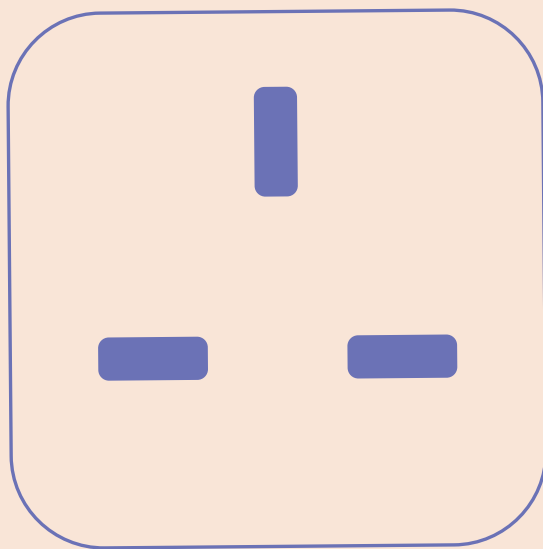




AN

ADAPTER-PLUG GUIDE



TO

AUTISTIC ARTISTS

Overview

This document aims to provide insight for Casting Directors, Producers, Actors, Dancers, Singers, Stage Managers and all those who work within the arts industry as to how diversity and accessibility in the arts can be achieved for people with ASD (Autism Spectrum Disorder).

Goals

1. To outline ways in which autistic artists face problems within our industry.
2. To provide ways in which this can be amended with your assistance.

Disclaimer

This guide offers you a foundation of understanding. Every autistic person is different and consequently their access needs will also change. Please speak directly to the autistic creative you are in contact with about their access needs – some may not be included in this guide.

Contents

THE CATCH 22 OF AUTISM AND THE ARTS	05
IN PERSON COMMUNICATION	08
MOTOR SKILLS/DANCE	10
SENSORY PROCESSING: COSTUMING/LIGHTING/SOUND	12
FAMILIARITY ACCESS	14
STIMMING/STIMULATORY BEHAVIOUR	16
AGENTS	18
DRAM SCHOOLS/TRAINING	20
TOURING	22

Introduction

In this guide Equity will aim to provide you with an “adapter plug” approach to autistic artists. We are using that metaphor because when each and every one of us travels to a foreign country an adapter plug is the exact thing we need in order to make our appliances function as they usually would on our homeland. When it comes to accessibility in our industry it is much the same. There are vast amounts of talent within the autistic creative community that is underutilised and often times this is down to a lack of adaptation and access for those individuals and education on why they’re needed.

It has been a common understanding for a long time that the autistic spectrum is linear with “not very autistic” and “extremely autistic” at opposing ends. This way of thinking about autism – although at one time popular – is now outdated. Autism in reality is much more like a giant colour wheel and every single autistic person tracks across that wheel differently. Around the outside of the wheel are the traits autistic people display such as: Motor issues, Executive function, Communication, Sensory, Language and Perception. Where each autistic person lands on that wheel as

they track across it are the traits they may display in varying degrees and the access needs they may need addressing.

ASD is a neurodivergent spectrum disorder. It falls under the larger umbrella of Neurodiverse which also includes: ADHD, Tourette’s Syndrome, Dyslexia and Dyspraxia either alone or intersected. Though ASD can overlap with mental health conditions – in and of itself it is not classified as a mental health condition. The Term “Neurodiverse” is quite a broad term. It covers a large bracket of individual disabilities. The reason the term has come about is because many of these disabilities do intersect with one another but must not be confused for one another. You can have just one, you can have more. Neurodiverse does not mean just autistic - that is one part and one disability under the umbrella of neurodiversity.

The term has also been used in an aid of self-identifying as it’s broader than simply stating which disability you have.

This guide focuses predominantly on ASD (Autism Spectrum Disorder)

The catch 22 of autism and the arts

Sadly, there is a lot of fear within the autistic creative community about self identifying for fear of not receiving employment or losing current employment – though this sounds shocking, it is a very true reality with mostly inaccurate stigma to thank.

“If I don’t tell people I’m autistic I will be treated as if I am not and therefore will trip up and struggle massively”

“If I do tell people I’m autistic I face an existent stigma that may stop me getting the job”.

How does autism affect the performance world?

