

# World Autism Acceptance Month



## Practitioner Handbook



Autistic  
Young  
Experts



Autism  
Education  
Trust



National  
Autistic  
Society



# Introduction

Our **Autism Re-Explained World Autism Awareness Month Handbook, Launch Assembly, Lessons and Activities Guide** provides you with everything you need to help you initiate a month of acceptance and understanding of autism and neurodiversity with your pupils.

The **Handbook** and **additional resources** included in the Pack show you how you can continue the conversation beyond this month, embedding inclusive practice across your schools - **making acceptance the norm, not the exception.**

## **This Handbook contains the following:**

- ✓ The story of the creation of these resources
- ✓ An introduction to Autism and the language we use to describe it
- ✓ The importance of understanding autism and neurodivergence
- ✓ A guide to the resources in your World Autism Acceptance Month Pack
- ✓ Guidance on involving parents
- ✓ Information on how to engage with us and share your World Autism Acceptance Month activities
- ✓ Information on how to carry on the conversation, working with us beyond this World Autism Acceptance Month





## The Story of these Resources

The Autism Education Trust has worked in partnership with our colleagues at the National Autistic Society and our Autistic Young Experts to bring you these resources for World Autism Acceptance Month.

The Autism Education Trust has been committed to widening the reach of good autism practice and support to all professionals working with autistic children and young people since 2007. In that time, we have developed a network of licensed training partners that work across 75% of Local Authority areas and have also developed a programme for schools and trusts that can be delivered 'in house.'



**Autism  
Education  
Trust**



We strive for a society that works for autistic people by providing support, information, and advocacy for better services and laws. Through expertise, trust, and leadership, we empower autistic individuals, promote understanding, and drive change. Our values—pioneering, empowering, upfront, and inclusive—guide our mission to create a more autism-friendly world.

The Autistic Young Experts (AYE) are a group of autistic 16 – 25 year olds, who meet online. Since 2016, this group of young people have shared their voices and lived-experiences to steer, contribute and coproduce the work we do



