

Supporting Access to Online Support for Autistic People

December 2020

This reflects our learning from attending a presentation by [Ambitious About Autism](#) at the Engage Conference 2020, which took place at the end of November. We believe many other organisations would benefit from this insight.



Ambitious about Autism are a national youth-based organisation that employs and works with autistic people. They provide an Autism Education Trust Panel, Health Panel (commissioned by a London NHS Trust) and work on the principle that all their work goes to the young people first for consideration.

Shared learning

Since moving services online the organisation has experimented and learnt from the young people they are supporting.

PROS	CONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No travel • Able to choose sensory environment • Inclusive support – transcript, alternative feedback • More flexibility and adaptability for meetings • Can fit more people into the virtual room. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data poverty • Sensory overload - so, make it clear people can leave without questioning (but with check-ins afterwards) • Feeling isolated • FOMO • Blurred boundaries – closing the door and being mindful to switch off • Privacy – can be difficult to share– fear of being interrupted or overheard

Creating inclusion

- ✓ They restrict invitations so they cannot be forwarded to others, or they get a notification if it has been forwarded.
- ✓ Use [otter.ai](#) software - as tis provides a *live* transcript of the conversation - enabling people to turn off distraction of people/noise and focus on the words if this helps them to engage. Need a budget for this.

- ✓ Person-centred - proactive support-led sessions, which include working with people beforehand to understand support needs, rather than after the need is discovered.
- ✓ Clear agenda that people have in advance - at least a week before.
Questions/worksheet shared before the meeting - so participants can process their thinking and can then just read out their thoughts.
- ✓ Access to stimulation toys/equipment - knowing this is OK and can be used to keep hands busy.
- ✓ Verbal instruction - followed up with written prompts and demonstrations.
- ✓ Structured sessions - must stick to it and be honest if something is going to over run and ask if this is OK.
- ✓ Help individuals to create the right environment - low lighting, blurred backgrounds, one person talking at a time.
- ✓ Keep content clear and concise. Use a person's name to get their attention.
- ✓ Be honest about the scope of participants' influence, "*your engagement is at this level and the impact of this will be....We will feedback by*"
- ✓ Frequent breaks and sessions no longer than 90 minutes.
- ✓ Need to establish (ideally co-design) rules of engagement/conduct - have a list of these visible (they have this as their background)
- ✓ Keep body movement under control when presenting/facilitating.
- ✓ Participants and organisation have found ZOOM is the best/most accessible platform.
- ✓ Use [mentimeter](#) as this provides live polls, slide presentations and people can give lots of feedback and its less noise for participants. (This is also a good way of showing funders information as well.)
- ✓ Being clear on how facilitator will move the conversation on, but offering time later if people want to give more feedback on a particular topic.
- ✓ Having a staff member in a breakout room is important. This 'room' can also be a quiet room to enable participants to reset themselves. They use private messaging to communicate with people here.
- ✓ They limit peer support to 10 people per session and have 3 people supporting. This is important so that the organisation can watch for behaviour that suggests there is an issue/need not being communicated.
- ✓ Lone working is still applicable for online meetings. There are risks of 1-2-1 in breakout rooms and therefore the organisation has a debrief for staff afterwards.
- ✓ They limit who can *private message* during a meeting to their staff. Staff know how to turn off videos promptly, in case someone starts to demonstrate inappropriate behaviour during a virtual meeting.