One of the major sidekicks of autism can be creativity and ingenuity. They really do go hand in hand with one another on a lot of occasions (but not all). Autistic individuals relate to the world in a very different way and so a means of creation is a fantastic and common outlet. Performance for some allows them the ability to jump out of their own world and into the life and time of someone else. It also allows them to experience the world through the eyes of others aiding them in learning about a society that often seems foreign to them. Performance can also be a means of communication and relatability to a neurotypical world in writing, drawing, directing and creating. Most importantly however, autistic people want to be part of the creative performance world for the same reasons non-autistic (Neurotypical) people do. Incredible talent lies in autistic artists for they see the world through a looking glass that nobody else has access to and because this is a spectrum disorder - every perspective of every person is different meaning there is so much on offer. For many of us - the arts provide a means of outlet, communication

and joy. The arts are also there as a form of education to the wider population on topics that often get pushed to the fringes of society - so our place within that world is as valid as any.

Autistic people don’t want more. They want equity

Before you read on - we wish to clear this up: In any of the following suggestions - we are not asking for more. We are asking for fair. It may seem as if we’re asking for more because autistic/neurodiverse access doesn’t often get covered. These things can be necessary to put us on an equal playing field with other artists.

Communication via email/online

As a casting director, producer, agent or manager it may not be unusual for you to be approached by creatives – however if approached by an autistic creative or you approach them it is slightly different. There is an unspoken rule in our industry that when communicating with a director, producer or casting director - there’s a formula to follow (especially on first contact) That involves lots of subtle grace notes thrown in out of respect/business etc. This kind of communication is very advanced and specific. If an artist who openly tells you they are autistic/neurodiverse doesn’t quite communicate with you in a way you would expect - don’t feel offended/unsure immediately. It is often a misunderstanding and communication issue that can seem to come over rudely or directly. Socialisation in the world is a very complicated and layered matter - however autism offers a different view on the experience of processing such deep and complex structures of social coding in the way you may expect.

This can look like:

- **Overly formal/Informal language**
- **Overly long/Short emails**
- **Not immediately grasping the task asked of them.**
- **Asking for further clarification.**
- **Very direct written communication.**
- **Going off topic.**
- **Persistent emails due to lack of understanding.**
- **A misinterpretation of your communication or instruction.**
- **A need for communication and updates.**

Access

As an industry professional here are some ways to make email communications, audition requests, meeting requests and self-tape requests more accessible:

1. Be as direct as possible informing the creative what it is you need from them or don't need from them at all times.
2. Avoid vague language that insinuates future conversation if it is not required ie: "Speak soon".
3. Be as specific as you can in your instructions of tasks.
4. If emails persist, inform the creative it is not needed or that you will contact them.
5. Be as specific as you can with dates/times. Provide maps to auditions.
6. Understand the unknown of auditions/production can be difficult to process for those with ASD and stick to your dates and plans where ever possible to avoid changes in routine or precepted routine.
7. Set boundaries where necessary.

8. Be willing to accept different forms of communication ie: Zoom, telephone, AAC devices (*AAC Device: Augmentative and Alternative Communication. These devices replace or support human speech).
9. Or BSL interpreters as well as different response times to allow for cognitive processing.
10. Provide as much information and audition material as possible, if requested provide audition sides on word documents that are amendable so the creative can change colours of both text and background to processing/reading reasons)
11. Inform them where the creative are in the process.
12. Allow as much turn-around time as physically possible to allow for processing.
13. If there is no material, state what kind of material you wish them to actively look for to perform for you. Cut out any doubt.
14. Discuss any audition access needs that creative may have directly with them around your specific audition, agency or production.

When casting specifically for autistic roles please do not ask for "speak about yourself" tapes without providing audition material and character breakdowns. This is often far too vague and inaccessible. It can also give the illusion of vetting a certain "type" of autism for the role even if that isn't the intention (sadly this happens far too often). Sides and character description should be provided and if that isn't possible, a very clear indication of what it is you're looking for in them including and not limited to text type and wardrobe choices.

In person communication:

In person communication:

In person communication relies on a lot of social cues from verbal to body language and facial expression. These can show as different in autistic people. Avoidance of eye contact, differences in perceived emotional range and tone, resistance to touch and self-stimulatory behaviour are common amongst many more. The way an autistic person communicates is so unique to each of us that there is no hard and fast rule for what to expect.