**Autistic  
Young  
Experts**

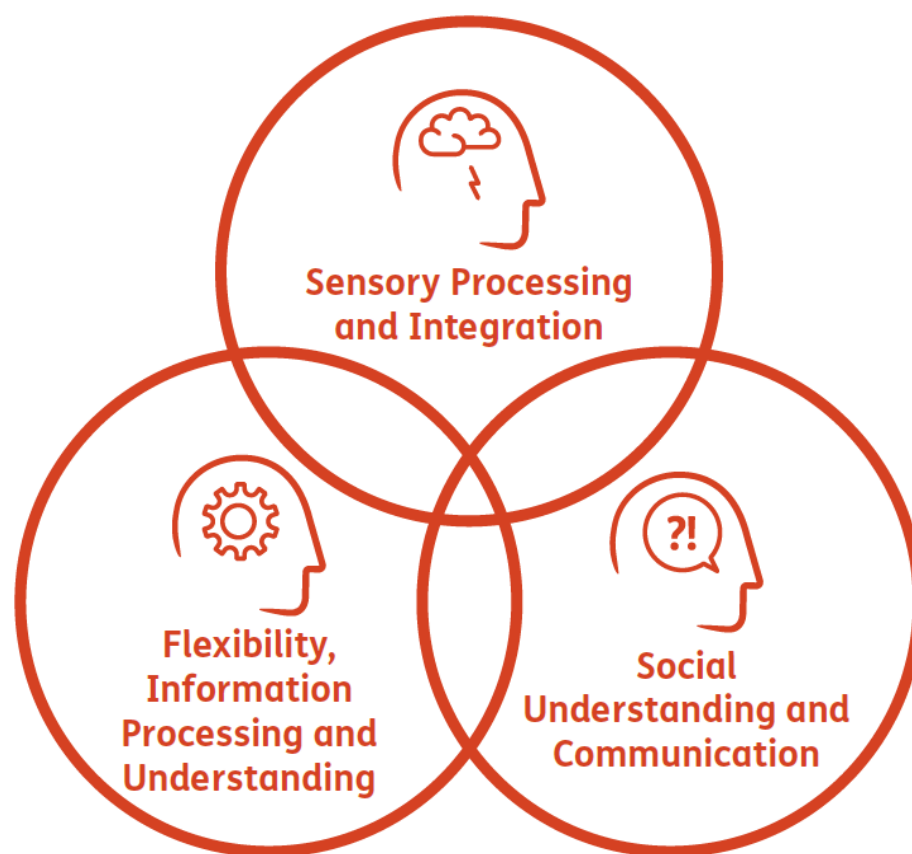


# About Autism

Being autistic does not mean you have an illness or disease. It means your brain works in a different way from other people. Autism is not a medical condition with treatments or a 'cure.' Instead, autism is a processing difference that can have an impact on many areas of a person's life.

**Autistic people will experience differences in three key areas:**

## The Three Areas of Difference





# About Autism

There is no 'typical' autistic person.

While autistic people share similar characteristics to some degree, they are also all different from each other. This is because autism is considered a spectrum. The autism spectrum is not linear from 'high' to 'low' but *varies* in every way that one person might vary from another.

**Every autistic individual has their own strengths, differences and needs, their own life journey and their own unique story.**

**This is described by the Autistic Young Experts, in their own words, as follows:**

*'It's colourful and it paints the world in a different way - every individual on the spectrum has their own picture, or experience, of life'*

(Saffron, Autistic Young Expert).

*'A multi-layered, non-linear, interconnecting relationship of different attributes/traits'*

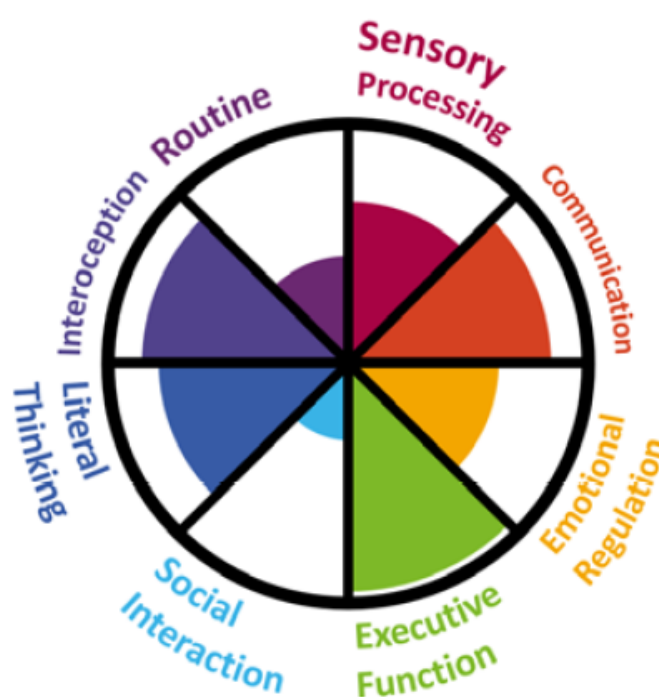
(Annabel, Autistic Young Expert).

## Autism Spectrum

The autism spectrum is not linear



The autism spectrum looks more like



With many different traits defining what autism is for an individual

For this reason, we should avoid using 'high/low functioning' and instead think of how these traits can fluctuate depending on circumstances

*'A representation of how diverse people are and how differently individuals can experience life in accordance to the structure of this world/society'*

(Autistic Young Expert).

Created by Jaye, Autistic Young Expert



# About Autism

## Terminology

Over the years, there have been a lot of changes and differences to how people talk about and understand autism. In a world where autistic people face many barriers, it is crucial we make a conscious effort to talk about autism **in a positive way**.

Language is a powerful means of shaping how people view and think about autism. It can have a **huge impact** on the way we behave towards and support autistic people.

Some young people see autism as their identity and would like you to use 'autistic person' as a term of reference (this is the preference of the Autistic Young Experts). Others may prefer to use 'has autism' or 'is on the autism spectrum' to describe their autism. It is best practice to ask the young person what their preference is.

It is also best to avoid using terms like 'suffer' or 'disease' and 'high/low functioning' when talking about autism. At The Autism Education Trust, we approach autism as a **different** way of being rather than as a 'deficient' or 'disordered' way of being.



