, sunglasses, or tinted eyewear within the operative environment in question, that can be borrowed by participants that may find the lighting of the space uncomfortable, anxiety-provoking or painful for them.
- If at all possible, avoid to use cleaning supplies during events and activities. If at any point you have to use cleaning supplies during the event/activity inform the participants about this. People with hypersensitivity to smells may choose to leave the space to avoid the possible discomfort, anxiety or other trigger caused by the scents.
- In case a participant gets overwhelmed by sounds during the activity/event, offer noise-cancelling headsets/earbuds if these are provided in the operative environment.
- In case a participant gets overwhelmed by sounds during the activity/event, help them find a place that is more quiet.
- In case a participant induces too much noise during the activity/event, advise them to stop the action that is causing the noise. Explain to them that this is important because some participants may be hypersensitive to sounds and some noises may result to their discomfort, anxiety or even physical pain.

When it comes to a physical environment`s accessibility, you can also enact an "accessibility mapping" process within the operative environment in question.

- Accessibility mapping is a tool for finding out the current state of accessibility in the environment.

- The built environment accessibility mapping method (ESKEH) was developed in 2007–2009 as a national collaborative project and the method was updated at the Disability Association's Disability Center ESKE in 2018. (invalidiliitto, no date)
- The ESKEH mapping method is intended for mapping buildings and their exterior areas. The mapping provides information on where the criteria set for accessibility are fulfilled. The information obtained can be used in the planning of repairs and changes to the site. (invalidiliitto, no date)
- The method includes survey forms and a guide for conducting the survey. ESKEH criteria are based on accessibility regulations, guidelines and recommendations. The surveyor collects the necessary information about the site using forms and prepares a report describing the current state of accessibility, the shortcomings and gives suggestions for measures to improve accessibility. (invalidiliitto, no date)

The second segment of the guidelines package will present guidelines related to the category of:



- **Social accessibility.**

“Beyond even the need for physical and mental accessibility, the key factors of an accessible space for autistic people are social and emotional accessibility. [...] the whole point of queer spaces is the relief of being your authentic self. If that relief is only available to queer people who present themselves in a certain way, then it is not a safe space.” (Hopkinson 2022)

Social accessibility refers to aspects regarding:

- The existence of a mutual language (in relation to the option of alternative communication methods) (Autismiliitto 2022)
- Diverse engagement and participation methods.
- The perception/attitude of non-autistic people towards autistic people in social situations.
- The perception/ attitude of non-autistic people in regards of autistic people`s way of representing themselves in social situations.
- Social accessibility for individuals on the Autism spectrum can be promoted with the following guidelines:

The environmental aspects that shall be taken into consideration in light of ensuring the physical accessibility of an operative environment includes:

1. Communication methods.
2. Engagement and participation methods.
3. Perception/attitude of non-autistic people towards autistic people in social situations.

The first collection of guidelines introduced in the social accessibility`s segment of the guidelines package, involves social accessibility aspects in relation to an operative environment`s:

1. Communication methods.



Accessibility aspects that shall be taken into consideration within an operative environment`s space in regards of communication methods:

- Expect diversity in the communication methods of the participants. For example, do not automatically assume that everyone uses speech for communicating. Ask for each participant`s preferred method of communication.
- Utilize alternative communication strategies that a person can use to communicate, when they are not able to speak. These can include:

- ➔ Facial expressions
- ➔ Body language
- ➔ Gestures
- ➔ Sign language (Assistive Ware, no date)

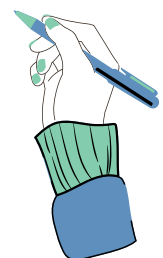


- Utilize Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) physical tools or aids. Ensure that at least one or few of these are accommodated in the operative environment. These can include:

- ➔ Symbol boards
- ➔ Choice cards
- ➔ Communication books
- ➔ Keyboards and alphabet charts
- ➔ Speech-generating devices or communication devices
- ➔ AAC apps on mobile devices (Assistive Ware, no date)

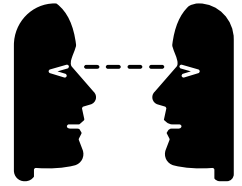
- Be aware and ready to utilize alternative/non-verbal methods of communication. This implies, that if a participant uses other ways of communication afar from speech, you should be ready to offer alternative tools and methods to communicate. Some examples of low-threshold preparations for alternative communication methods:

- ➔ Use an electronic device`s notes feature or even a messenger platform such as WhatsApp and offer to communicate by typing.
- ➔ Use paper and pen to communicate through writing or drawing.
- ➔ Download an AAC app on your electronic device before the activity/event and offer that as a method for communication.



- Be aware that some autistic people may find eye-contact distressing or challenging. Therefore, many autistic people may not engage in eye-contact as much or at all.

- ➔ Do not call attention to the lack of eye-contact of a participant. For example, do not comment on it or ask the participant about it (unless the participant voluntarily proceeds to address it).
- ➔ Do not oblige or ask a participant to engage in eye-contact.
- ➔ Do not associate a participant`s lack of eye-contact with a lack of respect or lack of attention. Be understanding and keep in mind that the lack of eye-contact may indicate that the participant is just not comfortable engaging in eye-contact.



- Ask for the participants` contact preferences, such as the preferred methods of information transmission and receipt. Due to difficulties with auditory processing and the lack of a full picture of the other person to provide context for conversational signals, some autistic people dislike chatting on the phone, while others prefer in-person interactions or via email (Gatfield et al. 2018, 18,19).
- Ask participants how they want to be referred to, such as "on the autism spectrum" or "autistic person," if at all feasible. There is no one phrase that is favored by all members of the autistic/Autism community when referring to Autism. (Gatfield et al. (2018, 25).
- During interactions, always use the name of the person you are referring to at the beginning of your sentence. This helps clarify who are you talking to. (National autistic Society 2020) This is especially important if there is a larger group of people around. Some autistic people may find it more challenging to be aware when someone is referring specifically to them, or when someone needs their attention in a specific moment. Saying their name before a sentence, can help an autistic person shift their focus to the conversation.
- Avoid open-ended questions and be specific. For example, ask "Did you enjoy your lunch?" and "Did you enjoy maths?" rather than "How was your day?" (National autistic Society 2020). Open-ended questions can be confusing and/or even distressing to some autistic people.