Access

1. Have a conversation prior to meeting with the autistic creative about what mode of in person communication suits them best. For example they may communicate through an AAC device. We are all different, the remainder of this list may/may not apply dependant on individual as well as more.
2. Potentially avoid any indirect language – be as clear as possible.
3. Potentially avoid metaphors, insinuations, idioms, similes.
4. Understand humour may be perceived and given differently.
5. Unless stated ok by the creative, avoid unconsented body contact including handshakes.
6. Accept and appreciate there may be a lack of eye contact – continue your communication as normal and do not request eye contact or perceive lack thereof as rude or inattentive.
7. Accept and appreciate speech may appear direct/blunt with or without tone and pace changes.
8. Do not encourage the creative to communicate in a way that is not accessible or suitable for them.
9. Adapt your communication only where necessary or requested. There is no need for you to change the way you speak in tone, pitch and pace unless specifically asked for. Normalise/accept their possible self-stimulatory behaviour.

Motor Skills/ Dance

Motor Skills/Dance

One of the traits on the autism spectrum is difficulty processing motor skills/movement. This does not automatically mean the autistic creative is unable to do the choreography or movement piece – It just needs to be made more accessible and equitable. This can mean a variation of choreography but often times is as simple as allowing more time to the autistic creative to process the movement from mind to body.

Access:

Ways to make a dance/Movement call more accessible:

1. Provide a choreography early in video format.
2. Allow the creative to listen to the soundtrack before learning the movement or before attending the audition to see if the music is suitable for them with stimulation sensory issues and to allow cognitive processing of the beats and track.
3. In large dance calls/open calls allow for noise cancellation headphones to avoid over stimulation. Allow for darkened glasses if requested due to bright lights in studios.
4. Be direct in your communication of the choreography.
5. Position the creative at the end of the

front row so they are closest to the teacher and not caged in with other performers. Also allow them space if requested.

6. Where possible and if requested see that performer alone.
7. Avoid teaching with your back to the creative so they do not have to reverse the mirror image in their minds.
8. Allow for out loud counting of dance steps and beat tracking (perhaps have a soundtrack available without lyrics)
9. Break down eight counts into smaller more easily processed chunks.
10. Teach without any warmup soundtrack or distraction sounds for processing issues.
11. Be prepared to offer slight alternative steps or adaptations. Avoid teaching two choreographies at once ie: boy/girl.
12. Be approachable for questions and repeats.
13. If a routine requires partner work or touch be sure to check if that is accessible with the creative prior to audition.
14. If fight choreography is required during audition/production check with the creative if that is accessible and teach in smaller blocking chunks if requested

Sensory processing: Costuming/

Sensory processing: Costuming/ Lighting/Sound

Lighting/Sound

Sensory processing/over stimulation to lighting, sound and touch are all common as our senses function on a different level to a neurotypical persons as well as taking in more/less of the environment around us at a different pace: This can manifest uniquely in each individual from discomfort inducing and not limited to physical pain, seizure and nausea to extreme levels of sensory joy. Possibilities are unique to each person and vary greatly as follows amongst others:

1. Difficulty Processing some fabrics and costumes.
2. Difficulty processing some lighting (strobes in particular).
3. Difficulty processing overstimulating bright colours.
4. Difficulty processing loud, sudden or unexpected noises.
5. Difficulty processing certain smells.
6. Difficulty processing certain tastes.
7. Difficulty processing certain temperatures.

Our brains process our senses differently and so physical feelings of pain can occur through sight, sound, texture, smell and taste which can lead to autistic meltdowns/shutdowns. It is also common for Epilepsy to overlap with ASD in some cases.