You can find out more about the three key Areas of Difference by watching the following video: [Why Autism is a Difference, not a Deficit](#)

*Autism is a difference not deficit. Differences are to be valued not 'fixed'. My normal is different from your normal and the aim shouldn't be conformity but well-being.*

(Autistic Young Expert).

*'Life is a river and everyone is stuck in the same storm working out how to live life but autistic people have different boats of different shapes and sizes etc and we all deserve a seat at the table!'*

(Meg, Autistic Young Expert).

High/low functioning labels are inaccurate as they can oversimplify the complex experiences of autistic individuals and can lead to misconceptions about their abilities. It is better to consider the individual's strengths, differences and support needs rather than using generalisations.



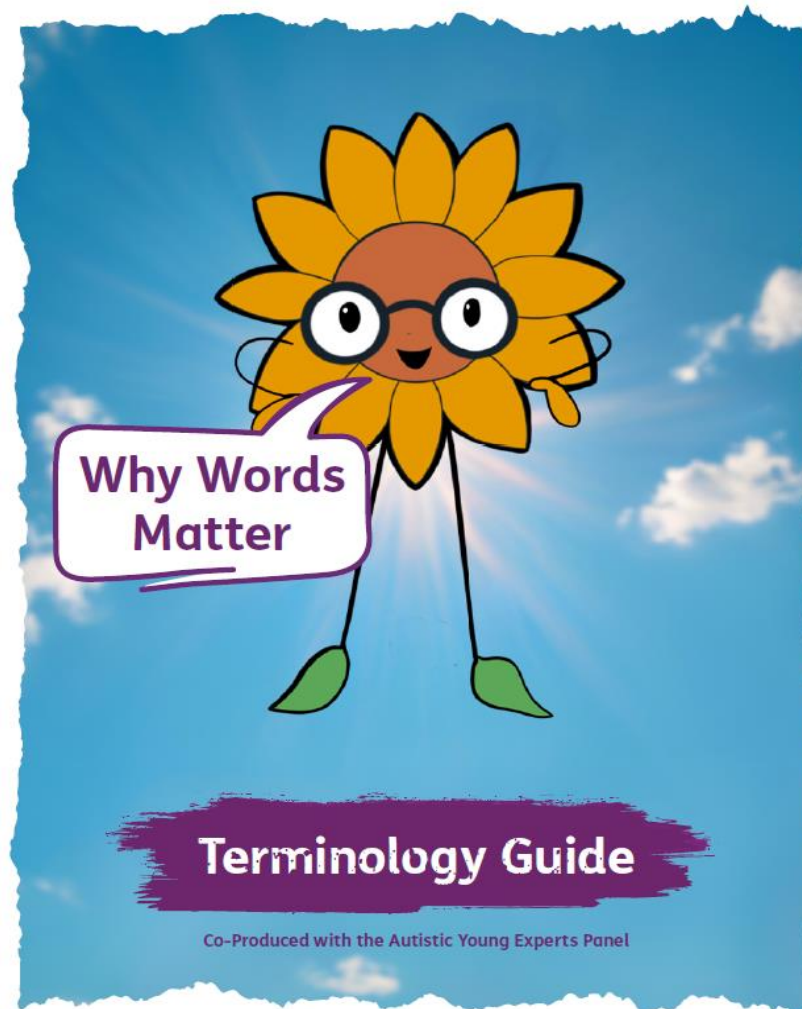
## Why Words Matter: The Impact of Language Choices

To learn more about the importance of embedding positive attitudes towards neurodiversity and how to model the language we would like being used across the whole school community, the Autism Education Trust have developed the **AET Terminology Guide: Why Words Matter**.

The guide has been **co-produced** with the Autistic Young Experts - it is central to our work, underpinning our resources and materials.

This document is updated regularly as language and terminology evolve.

The Terminology Guide: Why Words Matter can be a useful resource to guide and support whole school discussions throughout World Autism Acceptance Month!



The New Terminology Guide is provided free in your pack...



## Why Words Matter: The Impact of Language Choices

As preparation for launching World Autism Acceptance Month, below is some key information from the **AET Terminology Guide: Why Words Matter**. You may find this useful when guiding discussions to help develop and embed a culture of inclusion across your school.