- Keep questions short. Ask only the most necessary questions (National autistic Society 2020). Long questions as well as a series of questions can be confusing and/or even distressing to some autistic people.
- Structure your question and be specific. For example, you could offer options or choices (National autistic Society 2020).
- Avoid using irony, sarcasm, figurative language, rhetorical questions, idioms or exaggeration as some autistic people can take these literally. If you do use these, explain what you have said and be clear about what you really mean to say. (National autistic Society 2020)

The second collection of guidelines introduced in the social accessibility's segment of the guidelines package, involves social accessibility aspects in relation to an operative environment's:

2. Engagement and participation methods.



Accessibility aspects that shall be taken into consideration within an operative environment's space in regards of engagement and participation methods:

- Refrain from initially pressuring autistic persons to engage. Although being open-minded and adaptable is good, each person is aware of their own capabilities and interests. Although receiving "no" as an answer is certainly a crucial component of acceptance, giving time to consider the question and the procedure is often welcomed. (Hopkinson 2022)
- Give some extra time for rest breaks in social situations or activities, as so some people may need extra rest breaks in social situations. This way, everyone gets a chance to participate. (Autismiliitto 2022) Some autistic people may find a rest break from social situations crucial. Social situations without rest breaks, may result to their discomfort, anxiety, or even cause other distressing effects to them.
- Consider other people's need for personal space (Autismiliitto 2022). Some autistic people might need more personal space than others for various of reasons. Be respectful of this and give the time and distance that other people need, so that they feel comfortable. If you are unsure whether you are invading someone's personal space, you can check with the other person by asking them: "Do you feel comfortable in this situation or do you need more personal space?"

- Demonstrate flexibility. Make sure participants are aware that it is okay for them to leave the room, utilize sensory tools, relax in the “quiet room” or other. (Gatfield et al. 2018,21, 22, 23) By stating that it is perfectly normal and expected that each participant takes their own needed precautions to feel comfortable, allocates an environment of understanding and support towards autistic people.



- Encourage individuals to make contributions in various ways. Not everyone feels confident speaking up and asking questions (Gatfield et al. 2018,21, 22, 23). This is an important aspect to keep in consideration when constructing activities. Strive to construct activities that allow participants to contribute in various ways (afar from verbal contribution).



- Implement engagement guidelines (Gatfield et al. 2018,19, 20).

➔ Engagement guidelines can include specific guidelines that define what topics participants should avoid talking about within the operative environment. These topics can include topics such as religion, abuse, substances and other. This is essential for all participants, however, when it comes to autistic people, it may be even more challenging to recognize which topics are inappropriate to be talked about in a certain operative environment. This is because some autistic people do not comprehend social cues/protocols the same way non-autistic people do.

➔ Ensure that the engagement guidelines of the operative environment are unambiguous, as detailed as possible and provide concrete examples/scenarios they are applicable to. This is important, as some autistic people may find concrete examples essential in order to recognize which topics may be inappropriate or triggering to other participants. This is essential because some autistic people require concrete examples in order to comprehend broader concepts.



- Find individual solutions that support independent survival. (Autismiliitto 2022)
As each autistic individual is different and thus has different needs in between them, seek for different solutions and apply them in different situations in order to support autistic peoples 'participation in activities and social situations.

- ➔ For example, if an activity is too confusing or triggering in any way to a person, you can ask the person in question, how you can help them feel more comfortable during the participation.

- ➔ If an activity is too distressing or triggering in any way to a person, you can ask the person in question and/or seek for solutions together, how to make the activity more comfortable so they can participate.



- Do not oblige anyone to participate in any activity or social situation.

- ➔ Do not make people feel guilty or not included, for choosing to not participate in the activity in question.



- ➔ Do not use encouraging words or positive affirmations such as: "Come on, join us, it is going to be fun!", as these can be pressuring and/or even anxiety provoking towards someone who feels that they do not wish to participate in the activity in question. Choose to say "Anyone who wants to join this activity, is free to do so". This takes some of the pressure to join away, and allocates more freedom to the participants to choose whether they feel like joining the activity or not.

- Abstain from implementing any obligatory procedures that require interaction.
For example, abstain from implementing a guided introduction round.

- ➔ A guided introduction round is a procedure implemented by a lot of youth and safer spaces. An introduction round usually is guided by the worker or volunteer of the operative environment and it involves gathering all the participants in one place and introducing their name in front of the whole group of participants. Oftentimes, the introduction round includes a question such as "Tell us your name, pronouns and a few things about you".

- ➔ This procedure can be uncomfortable, anxiety provoking or even confusing to some autistic people for various reasons.

- ➔ For example, some autistic people may find talking in front of a large group of people anxiety provoking.

- ➡ Some autistic people that do not communicate verbally, may find this procedure inconvenient and uncomfortable.
- ➡ Some autistic people may find questions such as “Tell us a few things about you” too open-ended and therefore resulting to their confusion or even anxiety.
- ➡ Making this procedure optional may not be the best option as it may cause participants to feel exposed and/or not included if they choose to not participate in this.

- ➡ Instead, you could try to implement alternative methods for introducing participants with one another. For example, you could offer a variety of group activities such as board games, where people can engage and meet other participant more organically, comfortably and in a less anxiety provoking way. This is also a more accessible method for people that do not communicate verbally.



- Abstain from implementing activities in an open-plan environment, in a single table (where everyone sits) or a gathering cycle. It is optimal if the space is divided in more than one room or incorporates a “quiet room”. If this is not possible, divide the space in other ways, such as including different segments of seating areas and having more than one table. Implement different roles for each seating area segment (each seating segment could host a specific type of activities).

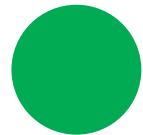
- ➡ Open-plan environments in addition to being more crowded and oftentimes loud, are also too over stimulant due to multiple activities and conversations occurring at once. This can contribute to an autistic person`s overstimulation which may result to their discomfort, anxiety or other distressing effect(s).
- ➡ Open plan environments, single tables or gathering cycles, usually host more people to gather around in one single space. This can make communication and engagement between participants confusing and/or distressing. This occurs for various reasons, as for example, some autistic people find it harder to focus when there are multiple ongoing conversations or activities nearby.



➡ Open plan environments have a lack of structure as there is no clear space division or separate rooms. This can be confusing and/or distressing to some autistic people, as some autistic people find it essential to have structure and clear definition of the space's usage.

• Implement "The red dot system." Participants can use this technique to graphically display their preferred methods of communication. Usually, nametags are dotted with these stickers. It should be made clear that these can be adjusted as necessary and that they should be followed before approaching someone. (Gatfield et al. 2018,21, 22, 23). Different colored stickers shall be provided by the operative environment. Each color represents the preferred method of communication/participation in interactions. All the participants of the operative environment should be informed in regards of what each color represents. An example of how to utilize "The red dot system" is presented below:

➡ Putting a green dot-sticker on your name tag indicates that you are currently open for interactions and/or an in-depth conversation.



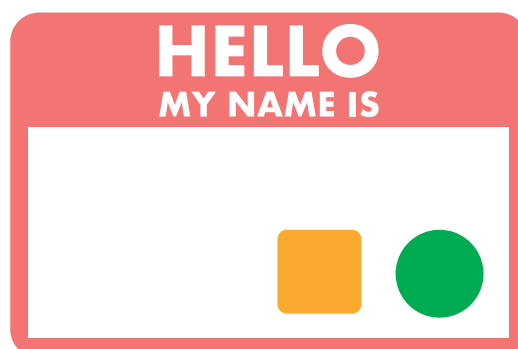
➡ Putting a yellow dot-sticker on your name tag indicates that you are currently open for interactions but wish to keep the conversation shorter /do not wish to engage in an in-depth conversation.



