

13 November 2023

## Reasonable adjustments for Autistic Individuals

**I am writing to ask what provisions or policies are in place in local hospitals and services regarding reasonable adjustments for individuals with autism?**

**For example, how are autistic individuals accommodated if they have to attend A&E or are admitted for further tests/treatments, to avoid distress stemming from sensory sensitivity, unfamiliar people on wards etc?**

We have no specific policies in our Trust regarding reasonable adjustments for individuals with autism. However we do adhere to the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 1995 and the Autism Act NI (2011). We also adhere to Equality legislation under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. This means we strive to understand and offer support to both staff and service users who are known to be autistic and make reasonable adjustments for their individual needs.

There are no specific Trust wide adjustments routinely in place across the Trust. However adjustments are aimed to be facilitated on a case to case basis as need is brought to our attention.

We have noted pockets of good practice including supports such as:

- specific font in letters and emails
- coloured background of correspondence
- use of simple English
- photo of the building and/or person they are coming to see
- email correspondence as an option for communication
- Patients have been facilitated if they want to wait outside or in their car and be contacted when their clinician is ready to see them- this has become more usual since covid
- video appointments – also more accessible and routine since covid
- the use of a hospital passport particularly with co-morbid Learning Disability
- sensory adjustments in clinical rooms
- the use of fidget toys and calming toys
- theatre tours, virtual tours
- avoidance of unnecessary contact, such as medical students seeking patients for examination practice or approaching the patient with a large entourage, which can occur on teaching ward rounds
- adjustments to diet when an in-patient
- patch-match system to help autistic children navigate clinical rooms.

In the last number of months we have recognised that we need a more consistent and coherent approach across the Trust in order to promote more Neurodivergent aware and supportive environments and services. We have recently temporarily appointed a Neurodiversity Lead from Psychological Services to increase awareness in Trust staff of the needs of neurodivergent individuals which includes autistic individuals, and to

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develop policies, training and support in respect to both neurodivergent staff and service users in the Trust. Our Lead is working with a variety of services across the Trust, and with neurodivergent service users and staff to take this work forward.

Should you wish to read the legislation that we have referred to, please see:

[Disability Discrimination Act 1995 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](https://legislation.gov.uk)

[Autism Act NI \(2011\) — Autism NI](https://www.autismni.org/)

[Northern Ireland Act 1998 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](https://legislation.gov.uk)

[Equality Scheme | The Executive Office \(executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk\)](https://www.executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk/)