It is important to keep in mind that there is often an assumption that autistic people need to behave and live like neurotypical people. Many autistic people take exception to this assumption and the fact that a lot of early literature on autism uses medical terms such as, **'deficit'**, **'disorder'** and **'intervention.'**

~~'deficit'~~

~~'disorder'~~

~~'intervention'~~

They argue that such terms are both inaccurate and stigmatising and based on an incorrect notion of what a 'typical' person is. Such perceptions can further disable autistic people, and, if internalised, can lead to crisis in self-identity, self-esteem and self-worth. On the other hand, there are others that argue that they are severely impaired and want to retain the term 'disorder' to **explain their experience**.

**In recognition of this debate, much of the literature now just refers to 'autism; and 'autism spectrum' and **not** 'autism spectrum disorder/condition.'**







## Why Words Matter: The Impact of Language Choices

We should avoid using terms such as 'problems, 'issues,' and 'impairments' and instead focus on language that **empowers** and focuses on an individual's **strengths and differences**. At the AET, we describe the level / type of support a person may require.

There are specific terms we use frequently at the AET to talk about autism in a positive way. We believe these terms should be used widely to help promote and embed equality, diversity and inclusion.

**Please refer to the AET Terminology Guide to gain insight into these terms to help guide your discussions throughout World Autism Acceptance Month and beyond!**

Promoting awareness and understanding of autism and neurodiversity can help bring about a call for change; through acceptance and viewing differences as strengths, whole school communities and settings can positively impact the wellbeing of their autistic students.

*Sometimes I see people in the media talking positively of autism and it makes me proud mostly. I get hope that I am perhaps not a societal failure and may well deserve to amount to something equally like others*

(Annabel, Autistic Young Expert)

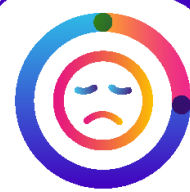


## The Importance of Understanding Autism and Neurodivergence

In 2023, the **National Autistic Society** published an Education Report which highlights that only **1 in 4 autistic people** feel happy within school. The findings of the report indicate that:



**Only 53%** of autistic children and young people said they have someone to go to if there is a problem at school.



**Only 26%** of autistic pupils feel happy at school.



**54%** of autistic students said that having teachers who don't understand them is the worst thing about school.



Almost **three in four** parents (74%) said their child's school place did not fully meet their needs.



Without appropriate teacher training, autistic children are **twice as likely** to be excluded from school.



More than **one in four** parents (26%) waited over three years to receive support for their child.



**Over half** (51%) of autistic students wanted help to understand how to get on with their peers.



**Seven in ten** (70%) autistic children and young people said school would be better if more teachers understood autism.



**50%** of parents were dissatisfied with their child's education, health and care (EHC) needs assessment planning process.



**Over half** of autistic pupils (54%) said they don't have a quiet place to go to at school.

[CLICK HERE](#) to find out more about the National Autistic Society Education Report 2023

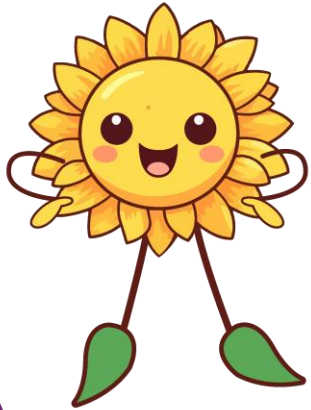
Through acceptance and viewing differences as strengths, whole school communities and settings can positively impact the wellbeing of their autistic students.