➡ Putting a red dot-sticker on your name tag indicates that you are currently not open for interactions/conversation and wish to have some personal space.



➡ You could implement more color and/or shape options for stickers, that could symbolize each participant's preferred method of communication. As for example: Putting a blue square sticker to your name tag indicates that you wish to use speech for communication, whilst putting an orange square sticker on your name tag indicates that you wish to use non-verbal/alternative methods for communication.



The third collection of guidelines introduced in the social accessibility's segment of the guidelines package, involves social accessibility aspects in relation to an operative environment's:

3. Perception/attitude of non-autistic people towards autistic people in social situations.

Accessibility aspects that shall be taken into consideration within an operative environment's space in regards of the perception/attitude of non-autistic people towards autistic people in social situations:



- Be open to change your preconceptions about Autism and autistic people. Share information about Autism (Autismiliitto 2022).

- ➔ Be eager to learn about Autism and autistic people's needs from qualified sources. This is important, as oftentimes people may not acquire accurate information about autism or methods that support autistic people needs.



- ➔ Do not express or assume stereotypical expectations from autistic people. For example, do not compare autistic participants with stereotypical characteristics of autistic characters or people that are represented on famous shows or the media. Generalizing is harmful and offensive, as every autistic person is different.



- ➔ Share qualified information about Autism and autistic people within the operative environment. This is a vital step to promote accessibility towards autistic participants. This way, all the participants can contribute into supporting autistic people.



- Ask members of your specific participant group to describe their needs, desires, and preferences in as much detail as is practicable. Participants' requirements may vary greatly because Autism can appear in such a variety of ways among different people. (Gatfield et al. 2018, 7).

- Don't call attention to or criticize behaviors you may find odd. autistic people may express themselves or cope under stress by fidgeting, speaking too loudly or too softly, asking several questions, or zoning out. Even if it may not be a behavior you are accustomed to, calling attention to it might alienate the individual and make them feel self-conscious. (Hopkins 2022)



- Be accepting towards differences. (Autismiliitto 2022) Some people, including some autistic people, may behave differently in certain social situations, compared to what you might be used to. Do not call attention to this or let this affect your perception or attitude towards people that behave differently than what you are used to.

- ➔ For example, some autistic people may not comprehend social cues the same way than non-autistic people do. This can sometimes contribute to autistic people expressing topics in a way that non-autistic people find unusual, inappropriate or even rude. In these cases, or cases similar to this, persist to be understanding towards the autistic person.

- ➔ For example, if an autistic person says something that appears rude to you, address the situation in a calm way and explain why you personally perceived the act as rude. Do not make autistic people feel guilty for the way they express themselves by automatically assuming their intentions based on your own perception and/or based on social cues/protocols.

- If someone has to leave early, don't take it personally; recognizing one's limit is a good approach for people to manage their sensory requirement. (Hopkins 2022) Do not call attention to someone leaving early and do not require the person leaving to give an explanation as to why they are leaving.

- Do not call attention to someone`s personal hygiene, such as possible odors or other indicators that you may associate with a person`s less frequent hygiene routines. Maintaining personal hygiene might be challenging for some autistic people.



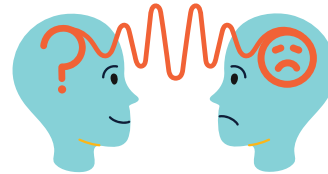
- ➔ Some autistic people may not grasp the value of personal cleanliness or the social repercussions that may occur due to less frequent hygiene routines. Additionally, there may be sensory concerns in relation to hygiene routines to take into account for some autistic people. (Autism anglia, 2022)

- ➔ Sensory concerns related to hygiene routines might be involve factors such as experiencing discomfort or other distressing feelings from water, smells like soap and/or other possible sensory experiences that may be triggering to some autistic people (Autism anglia, 2022).

- ➔ It might be as simple as them needing to be reminded to take a shower, brush their teeth, wash their clothing or other. (Autism anglia, 2022)

- ➔ If you feel that addressing this with the person in question is necessary, keep in mind to do it respectfully and through a private conversation, as it may be a sensitive issue to some.

• Consider familiarizing yourself with the theory of the “double empathy problem” as it may function as a tool for ensuring a more inclusive approach towards individuals on the Autism spectrum.



- ➔ The "double empathy problem" theory:

- ➔ Contends that communication problems between autistic and non-autistic persons are a result of both sides having trouble understanding one another opposed to just autistic people`s. (Zamzow 2021)

- ➔ Emphasizes to keep in mind seeing both sides of social interactions (non-autistic and autistic people), as opposed to concentrating primarily on the ways autistic persons deviate from the norm. (Zamzow 2021)

- ➔ Casts doubt on prevailing theories of Autism attributing to failed social encounters due to the social difficulties of autistic persons; In assuming that autistic persons just have a different style of communicating rather than a less effective one, it also reevaluates the concepts of neurodiversity. (Zamzow 2021)

- ➔ The “double empathy problem” theory emphasizes the significance of educational programs that teach non-autistic persons how to engage appropriately with autistic people. (Zamzow 2021)

Social Accessibility Protocol Checklist:



- What to ask/provide to participants:

What to ask and provide to participants in regards of ensuring social accessibility within the operative environment in question:

A) Before an activity/event

- Ask participants to describe their needs, desires, and preferences in as much detail as is practicable. Participants' requirements may vary greatly because Autism can appear in such a variety of ways among different people (Gatfield et al. 2018).

1) Providing information to participants in regards of the communication methods of the operative environment:

- Inform the operative environment`s staff and volunteers to be aware and ready to utilize alternative/non-verbal methods of communication. This implies, that if a participant uses other ways of communication afar from speech, they should be ready to offer alternative tools and methods to communicate. Some examples of low-threshold preparations for alternative communication methods:

- ➡ Use an electronic device`s notes feature or even a messenger platform such as WhatsApp and offer to communicate by typing.

- ➡ Use paper and pen to communicate through writing or drawing.

- ➡ Download an AAC app on your electronic device before the activity/event and offer that as a method for communication.

- Ask for each participant`s preferred method of communication and let them know what alternative methods of communication are currently available at the operative environment (for example, mention what communication tools are available- these can include even low-threshold tools such as paper and pens or other).

- ➡ Mention that the staff and volunteers of the operative environment are prepared to communicate in alternative methods (you can mention if for example a staff member knows sign language or if you offer other alternatives such as communicating via texting in the phone`s notes feature, writing in paper or using an AAC app or other).

- ➡ Mention that you are open to implement a new tool/communication method of their preference, if that is possible.

- Ask for the participants` contact preferences, such as the preferred methods of information transmission and receipt. (For example, ask does the participant wish to rather be contacted by message, email or call).

