



HM Government

The national strategy for autistic children, young people and adults: 2021 to 2026

An Easy Read version



easy
read

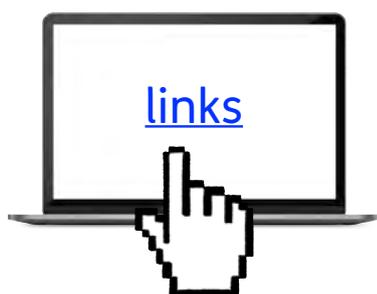
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In this easy read document, complicated words are in **bold**. We explain what these words mean in the sentence after they have been used.



Some words are [blue and underlined](#). These are links which will go to another website which has more information.

Introduction



The government is working to make things better for autistic people in England.



We have written a new **strategy** to improve the lives of autistic people, their families and carers in the next 5 years.

A **strategy** is a plan of things to do over a period of time.



We have also written an **implementation plan** which says what we will do in the first year of the strategy.

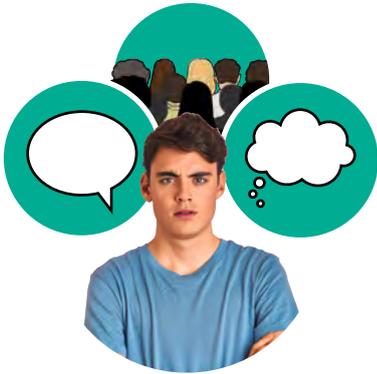
An **implementation plan** explains the steps that need to be taken to make something happen.



This is an Easy Read version of the strategy. It will explain more about:

- why we have written the strategy
- what we are planning to do
- how we will follow the strategy and make sure it works.

About autism



Autism can affect things like **communication**, mixing with other people, and how you think and feel about things.



Communication is the way people share information. It includes speaking and writing.



There are about:

- 700,000 autistic adults and children in the UK



- 3 million family members and carers of autistic people in the UK.



Autism can affect people very differently. This means autistic people need different types of help.



Some autistic people need:

- little or no help in their everyday lives



- help all the time, for example in care homes.



Autistic people may need help with different things, like:

- making friends



- coping at school



- being at work



- getting out and about.

Why we need a new strategy



The Autism Act is a law that tries to make things more equal for autistic adults in England.



This law says that the government has to write a strategy to help autistic adults.



The government also has to check this is still working for people every few years.



We already had an old strategy called '[Think Autism](#)', which we wrote in 2014.



We looked at this old strategy to check it was still working for people.



In 2019, we asked autistic people, their families and carers, professionals and organisations what they thought about this.



We have included what we found out and what people told us in our new strategy.



The old strategy and The Autism Act were only about adults.



The government thinks it is important to notice autism early in a person's life, so they can get the right help when they need it.



This new strategy includes children and young people too.

How COVID-19 has affected things



COVID-19 is also called Coronavirus. It is an illness that is spreading around the world. It can affect your lungs and breathing.

COVID-19 has been very difficult for lots of autistic people and their families.



To keep people safe from COVID-19, the whole country went into **lockdown**.

Lockdown is when everyone had to stay at home and most businesses had to close.



We asked the London School of Economics if they could look at [how lockdown affected autistic people](#).

They told us that some things autistic people already found hard got worse because of lockdown, like:

- feeling lonely
- being apart from people
- feeling worried about things.





Some autistic people said they liked lockdown because they:

- could stay in a familiar place
- did not have to meet people face-to-face
- liked using video calls instead of meeting face-to-face
- did not have to go to busy places so much.



This research helped us to make things better for autistic people during COVID-19.



For example, we said that autistic people could leave their homes more than once a day during lockdown.

How this strategy will work



Our new strategy is for the next 5 years, 2021 to 2026.

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The strategy has 6 main areas where we want to make things better for autistic people.

The 6 areas are:



1. Helping people to understand autism.
2. Helping autistic children and young people at school.
3. Helping autistic people to find jobs.
4. Making health and care services equal for autistic people.
5. Making sure autistic people get help in their communities.
6. Help for autistic people in the justice system.

1. Helping people understand autism



What we want to do

Most people have heard of autism, but not many people understand it.



We want to make sure more people across the country understand autism so that autistic people:

- feel more included and less lonely



- are treated better by people in their community.



We want more organisations, businesses and services to understand autistic people.

Autistic people can feel left out of public spaces because:



- public places are too busy and noisy



- the staff or public may treat them badly.



We need to make public transport better for autistic people so they can:



- get out and about in their communities



- find jobs more easily.

How we will do it



We will run a **campaign** to help the public understand and accept autism.

A **campaign** is a plan of things to do over time, to try and change something.



We will improve public transport for autistic people by:

- giving training to transport staff



- helping the public understand that autistic people can find public transport scary



- making sure autistic people aren't made to feel bad about not wearing a face covering.

2. Helping autistic children and young people at school



What we want to do

By 2026, we want the [special educational needs and disabilities system](#) to help autistic children and young people to get the right help.



Some autistic children and young people have special educational needs.

We want autistic children and young people to get the help they need at school and colleges.



