

Making our event more accessible

We have worked closely with the members of our Youth Network to design an accessible event. After a workshop gathering their ideas, we worked on implementing them into the day.

Often when designing an event to be more inclusive, everyone benefits from the results, not just those who are neurodivergent.

Below are some of the ways we have made the conference more inclusive.

Planning in advance

Picking the right venue

We chose a venue that was designed to be inclusive. This includes step-free access, changing places, gender-neutral toilets and braille and tactile wayfinding systems.

Sending information in advance

Not knowing what will occur during an event may cause anxiety for an autistic person. We sent out information beforehand including an agenda, layout, pictures of the location, directions, and any details that may be helpful, so autistic people can plan their day and know what to expect.

Communication

Communication stickers

Communication stickers, handed out at the check in show how an individual would like to communicate with others.

Communication stickers are coloured **red**, **yellow** or **green**.

- A **red sticker** means that the person does not want to talk to anyone, or only wants to talk to a few people. The person might talk to others if they feel able to, and that is okay; the approached people are welcome to talk back to them in that case.
- A **yellow sticker** means that person only wants to talk to people they recognise or prefer to have people start a conversation with them.
 - A **green sticker** means they want to talk to other people.

BSL Interpreters

BSL Interpreters have been hired to provide an alternative means of communication on the day. BSL is for those who are deaf or may have hearing loss.

Scripts

All answers to panel questions and scripts for speeches were requested in advance to provide a basic transcript of the day. This allows attendees support in following the events of the day and giving more processing time. It also allowed panel members to pre-plan answers to questions in advance.

Support need badges

Working with the company Happy Autistic Lady, our Youth Network suggested ideas for support badges offered at the event.

Two badges have been created.



Suggested conversation topics

Conversation topics have been put at every table to support those who may find it difficult to start conversations with strangers.

Nonverbal ways to ask a question

Questions from the audience are taken digitally and anonymously, to allow people to contribute without the pressure of public speaking.

Breaks

Regular breaks are scheduled throughout the day to allow time for processing and regulating sensory needs. At Ambitious about Autism we recommend a 10-minute break for every hour of an event.

Sensory needs

Autistic people often have different sensory needs. Sometimes bright lights or loud sounds can be overwhelming. To support this, we have provided:

Quiet room

A quiet room is set up for those who wish to leave the main space if they are feeling overwhelmed. The space is removed from the main event.

Stim toys

Stim toys are available on the tables. Stimming helps autistic people regulate their emotions and process their sensory environment.

Food

Members of our Youth Network requested plain foods on offer for lunch, to help with sensory needs.

Staff will serve the food to remove anxieties about other people touching food. Menus with listed ingredients allow attendees to make informed decisions and check allergy requirements

Headphones

Headphones have been supplied so that audience members can adjust the volume of the speakers to their liking. It also means attendees are unlikely to hear external noises, allowing greater processing capability.

Individual needs

Asking about adjustment needs

Every individual was asked for their specific support needs prior to the event. We then used this information to make sure all individual needs were accommodated for where possible and included in our event risk assessment.

Live streaming/recording

Live streaming links, and recordings of the day have been offered as an alternative to attending in person on the day. As hybrid offers are a great solution for those who struggle in new environments or using public transport.

Mental health first aiders



Being mindful of lived experience, some topics may be distressing and difficult for individuals. Mental Health first aiders are signposted at the beginning of day to offer support.

Freedom to enjoy

We encourage our guests to enjoy the conference in whatever way they find comfortable, whether that is sitting on the floor or leaving the room, regardless of if there is a break.