2) Providing information to participants in regards of the engagement and participation methods of the operative environment:

- Strive to construct activities that allow participants to contribute in various ways (afar from verbal contribution).
- Abstain from implementing any obligatory procedures that require interaction. For example, abstain from implementing a guided introduction round. Instead, offer alternative group activities that allow engagement in between participants, such as board games.
- Inform participants what kind of activities will take place at the operative environment.
- Ask the participant what kind of activities would feel comfortable for them and how can the current available activities be transformed to be more comfortable (if possible).
- Implement engagement guidelines (Gatfield et al. 2018,19, 20). Ensure that at least the staff and volunteers of the operative environment are familiarized with these. If possible, provide the engagement guidelines to the participants before their attendance.

3) Providing information to participants in regards of the Perception/attitude of non-autistic people towards autistic people in social situations:

- Prepare the staff and volunteers of the operative environment to be aware of social accessibility factors and measures in diverse situations so they can support and understand autistic participants more. Suggest them to familiarize themselves with the social accessibility factors of this booklet.

- What to ask and provide to participants in regards of ensuring social accessibility within the operative environment in question:

B) During and event/activity:

- During interactions, always use the name of the person you are referring to at the beginning of your sentence. This helps clarify who are you talking to. (National autistic Society 2020)
- Avoid open-ended questions and be specific. For example, ask “Did you enjoy your lunch?” and “Did you enjoy maths?” rather than “How was your day?” (National autistic Society 2020).
- Keep questions short. Ask only the most necessary questions (National autistic Society 2020).
- Structure your question and be specific. For example, you could offer options or choices (National autistic Society 2020).
- Avoid using irony, sarcasm, figurative language, rhetorical questions, idioms or exaggeration as some autistic people can take these literally. If you do use these, explain what you have said and be clear about what you really mean to say. (National autistic Society 2020)
- Refrain from initially pressuring autistic persons to engage. (Hopkins 2022)
- Give some extra time for rest breaks in social situations or activities, as so some people may need extra rest breaks in social situations. This way, everyone gets a chance to participate. (Autismiliitto 2022)
- Consider other people`s need for personal space (Autismiliitto 2022). If you are unsure whether you are invading someone`s personal space, you can check with the other person by asking them: “Do you feel comfortable in this situation or do you need more personal space?”
- Make sure participants are aware that it is okay for them to leave the room, utilize sensory tools, relax in the “quiet room” or other. (Gatfield et al. 2018,21, 22, 23)

- If an activity is too confusing or triggering in any way to a person, you can ask the person in question, how you can help them feel more comfortable during the participation.
- If an activity is too distressing or triggering in any way to a person, you can ask the person in question and/or seek for solutions together, how to make the activity more comfortable so they can participate.
- Do not oblige anyone to participate in any activity or social situation.
 - ➡ Do not make people feel guilty or not included, for choosing to not participate in the activity in question.
 - ➡ Do not use encouraging words or positive affirmations such as: “Come on, join us, it is going to be fun!”, as these can be pressuring and/or even anxiety provoking towards someone who feels that they do not wish to participate in the activity in question. Choose to say “Anyone who wants to join this activity, is free to do so”.
- Share qualified information about Autism and autistic people within the operative environment. You can for example, hold an informative presentation, discussion or share informative materials/flyers.
- Don't call attention to or criticize behaviors you may find odd.
- If an autistic person says something that appears rude to you, address the situation in a calm way and explain why you personally perceived the act as rude. Do not make autistic people feel guilty for the way they express themselves by automatically assuming their intentions based on your own perception and/or based on social cues/protocols.
- If someone has to leave early, don't take it personally; recognizing one's limit is a good approach for people to manage their sensory requirement. (Hopkins 2022) Do not call attention to someone leaving early and do not require the person leaving to give an explanation as to why they are leaving.
- Do not call attention to someone`s personal hygiene, such as possible odors or other indicators that you may associate with a person`s less frequent hygiene routines.

The third segment of the guidelines package will present guidelines related to the category of:

• Cognitive accessibility:



Cognitive accessibility is a concept that describes inclusive procedures that eliminate barriers for people whose disabilities influence how they process information, such as for people on the autism spectrum.

The way that autistic people process information can affect multiple sectors within their everyday lives, such as attaining information from websites, lectures, visual media (movies, videos, presentations and other) as well as transcripts (books, leaflets and other). It can also affect autistic people's everyday interactions, as for example processing information within a conversation.

Cognitive accessibility for individuals on the Autism spectrum can be promoted with the following guidelines:

The aspects that shall be taken into consideration in light of ensuring the cognitive accessibility of an operative environment includes:

1. Methods for providing information through websites, social media and printed media.
2. Methods for providing information through communication.

The first collection of guidelines introduced in the cognitive accessibility's segment of the guidelines package, involves accessibility aspects in relation to an operative environment's:

1. Methods for providing information through websites, social media and printed media.

Accessibility aspects that shall be taken into consideration in regards providing information through an operative environment's websites, social media and printed media:

- Whether creating websites, social media posts or printed media, create written content that presents and provides information in accessible way.



➔ For example, the starting point of the directions for the journey, can be the train/bus station that is closest to the event/activity in question, or another landmark that is most widely known.

➔ If the event/activity takes place inside a building with multiple rooms and/or floors, include descriptive directions (and pictures/videos) for the way through the building as well.



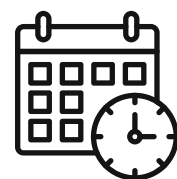
➔ Include contact numbers in the description that can be contacted if the participants need verbal guidance for directions throughout their journey towards the event/activity.

- Provide information about the operative environment`s space. Include pictures of the rooms, the entryway, and, if applicable, the front desk should be included. This will help people prepare by letting them know what to expect. (Gatfield et al. 2018,19).



➔ For example, people could decide to bring a cap if they are aware in advance that there would be fluorescent lights. (Gatfield et al. 2018,19).

- Provide a detailed and visually clear timetable of all the activities and events of the operative environment. Provide as much details as possible, for each activity and event, such as its timings, timetables, and transitions between activities. (Gatfield et al. 2018,19, 20).



➔ Include expectations for involvement in each event/activity of the operative environment. (Gatfield et al. 2018,19, 20).

➔ Mention if the participants are expected to talk or participate in other certain procedures throughout the activity. For example, mention if you have an introduction round.

- Provide information on proactive supporting strategies within the operative environment. Some autistic persons may downplay their discomfort while in a group situation. By explaining the supporting practices, you may let your participants know what to expect, which promotes more open communication about needs and the identification of overlooked factors/guidelines. (Gatfield et al. 2018,19).

- Provide information about the support people (staff and volunteers) of the operative environment. Include the support people`s pictures. (Gatfield et al. 2018,19, 20).



- ➔ Prosopagnosia, sometimes known as "facial blindness," affects autistic persons significantly more frequently than the general population, making it possible for them to have trouble recalling people's appearances from one instant to the next. (Gatfield et al. 2018,19, 20).

- ➔ Name badges worn consistently and current images of the presenting team in the information pack can both be helpful. (Gatfield et al. 2018,19, 20).