**Participating in World Autism Acceptance Month can help promote awareness and understanding of autism and neurodiversity, supporting in bringing about a call for change...**



## A Guide to the Other Resources in Your Pack

### World Autism Acceptance Month Launch Assembly



Use the Autism Acceptance Month Launch Assembly to introduce to pupils and staff:

- What World Autism Acceptance Month is
- Why we celebrate it
- What they will be doing during the month

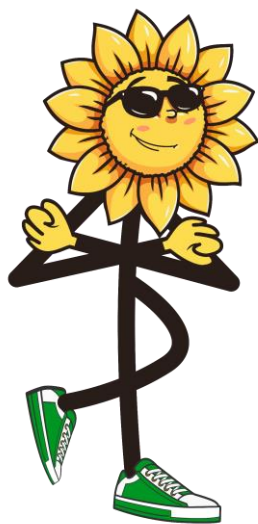
### World Autism Acceptance Month Lesson Plans

Use the fully resources lesson plans to:

- Improve **understanding of autism**
- To promote the valuing of individuals' strengths and differences
- To encourage all pupils to be supportive of their peers, including those who are autistic



### World Autism Acceptance Month 'Pick and Mix' Activities Guide



The Activities Guide contains a selection of activities, each varying in degree of complexity to foster an understanding of **differences as strengths**.

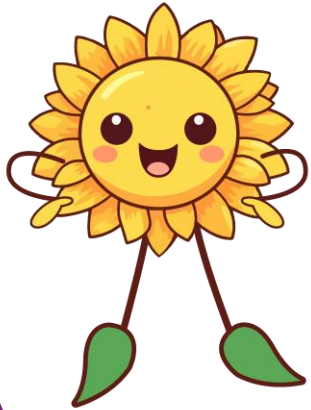
These activities can be completed:

- During registration time
- During dedicated sessions
- During subject sessions (e.g. some of the creative tasks could be done when pupils would normally have Art)
- As stand-alone activities or joined together to make up a whole lesson



## Additional Resources

### AET Terminology Guide: Why Words Matter



The importance of making positive language choices when talking about autism. The Guide has been coproduced with the Autistic Young Experts who have given their perspective on the words and terms they find positive, inclusive and neuro-affirming.

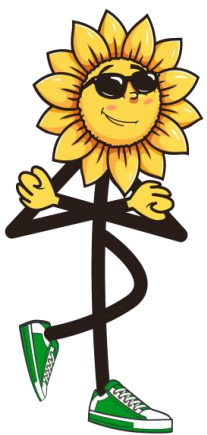
### AET Setting Up Your Own Panel Resources

Find out about the importance of embedding the autistic pupil voice in your work in school.

This Guide provides advice and suggestions on how you can set up your own Autistic Young Experts' Panel.



### AET Self Advocacy Toolkit



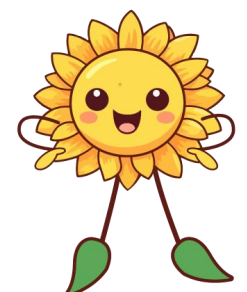
It is important for staff and peers to advocate for autistic pupils in school. However, it is also important to support autistic pupils to advocate for themselves.

The Self Advocacy Toolkit provides guidance and resources to empower young people to understand their own value and worth, to know what works for them and how to communicate this to others.

### AET Standards and Competencies Documents

Industry acclaimed:

- AET Autism Standards for developing inclusive settings
- AET Autism Staff Competencies to develop and embed inclusive teaching and learning practice across settings





## Getting Involved: Staff

### Involving the Leadership Team:

Getting buy-in from the school leadership team is crucial because their support and active participation are essential to make World Autism Acceptance Month a success. Involving the leadership team is vital as it demonstrates a whole school commitment to inclusion, encouraging other members of staff to commit to this too.

### Involving the Staff Team:

Getting buy-in from the staff team is important as they will be the ones leading the activities with pupils. It is important to explain to them:

- What World Autism Acceptance Month is
- When it is
- Why it is important
- How you intend to participate as a school, sharing, explaining and demonstrating the resources

[CLICK HERE](#)



**Video**

**This short video features autistic pupils talking about how all members of an educational setting should have an awareness of autism that is relevant to their role and how this can make a positive difference to their wellbeing and school life experience.**



## Getting Involved: Parents

### Supporting Autism Acceptance: A Guide for Parents



This April, join us in fostering a more inclusive and accepting society for autistic people. Here are some ways you and your family can get involved.

#### 1. Learn About Autism

Visit [autism.org.uk](http://autism.org.uk) to learn more about autism and how you can support autistic individuals.

