



Autism and ASCs in shops and services

Autism and autism spectrum conditions (ASCs) affect how people process information and interact with the world. These differences in the way information is interpreted and communicated can make accessing shops and services a challenge for autistic people and people with ASCs. Adjusting things to make shops and services more accessible not only helps those with disabilities, it can improve customer experience for everyone.

This guide explains some easy ways you can adjust environments and services to make them more inclusive, and tells you where to find more information and advice.



Adjusting environments

Autism and ASCs can make people very sensitive to sensory inputs like lights, noises, textures and smells. You can reduce the chance of people becoming overwhelmed by thinking about:

- Turning down or turning off background music
- Using softer lighting, and avoiding harsh fluorescent lights where possible
- Keeping scents to a minimum – avoid strong smelling cleaning products or air fresheners
- Designating quiet shopping times – remember to advertise them, so that people know when they're happening
- Letting people book specific appointment times, so they can avoid long waits, queues or crowds
- Providing or encouraging the use of sensory shields such as headphones or sunglasses

Autistic people and people with ASCs can also find it difficult to understand information if it's vague or not presented clearly. Not knowing what to expect can make people feel very anxious, but you can help to reduce anxiety by thinking about:

- Signage – make sure you signpost things clearly, and that signs have up-to-date information
- Provide information about your buildings and services so that people can find out what to expect ahead of time – maps, floor plans, photographs and virtual tours can all help people feel more prepared and less anxious before they arrive
- Ask for feedback – make it easy for people to tell you about things they struggle with when they're using your services



Adjusting services

The biggest difference you can make to provide accessible services is encouraging more understanding of autism and ASCs. With understanding comes flexibility, and flexibility makes services more inclusive. You could consider:

- Investing in staff training, to help your employees identify autism and ASCs, communicate effectively, and understand people's different sensory needs
- Appointing autism (and other disability) champions – designating a member of staff to be a central point of contact for your organisation who can provide advice and guidance
- Providing clear information for customers about how to ask for adjustments or extra support when accessing your services



Further information and advice

The Department for Enterprise offers an accessibility grant scheme for businesses wishing to make adjustments in line with the Equality Act (2017). You can download an application form and find more information about the scheme online or by contacting dfemarketing@gov.im.

There are many online resources which give information and advice about adjusting environments and services for autism and ASCs.

The National Autistic Society (UK) has this autism-friendly guide to accessible services, which includes a downloadable checklist for creating accessible services, environments, and information.

Local organisations can also help by providing advice and information:

- Autism in Mann – autisminmann@manx.net or call **07624 480167**
- Autism Initiatives – paul.ormond-smith@autisminitiatives.org or call **01624 814801**
- Crossroads Isle of Man – info@crossroadsiom.org or call **01624 673103**
- Manx Mencap - support for people with learning disabilities – mencap@manx.net or call **01624 677289**

Finally, you can check out some of the adjustments being made by organisations in the Isle of Man to promote autism and ASC inclusivity:

- Villa Gaiety provide 360° online maps of each venue, so they can be explored before attending any events or performances. They also provide additional assistance to those who require it, relaxed performances, essential companion scheme and information on how to get to each venue.
- Bus Vannin are one of the leading organisations for using the Sunflower Hidden Disabilities programme in the Island. Part of this service is providing virtual tours of their single and double decker buses

- Ronaldsway airport provide information online about the process of going through security so that people can find out what to expect in advance of travelling. The airport also supports the Sunflower Hidden Disabilities programme.