- Include contact numbers of the staff of the operative environment. There should be a phone number or numbers for the organizers or support staff in case something goes wrong, such having trouble finding the place or needing counseling during the event. (Gatfield et al. 2018,19, 20)



- Write in specific detail. Don't use abstract terminology. (Josche 2010, 14) Writing ambiguously or in an abstract manner can be confusing to some autistic people. Do not assume the reader is familiar with subject matter of the written content, explain terms and concepts that are being introduced in the text.

- Apply logic. There should be a single, logical thread running through the entire text. (Josche 2010, 14) Create transparent and logical layouts for both web- and printed media. Avoid overloaded layouts.

- ➔ For example, construct the written content in separate segments, dividing each segment in a specific category. This makes broader concepts and areas of information easier to understand.

- ➔ When it comes to websites; divide the website in several segments/categories that are illustrated clearly, so that the user can easily access the information they are seeking.

- ➔ Avoid putting too much text in one single page.

- Use clear common language, simple language or communication supported by images in interactions, on websites and services. (Autismiliitto 2022)

- ➔ Avoid using difficult words, but speak in an adult and respectful manner. (Josche 2010, 14) For example, avoid using academic language. Use simple, everyday language when possible.

- Avoid sayings, jargon, metaphors and irony in communication. (Autismiliitto 2022) Some readers might not understand such terminology.

- Avoid high contrasting colors. Use neutral colors. Vibrant colors and high contrast in between colors can be overstimulating to some autistic people, which can make the content of the text more challenging for them to understand.



- Use monochromatic and simple backgrounds. Avoid overloaded or too vibrant backgrounds. For example, avoid using backgrounds with patterns or a background that is a photograph or illustration. Overloaded/vibrant backgrounds can be overstimulating to some autistic people, which can make the content of the text more challenging for them to understand.



- Use illustrations or pictures that support the text`s meaning. (Josche 2010, 16) Pictures and illustrations that are complementary to the text`s content, can help the text`s meaning to get across more easily to the reader.

- ➔ Avoid using pictures and illustrations that are not directly correlated with the text`s content, as they may confuse some autistic people.

- ➔ Whenever using a picture or an illustration afar from (complementary icons), insert a descriptive caption for it (above or below it), of which explains what is presented in the picture/illustration as well as what purpose does the illustration or picture serve (for example, you can explain that the illustration in question functions as a tool to present the text`s meaning in a more visual manner).



- ➔ Avoid using pictures or illustrations that are too detailed or abstract. These might be confusing to some autistic people.

- Set concrete examples. (Schürmann 2009, 10) This can help clarify concepts, instructions and questions. Broad concepts and instructions as well as extensive questions can be confusing to some autistic people.

- ➡ When explaining concepts or giving instructions, give tangible examples or scenarios from real-life.

- ➡ When asking questions, be specific and avoid open-ended questions. Sometimes giving possible options for answers can be helpful too.

- Use the same word to describe the same concept throughout the document. (Schürmann 2009, 10) Avoid using multiple synonyms when referring to the same concepts throughout a text, as it may be confusing to some autistic people.

- Collect all information of the same topic together. (Schürmann 2009, 11) Creating categories for topics and dividing them into segments can be helpful for some autistic people in regards of understanding a broad concept or the overall text`s meaning.

- ➡ Make sure that the segments are divided in a clear manner. For example, use headings for each introduced segment.

- Use a readable, clear font at all times. (Schürmann 2009, 13)

- ➡ Avoid using serif fonts. Serif fonts can be more challenging to read because the shape of the letters is not as clear. (Schürmann 2009, 13)



- ➡ Avoid using writing that is greatly close to each other as well as using italics or special writing design. (Schürmann 2009, 13)

- ➡ Write in large font and do not capitalize entire words. It's simpler to read letters in lower case. (Schürmann 2009, 14)



- ➡ Try to stick to just one style of writing. (Schürmann 2009, 14)

- ➡ Avoid using colored letters when you can. Some readers have trouble telling one color from another. Some colors don't contrast well with some backgrounds. (Schürmann 2009, 15)

- ➡ Use sufficient contrasts between background and text. (Autismiliitto 2022)

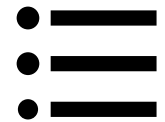
- Avoid using footnotes. Footnote is explaining something at the bottom of the page rather than in the text. (Schürmann 2009, 15)

- Use concise and understandable headings. Headings are used to describe what the text below is about. (Schürmann 2009, 16)

- When providing information or instructions, include summaries with all the principal points that the reader should keep in mind (especially in lengthier texts). Some autistic people may find it challenging to process lengthy texts; summarizing the text into key points can be helpful.

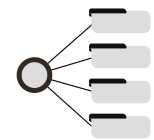


- List topics using bullet points. It is difficult to read a list of words that are separated by commas. Columns are not recommended. (Schürmann 2009, 17) Large blocks of text and lengthy sentences can be challenging for autistic people. Bullet points can help autistic people process each piece of information.



- Develop transcripts (written content in any form/platform), in an ease of reading and visual appeal of the text: summarizing the message, using subheadings, paragraph divisions and lists. (Autismiliitto 2022)

- Support the content in question through different senses, for example with text, infographic or image, video, sound. (Autismiliitto 2022)



- Number the pages of the document when possible. (Schürmann 2009, 18)

- Explain terminologies and concepts that may not be familiar to readers in all the appropriate details. Do not assume the readers` familiarity with the subject matter of the text in question.

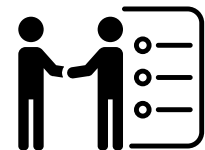
- Use inclusive language. This is one way to help everyone feel welcome and safe. Inclusive language demonstrates respect for human differences, cultures, and experiences.

➡ People with disabilities shall be referred to “a person with disability”, opposed to “disabled person” or “handicapped person”. Negative connotations shall be avoided as well, some of which include “stricken” or “victim”.

- ➔ People with disabilities shall be referred to “a person with disability”, opposed to “disabled person” or “handicapped person”. Negative connotations shall be avoided as well, some of which include “stricken” or “victim”.
- ➔ Some autistic people prefer to be referred to as “autistic” and others prefer to be referred as “on the autism spectrum”. There is not one term favored by all people on the autism spectrum. In real-life you can ask which term is an individual’s preference to be referred as, but in written text you can strive for using both since you cannot know every reader’s preference.
- ➔ Do not use the word “normal” to describe non-autistic people (or people without disabilities).

• When constructing and presenting the guidelines of the operative environment, give concrete examples in which each guideline can be applicable to. Emphasize that these are just a few examples and do not include all of the possible scenarios.

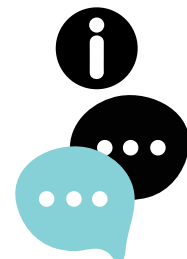
- ➔ Clarify that if someone is unsure whether an action is against the operative environment’s guidelines, the participants can consult this with the staff and/or volunteers of the operative environment in question.