#### 2. Access E-Learning and Resources

Deepen your understanding with our e-learning modules, including:

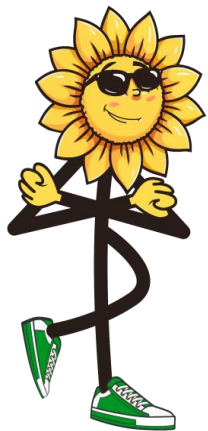
Understanding autism

Women and girls on the autism spectrum

Supporting young autistic people's mental health

A guide to the mental health experiences and needs of autistic teenagers

Explore our Know Yourself resources designed for teenagers at [www.autism.org.uk/Knowyourself](http://www.autism.org.uk/Knowyourself). These resources empower young autistic people to better understand themselves and their needs.

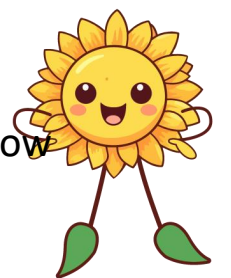


#### 3. Talk About Autism

Discuss autism at home with your family and friends. Reflect on how you and your child can help make society more accepting and accessible for autistic people.

#### 4. Show Up for Autistic People

Every autistic person is unique. Take the time to learn from autistic individuals about what you can do to be a better friend. Here are some ways to show up: Give time: Allow autistic friends more time to process information.



Be clear: Use straightforward and unambiguous language.

Be inclusive: Think about ways to make activities or events more comfortable, such as:

Offering a quiet area at class parties.

Considering sensory needs when planning group activities.



## Getting Involved: Engage with us on Social Media



Show us how you are turning up for World Autism Acceptance Month and help increase autism acceptance and awareness. Share, connect, and engage with supporters by joining the online conversation.

### Hashtags

Tag your posts with the official hashtags to follow what's happening:

**#WorldAutismAcceptanceMonth**

**#WAAM25**

**#SpectrumColourWalk**

### Social Media Handles

Make sure to tag our social media channels so we can share your posts:

X: [@autism](#)

Threads: [@nationalautisticsociety](#)

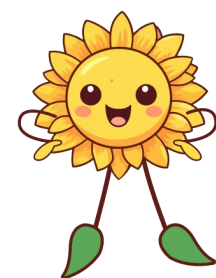
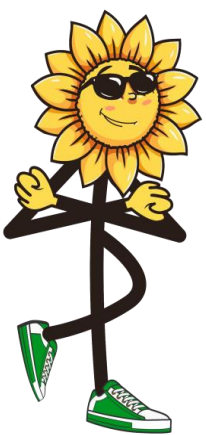
Instagram: [@nationalautisticsociety](#)

LinkedIn: [@NationalAutisticSociety](#)

Facebook: [@NationalAutisticSociety](#)

### Social Media Assets

Check out our official social media assets to help you spread the word. Download shareable graphics, banners, and templates to make your posts stand out and encourage others to get involved! [Access here](#)





## Getting Involved: Continuing the Conversation

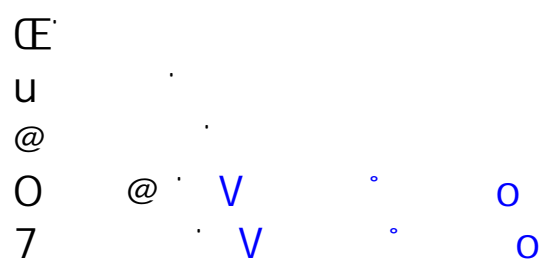


World Autism Acceptance Month doesn't end in April—your support can continue all year round. Here's how you can stay involved:

**Join a local or online branch:** Connect with others and stay engaged through one of our branches. Find a branch near you.

**Subscribe to our newsletters:** Keep up to date with news, information, and updates from the charity. [Sign up here.](#)

**Stay active on social media:** Like, share, and comment on our posts to keep the conversation about autism going.



**Visit our advice and guidance pages:** Learn more about autism and find resources to support autistic individuals. [Explore here.](#)

**Become a member:** Join our membership community to receive Your Autism magazine, access our members' Facebook group, and attend our AGM. Whether you're autistic, support an autistic person, or simply care about the community, you'll be welcomed. [Join today.](#)

Your support makes a difference—let's continue working together to create a more inclusive and accepting world for autistic people!