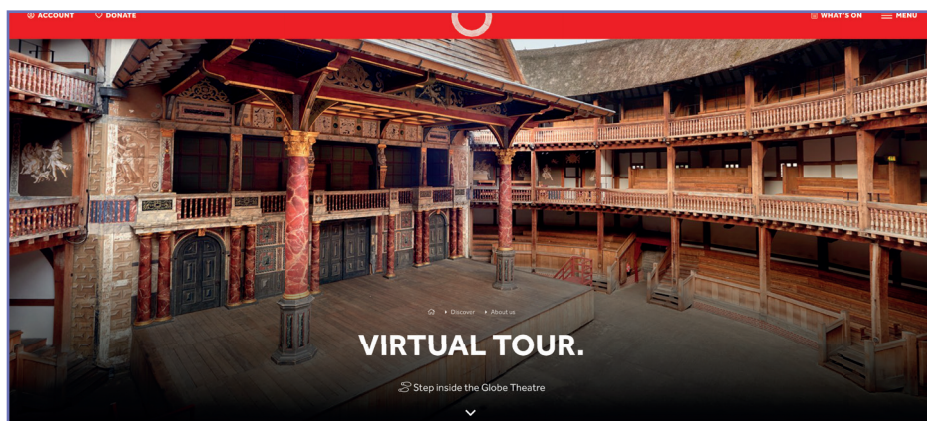
Access

1. Have a conversation with the autistic creative about what/if anything over stimulates them. This is so broad and varied (ranging from none to many in specifics) that it is integral no conclusions are drawn without a conversation. It is impossible for a guide to detail the personal needs of each autistic persons sensory issues. The following list is composed of potential possibilities.
2. Discuss strobe lighting or fast pulsating LED lights. Discuss neon and strong reflective colours.
3. Discuss projection/mapping/special FX
4. Discuss and rehearse sudden/loud sounds in theatre/film.
5. Rehearse sound drills where the creative hears the sound first alone.
6. Trial lighting/sound designs with the creative present and adapt upon them.
7. Be open to an underlayer being worn under costuming concealed from the audience.
8. Be open to variations on costume design including but not limited to less/more body exposure to open air or different fabrics being used.
9. Be open to alternatives to water at their preference being drunk backstage by the creative. Avoid strong smelling foods and perfumes in rehearsall and performance spaces. Any smells/scents used during performances should be discussed.

Familiarity Access

It is not uncommon for an autistic person to need to see the environment they will be working in prior to actually going there. This is sometimes necessary in aid of planning and processing the order of their day and familiarising themselves with a particular setting prior to being required to work in it. The unexpected and the unknown are fairly inaccessible.

1. If requested please provide a draft of the set/location design if the creative cannot physically or has not previously seen the set/location. This mostly applies to film and television but can apply to new theatre productions too. This can be as simple as a draft copy of the design/location or a description of what it will look like.
2. If it is not possible to provide a set/location design or disclose that information to a creative prior to contract be open to giving even a small description. I.e filming will take place in Birmingham roughly twenty minutes outside the city centre with transport links available.



A good example is The Globe, who have a virtual tour of the theatre on their website:
<https://www.shakespearesglobe.com/discover/about-us/virtual-tour/#virtual-tour-online>

Stimming/ Stimulatory Behaviour

Stimming/ Stimulatory behaviour

Stimming of stimulatory behaviour is basically a large burst of energy in our bodies that sits on our chest and brains and suddenly has the urge to come out as a processing aid of the world around us. It's a way of coping with the anxieties and physically processing the environment around us. When we say physical processing – we mean actually processing the environment from brain down to body. These behaviours may look involuntary to you as a fellow performer or director or producer and they may also look distressed. They aren't always distressed - they're vital aids in processing a lot of feelings and thoughts coming out into one physical action. Some stims are really unnoticeable - others are really noticeable. Please don't draw attention to them or see them as disturbing/stressed/uncapable. They're essential bodily processing aids.

Access

Continue your communication as normal with the creative drawing no attention to the stimulatory behaviours they may be displaying. Cast and crew alike should not draw attention, copy, mimic or stare at these behaviours at any time nor should they be actively discouraged. All performance environments should be made to feel safe for the autistic creative to behave and

process as they authentically need to.

Where possible provide a private area the creative can go to if they require/ prefer privacy to stim or simply to process the environment they are in, go over lines or go over what their next task is. These environments may not be necessary however if requested they are integral access needs and a conversation must be had in regards to that. It is understood not all venues and productions can provide such spaces due to size however anything is better than nothing.

Sidenote: Burnouts and meltdowns:

Should an autistic person experience a meltdown or burnout in your work environment allow them space and time away from the work in order to come down from it.

It is perhaps one of the most important parts of this guide to note that as different as we all are – our needs in the situation of burnout/meltdown differ greatly. This is an access conversation that needs to be had including all meltdown trigger points and what to do if they accidentally are hit during audition or production. The idea at large behind this guide is to create work environments where such things do not occur.

Agents

Agents

The relationship between creative and agent is of large importance within our industry. The jobs submitted for via Spotlight and other casting platforms rely on a strong bond between client and agent and a strong understanding on the part of the agent as to the access needs of their client.