The second collection of guidelines introduced in the cognitive accessibility’s segment of the guidelines package, involves accessibility aspects in relation to an operative environment’s:

2. Methods for providing information through communication.

Accessibility aspects that shall be taken into consideration in regards of providing information through communication:



- Make sure the participant(s) is/are paying attention before you ask a question or give an instruction. The signs that someone is paying attention will be different for different people. (National autistic Society 2020)

- ➔ When referring to a specific person you can say their name to ensure that you have their attention.

- Keep in mind that some autistic people can find it challenging to filter out the less important information. If there is too much information, it can lead to 'overload', where no further information can be processed by them. (National autistic Society 2020)

To prevent this:

- ➔ Avoid providing too much information all at once.

- ➔ Avoid asking multiple questions all at once.

- ➔ Talk slowly. (National autistic Society 2020)

- ➔ Use specific key words, repeat and emphasize them. (National autistic Society 2020)

- ➔ Pause between words and phrases to give the person(s) time to process what you've said, and to give them a chance to think of a response. (National autistic Society 2020)

- ➔ Use visual supports (for example symbols, timetables, pictures) if appropriate. (National autistic Society 2020)

- ➔ Be aware of the environment (for example, if it is noisy or crowded) that you are in. Sensory differences may be affecting how much someone can process. (National autistic Society 2020) If you suspect the environment may be triggering to the participant(s) in some way, suggest them to move with you to a different room/area, in order to help them process the information more efficiently.



- Use clear common language or simple language. (Autismiliitto 2022)
 - ➔ Avoid using difficult words, but speak in an adult and respectful manner. (Josche 2010, 14) For example, avoid using academic language. Use simple, everyday language when possible.
- Avoid sayings, jargon, metaphors and irony in communication. (Autismiliitto 2022) Some autistic people might not understand such terminology.
- When providing information or instructions, provide details and concrete examples applicable to the situation. This can help clarify concepts, instructions and questions. Broad concepts and instructions as well as extensive questions can be confusing to some autistic people.
- Avoid sayings, jargon, metaphors and irony in communication. (Autismiliitto 2022) Some autistic people might not understand such terminology.
- When providing information or instructions, provide details and concrete examples applicable to the situation. This can help clarify concepts, instructions and questions. Broad concepts and instructions as well as extensive questions can be confusing to some autistic people.
 - ➔ When explaining concepts or giving instructions, give tangible examples or scenarios from real-life.
 - ➔ When asking questions, be specific and avoid open-ended questions. Sometimes giving possible options for answers can be helpful too.
- Give instructions and information both verbally and in a transcript form (written/printed). Verbal instructions can be confusing and hard to follow for some autistic people. If possible, include complementary illustrations that help with the text`s comprehension.



Cognitive Accessibility Protocol Checklist:



What to ask/provide to participants:

What to ask and provide to participants in regards of ensuring cognitive accessibility within the operative environment in question:

A) Before an activity/event

- Whether creating websites, social media posts or printed media, create written content that presents and provides information in accessible way (make sure to check the guidelines presented in the cognitive accessibility`s first section).
- When informing about the location of an operative environment, event or activity, include written directions as well as pictures and/or videos of different stages of the journey towards it.
- Provide information about the operative environment`s space. Include pictures of the rooms, the entryway, and, if applicable, the front desk should be included. This will help people prepare by letting them know what to expect. (Gatfield et al. 2018,19).
- Provide a detailed and visually clear timetable of all the activities and events of the operative environment. Provide as much details as possible, for each activity and event, such as its timings, timetables, and transitions between activities. (Gatfield et al. 2018,19, 20).
 - ➡ Include expectations for involvement in each event/activity of the operative environment. (Gatfield et al. 2018,19, 20).
 - ➡ Mention if the participants are expected to talk or participate in other certain procedures throughout the activity. For example, mention if you have an introduction round.
- Provide information on proactive supporting strategies within the operative environment [...]. (Gatfield et al. 2018,19).
- Provide information about the support people (staff and volunteers) of the operative environment. Include the support people`s pictures. (Gatfield et al. 2018,19, 20).

- Include contact numbers of the staff of the operative environment. There should be a phone number or numbers for the organizers or support staff in case something goes wrong, such as having trouble finding the place or needing counseling during the event. (Gatfield et al. 2018,19, 20)
- When constructing and presenting the guidelines of the operative environment, give concrete examples in which each guideline can be applicable to. Emphasize that these are just a few examples and do not include all of the possible scenarios.

What to ask and provide to participants in regards of ensuring **cognitive accessibility** within the operative environment in question:

B) **During and event/activity:**

- Make sure the participant(s) is/are paying attention before you ask a question or give an instruction. The signs that someone is paying attention will be different for different people. (National autistic Society 2020)
 - ➔ When referring to a specific person you can say their name to ensure that you have their attention.
- Wear name badges.
- When giving instructions or providing information:
 - ➔ Avoid providing too much information all at once.
 - ➔ Avoid asking multiple questions all at once.
 - ➔ Talk slowly. (National autistic Society 2020)
 - ➔ Use specific key words, repeat and emphasize them. (National autistic Society 2020)
 - ➔ Pause between words and phrases to give the person(s) time to process what you've said, and to give them a chance to think of a response. (National autistic Society 2020)
 - ➔ Use visual supports (for example symbols, timetables, pictures) if appropriate. (National autistic Society 2020)

- ➡ Be aware of the environment (for example, if it is noisy or crowded) that you are in. Sensory differences may be affecting how much someone can process. (National autistic Society 2020) If you suspect the environment may be triggering to the participant(s) in some way, suggest them to move with you to a different room/area, in order to help them process the information more efficiently.

- Use clear common language or simple language. (Autismiliitto 2022)

- Avoid sayings, jargon, metaphors and irony in communication. (Autismiliitto 2022) Some autistic people might not understand such terminology.

- When providing information or instructions, provide details and concrete examples applicable to the situation. This can help clarify concepts, instructions and questions. Broad concepts and instructions as well as extensive questions can be confusing to some autistic people.
 - ➡ When explaining concepts or giving instructions, give tangible examples or scenarios from real-life.

 - ➡ When asking questions, be specific and avoid open-ended questions. Sometimes giving possible options for answers can be helpful too.

- Give instructions and information both verbally and in a transcript form (written/printed). Verbal instructions can be confusing and hard to follow for some autistic people. If possible, include complementary illustrations that help with the text`s comprehension.

The last segment of the guidelines package will present guidelines related to the category of:

- **Mental accessibility**



The mental accessibility of an autistic person involves a broader term in which all of the areas of accessibility (including physical, social and cognitive) play a role. After all of the aspects related to these areas have been taken into consideration within an operative environment, we can ensure mental accessibility for autistic people.

Mental accessibility can also refer to ideals that shall be endorsed when perceiving autistic individuals, or ideals that shall be endorsed when implementing any sort of guideline directed for people on the autism spectrum.

- Mental accessibility for individuals on the Autism spectrum can be promoted with the following guidelines:

Accessibility aspects that shall be taken into consideration within an operative environment`s space in regards of promoting mental accessibility for autistic individuals:

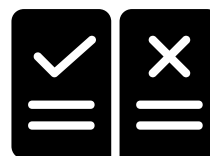
- Ensure that the staff members of the operative environment are familiarized with this booklet`s content and are well-acquainted with the accessibility guidelines directed for autistic people. This way they can be more supporting and understanding towards autistic participants.

