

# Autism-friendly practices for gatherings

*These are some of the needs many people with autism may have when attending gatherings, meetings or conventions.*

*Please consider each one when organising a meeting, especially if more than one autistic is there.*

## 1. TOILETS:

Autistics often need to know where the disability toilet is even though they may have no apparent or obvious physical disability. Other toilets are often scary social environments they find difficult to navigate.



## 2. PARKING:

Autistics often need parking pre-organised - whether paid or free. If they are reclusive they don't want to walk long distances in public; if they are bewildered by cities they don't want to immerse themselves in them before an important meeting; and if they are anxious they will want to be on time and prepared - not late and rattled.



## 3. LIGHTING:

Autistics often prefer no overhead fluorescent tubes or sufficient natural lighting to limit its effects. Many autistics see at a higher rate of frames per second because of the absence of typical neurological visual filters and flickering light may disturb them, while bright light can be overwhelming.



## 4. SPACING:

Autistics often need increased personal space. Many autistics are very uncomfortable with close proximities, especially in clammy, perfumed, hostile or drawn-out gatherings.



## 5. RETREAT:

Autistics often need a place to retreat. Many experience anxiety and emotional challenges that are only resolved through finding refuge in a low-sensitivity environment (preferably marked 'Reserved' and 'Quiet please!')



## 6. SEATING:

Autistics often prefer to have nothing between them and the wall behind them, and prefer to sit near the exit. Many experience low-level unconscious discomfort and are more likely to need to quietly exit a room than typical folk.



## 7. ATMOSPHERE:

Autistics prefer that any breakout groups meet in separate rooms. Some find it hard to 'tune out' noise or conversations from other groups due to auditory processing issues and an intense desire to focus.



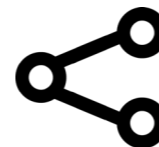
## 8. ACCOMMODATION:

Autistics who need to travel long distance to attend gatherings may prefer to be accommodated the night before or after the meeting. Travel can be very stressful and involve much unsettling processing, which can compromise social and personal safety, as well as their sense of wellbeing.



## 9. RETENTION:

Autistics often prefer not to see group work discarded whether it's large format paper sheets or whiteboards, or even pages on a group note taker's pad. Either destroy the material after they have left, or - better still - offer each individual a copy as contributors to the material.



## 10. TIMELINESS:

Autistics often prefer that schedules are adhered to as planned. Keep them informed if there are any schedule changes and the reasons why changes have been made.



## 11. WELCOMING:

Autistics often prefer a friendly face or someone they know from a picture or website. If requested, ensure a greeter is available at the right time and where necessary have autistic attendees send through a picture of themselves ahead of time.



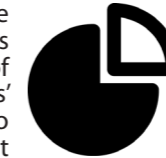
## 12. RELEVANCY:

Autistics sometimes need to be reminded when they are speaking too long or when their contribution is off topic. Use forthright but gentle reminders to let speakers know if they are running over time rather than humour, subterfuge or subtle hints.



## 13. MATERIALS:

Autistics are often word-based or visual learners and prefer written or pictorial materials. Ensure you use appropriate visuals for key concepts and circulate full documentation well ahead of time as autistics are unable to 'parallel process' information during meetings and need to think about things beforehand. Be aware that some autistics may prefer to be 'away with their thoughts' chewing over material during breaks or at lunchtime...alone.



## 14. EMERGENCIES:

Autistics can become confused or anxious during an emergency or venue evacuation. Ensure one staffer is ready to guide all autistics to the correct assembly point.



## 15. VOCALISATION:

Autistics often have difficulty hearing consonantal sounds. Ensure microphones are functioning correctly and not hissing. And make sure those who rely on consonantal lip-reading can see the speakers' faces clearly.



## 16. SOUNDS:

Autistics are often unsettled by repetitive sounds such as clicking, hissing and ticking. Check the environment to see if any devices such as air conditioning units or clocks could cause distress. Be aware that some autistics are very sensitive to sound - even small or faint sounds - when trying to focus.



## 17. ENVIRONMENT:

Autistics often find it challenging to cope with some everyday things like strong perfumes, bright colours, food smells and draughts. These things should be assessed during the planning process. Wherever possible ask participants to tone down perfumes and deodorant, mask bright walls and seat autistics away from the lunch areas and open windows or air-conditioning outlets.



## 18. VENUE MANAGEMENT:

Autistics expect venue staff to have an understanding of autism. This will ensure unusual requests or behaviours are handled sensitively and professionally.



## 19. ASSISTANCE:

Autistics may not always know when to take matters literally, or when it's their turn to speak or to offer an opinion. Don't hesitate to ask them individually "Do you have anything to add?" and to warn them that it is the last opportunity to speak before moving on to the next topic. If participants are expected to complete tasks, such as feedback surveys or expense claim forms, you should be specific and proactively offer assistance.



## 20. REFERENCE:

Use language as preferred by the individual. Most autistic people like to be called autistic while some prefer 'person with autism'. Some may refer to themselves as 'autistics' or 'auties'. Check with individuals of their preference and use appropriate language accordingly.



## 21. IDENTIFICATION:

Autistics who are advocates may prefer that other attendees are aware of their condition. They may choose to mention it when they introduce themselves to others, but also consider offering them identification.



Adapted from information provided by Asperger's Syndrome New Zealand.

INFORMING · EMPOWERING · CONNECTING  
**ALTOGETHER  
AUTISM**  
THROUGH KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERIENCE

0800 273 463  
[www.altogetherautism.org.nz](http://www.altogetherautism.org.nz)