We want to make sure teachers and education staff understand how to help autistic children and young people.



We want to make sure there is no **bullying** of autistic children and young people at school.

Bullying is when someone is mean to you or hurts you on purpose.



We want to help autistic young people as they become adults, so that they:

- can live in their communities
- can find work
- can get higher education, for example in university, if they want to
- are less likely to have mental health problems.

How we will do it



We will improve the special educational needs and disabilities system so it works better for autistic children, young people and their families.



We will make sure that autistic children are in schools that give them the right help.



We are giving autism training to:

- teachers and education staff to help them understand autism
- staff who work with very young children to help them notice if a child has special educational needs.



We are starting a campaign to help protect autistic children and young people from being bullied at school.



We are giving training to school staff so they can help autistic young people when they grow up.



We are making sure there are more chances for autistic young people to:

- find jobs
- get the skills and training they need.



We will continue to help children with special educational needs and disabilities as we move out of COVID-19.

3. Helping autistic people find jobs

What we want to do



By 2026, we want more autistic people to have jobs.

We also want to help autistic people who have jobs, to keep them.



We want to improve the help autistic people can get to find and stay in jobs.



We want to improve help for autistic people who can't work, so they can live well.

How we will do it



We will help businesses understand autism, so they are able to give jobs to autistic people.



We are making training and Jobcentres more accessible to help autistic people find jobs.



Jobcentre staff will know more about how to help autistic people.



We will continue with the [Access to Work scheme](#) - this gives people help with jobs, including autistic people.



For autistic people who need extra help to find work, there is the [Intensive Personalised Employment Support Programme \(IPES\)](#).



We will improve help for autistic people that can't work.

4. Making health and care services equal for autistic people

What we want to do



By 2026, we want to make health and care services better for autistic people.

We want autistic people to live healthier lives and live longer.



We want to get better at recognising autism in young children, so they can get the help they need from an early age.

NICE National Institute for Health and Care Excellence

The [National Institute for Health and Care Excellence \(NICE\)](#) gives guidance and advice to improve health and social care.



They say that people should only wait up to 13 weeks before they see a healthcare worker, to see if they are autistic.



Too many people are waiting longer than 13 weeks and we want to stop that happening.

How we will do it



We will give money to help:

- reduce how long some people have to wait to find out if they might be autistic
- recognise autism earlier in children.



We will do more in schools to find out if children are autistic.



We will give training to health and care staff to help them:

- understand autism better
- give autistic people better help.



We will start giving health checks to autistic people to try and make health care more equal.



We will look at the reasons autistic people don't live as long, so we can do something to help.

5. Making sure autistic people get help in their communities



What we want to do

Some autistic people have to stay in mental health hospitals.



We want to reduce the number of autistic people in these hospitals.



We only want autistic people to be in these hospitals if they really need to be.



We think autistic people should not be kept in hospital care just because they are autistic.



Autistic people should be allowed to leave hospital as soon as they are well enough to go home.



If autistic people need to stay in mental health hospitals, the hospital should:

- be very good quality
- understand autistic people
- be as close to their home as possible.

We want autistic people to get help with their mental health in their local area, so they don't have to go to hospital.

We want to make social care and help with housing better for autistic people.

How we will do it

We are working to reduce the number of autistic people in hospitals by:

- making community support better
- making it easier for autistic people to get good housing
- improving housing to include what is good for autistic people
- making changes to the law to stop autistic people from going to hospital unless they really need to be there.





We are making sure there is more money to:

- help autistic people get the help they need for their wellbeing in the community



- stop people from ending up in hospital by giving them help when they're not well



- help more autistic people leave hospital and go back home



- give housing that is good for autistic people.



We will give training for staff in mental health hospitals about how to look after autistic people.



We will also make hospitals better for autistic people so they are not so overwhelming.

6. Help for autistic people in the justice system



The **justice system** means things like the police, courts and prisons.

Autistic people can come into contact with the justice system for lots of reasons, like getting into trouble with the police or being the victim of a crime.

What we want to do



By 2026, we want to make improvements to the way autistic people are treated by the justice system.



We want to make sure justice system staff understand autistic people and know how to help them.



We want the justice system to support autistic people and make autistic people feel safe.

We want the justice system to treat autistic people in the same way as other people.

How we will do it



We are working to understand how we should improve things for autistic people and **neurodivergent** people.

Neurodivergent means that brains work in different ways.



We will make sure staff understand autism and how to help autistic people.

We will give training about autism to all new staff working in prisons.



We are working to find out about if there are other things that can be done instead of putting autistic people in prison if they commit a crime.



We are improving health care for autistic people in prisons.

Things we need to make our strategy work



In the first year of our strategy, we need to do some things that will make the rest of the strategy work better.

We need to:



- find out more about what help makes autistic people's lives better
- make a plan to collect better information about autism and autistic people in the 6 areas of the strategy
- start a new group called the 'Executive Group' - the group will:
 - include autistic people, their families and carers
 - check that the strategy is working well
- work together with local councils, the NHS and health and care organisations to make this happen.