- ➔ Ensure that staff members receive instructions on how to manage unexpected demands or behaviors in a compassionate and professional manner. (Gatfield et al.2018, 18)



- Encourage all the participants of the operative environment to familiarize themselves with this booklet`s content and to be aware of the accessibility guidelines directed for autistic people. This way everyone can be more supporting and understanding towards autistic participants.

- ➔ Implement "Rules of engagement" within the operative environment. These have to include guidelines for the use of fragrances, physical touch, eye contact, and other supportive techniques. (Gatfield et al. 2018,21, 22, 23).



- Consider that not all disabilities are visible. Do not conclude someone is neuro-typical based on your own assumptions and interpretations.

- ➔ Strive for implementing accessible methods in all circumstances, even if you are unsure whether someone is autistic or not.

- ➔ Consider that some autistic people may not be comfortable coming out as autistic.

- Abstain from comparing people on the Autism spectrum with stereotypical perceptions of autistic people.

- ➔ For example, keep in mind:

- A) Not all autistic people misunderstand sarcasm.

- B) Not all autistic people are non-verbal.

- C) Not all autistic people have a special interest in which they excel in.

- ➔ Note that these are just a few of the examples that represent stereotypical perceptions around autistic people. Basing your view on autistic people on any stereotypical perception around autistic people is offensive and harmful.

- Spread accurate information around Autism. This can increase accessibility and inclusivity for autistic people, as all participants within an operative environment, event or activity will be more aware in regards of how to support and perceive people on the Autism spectrum.

For example:

- ➔ You can have leaflets or booklets that spread information and awareness about autism exposed in the area of your operative environment (such as this booklet).

- ➔ You can utilize accurate information about autism by seeking information from qualified sources (a few of which will be mentioned in this booklet's page 74) and constructing informative presentations or discussions about it within your operative environment.

- Take physical, social, mental and cognitive barriers seriously and make an active effort to remove them. (Autismiliitto 2022)

➡ Consider the guidelines presented in this booklet and make an active effort to implement them in your operative environment.

- Be aware that ableism towards autistic people may occur during the activity or event of the operative environment. If you recognize ableism, proceed to address the situation in a calm but firm way, whilst explaining why the act/situation was inaccessible, harmful and/or offensive.



➡ Be cautious to address the situation in a respectful manner; do not patronize people on the autism spectrum (for example, do not address the situation in a way that makes autistic people feel/appear helpless).

➡ If possible, ask people on the autism spectrum how they personally feel about the situation in question and if/how do they want to address it.

➡ Do not talk on behalf of people on the autism spectrum, but rather support them in this process.

- Expect diversity among people on the autism spectrum. Keep in mind that every autistic person is different and therefore everyone on the autism spectrum may have differentiating needs. For example, keep in mind:



A) Some autistic people may have different sensory sensitivities in between them (for example, sensitivity to light, sensitivity to sounds and/or other).

B) Some autistic people may have different ways to communicate (verbal/non-verbal, utilizing writing for communication, utilizing picture cards for communication or other forms of communication)

Note that these are just a few examples of differentiating needs of autistic people. There are many more potential needs of autistic people that have been addressed more in depth throughout the guidelines package of this booklet.

- Keep in mind that every person on the Autism spectrum has differentiating needs, every autistic person may have different ways to respond to them, as well as different methods to support these needs.

For example, keep in mind:

A) Some autistic people may use different tools to stim (as for instance, fidget toys), whilst others use other methods for stimming (repetitive movements).

B) Some autistic people may need to exit to a quieter and less crowded space when they feel socially overwhelmed, whilst others may need to leave the event/activity/space in total.

➡ Note that these are just a few examples of differentiating responds of autistic people to their needs. There are many more potential responds of autistic people, to differentiating needs, that have been addressed more in depth throughout the guidelines package of this booklet.

- Offer participants a "sensory map" in advance, as this can help them be ready for any bright, noisy, or smelly stimuli and carry any necessary aids. Even while not all occasions may be made totally sensory-friendly for people with Autism, it is frequently possible to improve their experience. (Hopkinson 2022)

- Ensure that authorized support personnel with psychological first aid training are contactable by participants and that their contact information is available in case of emergency both in person and by other means (such as text or email). (Gatfield et al. 2018, 18)

- Encourage participants to prepare their support network in advance of any potentially triggering event/s/topics. (Gatfield et al. 2018, 18) In this case, the support network can refer to the operative environment`s staff members, volunteers and/or friends.

➡ This involves a vital protocol when implementing any sort of guideline as every individual is different and therefore may have differentiating triggering topics and/or events.

➡ By asking participants beforehand what are the potential triggering event/topics for them, you can implement more customized strategies and be more supportive towards the participants.

- Provide participants with a designated support person or individuals who are accessible to them in person, over the phone, or via text message to assist with tasks like locating the location of the event/space. (Gatfield et al.2018, 18)

➔ A designated support person can be a staff member or volunteer within your operative environment, that is eligible to provide personal guidance when a participant needs it.



➔ For example, this can refer to a staff member/volunteer that is available for private conversations with a participant, if a participant feels to discuss about certain matters that is in their mind with someone they feel comfortable with.

- If anything is going to change, let those who will be impacted know as soon as possible in a calm and straightforward manner so that the change may be accommodated. Changes in timetables and routines can be anxiety provoking to some autistic people.

- Clarify to the participants to always ask for permission to touch. Many people are uncomfortable with being touched and/or hugged therefore permission to touch should be sought. (Gatfield et al. 2018,21, 22, 23).

- Be aware of how you talk about food and diets.

➔ Food and diets are not exclusively a triggering topic for (some) autistic people. However, some autistic people have eating disorder(s) and it is worth keeping in mind when promoting accessibility towards people on the autism spectrum. When talking about food avoid the following:

➔ Talking/mentioning (about) calories or weight.

➔ Talking/mentioning (about) diets.

➔ Asking someone about their eating habits or what they have eaten that day.

➔ Commenting on what someone`s eating in a judgemental way, as for example saying “That is really unhealthy”.



Note that there might be other triggering matters related to food and that the mentioned matters above are just a few of the examples to avoid mentioning.

- Ask the participants and autistic friends how they're doing. It could be more comfortable for them if you ask them what they need rather than them just bringing it up. (Hopkins 2022)

- Construct and provide a questionnaire for your participants that gathers their thoughts and feelings in regards of the operative environment`s physical and immaterial accessibility.

The questionnaire can include:

- ➡ Questions for each accessibility category (physical accessibility, social accessibility, cognitive accessibility and mental accessibility) to ensure that every participant`s needs are covered.
- ➡ A space where a participant can fill in any sort of personal suggestions or feedback about the operative environment.

- Keep in mind that the guidelines package of this booklet only acts as a framework for accessibility and inclusivity and cannot respond to everyone`s individual needs.

- ➡ The best way to support the individual needs of an autistic person, is to ask them what are their personal needs and seek for appropriate solutions accordingly.

Mental Accessibility Protocol Checklist:



- What to ask/provide to participants:

- What to ask and provide to participants in regards of ensuring mental accessibility for autistic people within the operative environment in question:

A) Before an activity/event

- Ensure that the staff members of the operative environment are familiarized with this booklet`s content and are well-acquainted with the accessibility guidelines directed for autistic people. This way they can be more supporting and understanding towards autistic participants.

- Encourage all the participants of the operative environment to familiarize themselves with this booklet`s content and to be aware of the accessibility guidelines directed for autistic people. This way everyone can be more supporting and understanding towards autistic participants.
- Consider the guidelines presented in this booklet and make an active effort to implement them in your operative environment.
- Offer participants a "sensory map" in advance, as this can help them be ready for any bright, noisy, or smelly stimuli and carry any necessary aids. Even while not all occasions may be made totally sensory-friendly for people with Autism, it is frequently possible to improve their experience. (Hopkinson 2022)
- Ensure that authorized support personnel with psychological first aid training are contactable by participants and that their contact information is available in case of emergency both in person and by other means (such as text or email). (Gatfield et al. 2018, 18)
- Encourage participants to prepare their support network in advance of any potentially triggering event/s/topics. (Gatfield et al. 2018, 18) In this case, the support network can refer to the operative environment`s staff members, volunteers and/or friends.
- Provide participants with a designated support person or individuals who are accessible to them in person, over the phone, or via text message to assist with tasks like locating the location of the event/space. (Gatfield et al. 2018, 18)
- Insert leaflets or booklets that spread information and awareness about autism exposed in the area of your operative environment (such as this booklet).

B) During an activity/event:

- Consider that not all disabilities are visible. Do not conclude someone is neuro-typical based on your own assumptions and interpretations.
 - ➡ Strive for implementing accessible methods in all circumstances, even if you are unsure whether someone is autistic or not.
 - ➡ Consider that some autistic people may not be comfortable coming out as autistic.
- Abstain from comparing people on the Autism spectrum with stereotypical perceptions of autistic people.
- Spread accurate information around Autism.
- Expect diversity among people on the autism spectrum. Keep in mind that every autistic person is different and therefore everyone on the autism spectrum may have differentiating needs.
- Keep in mind that every person on the Autism spectrum has differentiating needs, every autistic person may have different ways to respond to them, as well as different methods to support these needs.
- If anything is going to change, let those who will be impacted know as soon as possible in a calm and straightforward manner so that the change may be accommodated.
- Clarify to the participants to always ask for permission to touch. Many people are uncomfortable with being touched and/or hugged therefore permission to touch should be sought. (Gatfield, et al. 2018, 21, 22, 23).
- Be aware of how you talk about food and diets.
 - ➡ Food and diets are not exclusively a triggering topic for (some) autistic people. However, some autistic people have eating disorder(s) and it is worth keeping in mind when promoting accessibility towards people on the autism spectrum.
- Ask the participants and autistic friends how they're doing. It could be more comfortable for them if you ask them what they need rather than them just bringing it up. (Hopkins 2022)

- Note that throughout this booklet, I refer to people on the autism spectrum as both “people/person on the autism spectrum” and “autistic people/person”. I granted that this is optimal, as every autistic person has their own preference as to what to be referred as and thus, concluded to use the two most popular phrases favored by the Autism community. As Gatfield, Hall, Isaacs, and Mahony (2018, 25) affirm, there is no one phrase that is favored by all members of the autistic/Autism community when referring to Autism. However, it is good to keep in mind that when it comes to individual interactions with autistic people, it is usually best to ask personal preferences in reference to Autism.

Valuable sources and contacts.



Within this segment of the booklet, some valuable sources that spread information about autism as well as helpful contact information will be presented.

- Autismiliitto:

Autismiliitto is a national expert and non-governmental organization representing the autism spectrum community.

- Autismiliitto:

- ➡ Spreads autism information.
- ➡ influences decision-making.
- ➡ supports their member associations.
- ➡ organizes peer expert and experience expert activities.
- ➡ gives advice and guidance, trains and consults.
- ➡ Implements projects related to autism. (Autismiliitto.fi, no date)

- Contact information:

- ➡ [Autismiliitto.fi](https://autismiliitto.fi)
- ➡ info@autismiliitto.fi

- ASY (Suomen Autismikirjon Yhdistys):

ASY is a Finnish Autism Spectrum Association.

ASY:

- ➡ ASY`s aspiration is to influence things that are important in the lives of young people and adults on the autism spectrum. (ASY.fi)
- ➡ ASY has chosen as partners, projects and researchers who have emphasized the active participation of the autism spectrum in campaigning and research. (ASY.fi)

➡ ASY repeatedly highlights important problems of people on the Autism spectrum through their events, as for example problems related to employment. (ASY.fi)

- Contact information:

➡ ASY.f

➡ info@asy.fi

- Autismisäätiö:

Autismisäätiö is a non-profit, foundation-type company founded by relatives of people on the autism spectrum.

Autismisäätiö:

➡ Offers expert services to people on the autism spectrum all over Finland. (Autismisaatio.fi)

➡ Operates openly and on a non-profit basis for the benefit of an inclusive society. (Autismisaatio.fi)

- Contact information:

➡ Autismisaatio.fi

➡ info@autismisaatio.fi

- National autistic Society:

National autistic Society is a registered charity organization based in the United Kingdom. National autistic Society's web-page offers plenty of qualified information in regards of autism and autistic people.

- National autistic Society:

➡ Provides Support, guidance, and counseling along with advocacy for better rights, resources, and opportunities to help build a society that works for people with autism.

- For more information about autism:

➡ autism.org.uk

- Luna Goc, Youth Services Specialist:

➡ Luna Goc offers counseling, support discussions and service guidance for 13-29-year-olds and young adults in questions related to sexual orientation and gender diversity. If you want to get more information about rainbow activities and peer groups aimed at young people and young adults, contact Luna. (Helsinki Pride ry, no date)

- Contact information:

➡ luna@pride.fi

➡ +358 44 493 2099

Regards

Thank you,

for taking the time to read this booklet.

As this is where the booklet comes to an end, I wish that I have carved a certain impact on you;

I wish that I have motivated and inspired you to reevaluate your actions and perspectives in a demeanor that can possibly welcome in more inclusive and accessible approaches of which you can carry on through all of your endeavors, everywhere you go.

Finally, I wish that you can join me on a mission, where we as a society, expect diversity consistently as well as put our hardwired perspectives, standardized social constructs and restrictive ways of operating, in a retrospect. Let`s replace these, with approaches that are more welcoming and supportive of all kinds of people.

Keep in mind- whether a coordinator of a large or small institute, or even just a participant among others within any activity, you can play a significant role in regards of making someone feel more included!

Warm regards,

Nerissa.

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