Access

1. In meeting with autistic creatives enquire about access for your agency/communication but also for future jobs.
2. Create a list with the client of things they would like to avoid/go for based on their castability and access needs.
3. Understand that your part as an agent requires an understanding of them and their autism. It is never appropriate to go against a clients access needs or comfort zones if they have clearly laid them out to you.
4. Accept that with an autistic client there may well be times where they experience autistic burnout and are not fit to be submitted for jobs and work. This does not make them unstable or unwell – it is part of access. Allow for these periods within your management.
5. Stick to reasonable time frames and turn around times as decided with your client. Even if the job is perfect for said client – it may not be accessible for them to turn around an audition within twenty four hours due to a disruption in their routine.
6. Advocate for your client in terms of access when discussing contracts with production companies. Know their needs well or consider putting them in direct communication with said production company once audition/job is secured.
7. Most importantly – allow for those conversations to be had. There is a huge fear about agents in the autistic creative community and from research and experience – with good reason - surrounding “outing” themselves. Please assist in breaking down that fear and stigma by allowing yourself to uniquely educated on them and their individual needs.

Drama Schools/ Training

Drama Schools/Training

Drama schools hold a lot of importance in getting into the industry and it is integral that those institutions become more accessible to the ASD community. The majority of autistic creatives in the industry didn't have the luxury of drama school training as those spaces were inaccessible to them – it is vastly important we work towards changing that.

1. Be open to email communication or communication prior to audition to allow creative to feel comfortable and ask about their access needs. Run through the proceedings of the day clearly in order to familiarise the creative what to expect and aid in processing and be adaptable to their access needs.
2. Lay out clear timelines as to when they can expect to hear back from their audition as well as clear audition breakdowns.
3. Apply previous guidelines surrounding movement/dance calls where necessary or requested.
4. Apply previous guidelines with Access
5. Many drama schools already provide the option to state disability upon application – that option needs to be there for access.
6. Specifics on what kind of monologue or dance material you're looking for.
7. See the auditionee privately if possible and upon their request.
8. Inform the auditionee what kind of clothes/what they need to bring to the audition and if there is a space for them to change.
9. Allow for a space where possible for the auditionee to be alone (see stimulating section).
10. If auditionee is accepted run through housing/funding options with them and what it is they can expect from your school.

Touring

Access

Please discuss with the creative before assuming any of the following access suggestions need to be met:

- Discuss how the creative is to get from venue to venue and if there is any way you can assist with that. I.e booking travel on their behalf. They may or may not need this.
- Discuss all dates and locations with creative.
- When booking travel discuss with creative if it is more accessible to them to have all travel arrangements upfront or individually broken down and dispatched for each leg of the tour.
- The same goes for booking hotels or accommodations, ask if it is more accessible for them to have that information upfront or in chunks only when needed.
- With hotels and accommodations allow for the creative to have their own room wherever possible.
- If requested provide hotel information including photos, maps, addresses and links to the accommodation websites where ever possible so that the creative can check them out themselves with software like Google street view.
- Outline how far away from the venue accommodation will be and how it is best to get to the work location. (The closer the better).
- Ask if the creative has any access needs specifically centred around accommodation. I.e.: Specific bathroom requirements.
- Allow for creative to potentially bring more luggage with them than expected to allow for self-stimulatory objects to be brought, replacement bedding (should the accommodation bedding provide a sensory issue) and lighting (small plug in lamps) should the lighting in the accommodation be over stimulating.
- If requested and if possible allow the creative to arrive at the work location at an earlier time that is suitable to them. It is often the case specifically with theatre that the gap between sign in and performance are not long enough to allow for processing. If possible request that the creative can go to the theatre greenroom earlier than the rest of the cast. This also aids the creative in time management issues. It is far more likely to an autistic creative to be early than late. Naturally it is never appropriate to be late for a performance.
- If requested familiarise creative with tour staff prior to touring.
- If requested: Please provide the theatre or location staff with the creatives access needs. This can be done via the creative themselves if they wish to i.e. a discussion with the stage manager themselves OR a discussion by the production on their behalf should they prefer. With constantly changing venues it is integral each venue can meet the performers access needs.
- Provide this guide to each venue and outline which areas of it are of relevance with the creatives permission OR alternatively the creative themselves can provide a document that is tailored to them.

Deciding if we're right for a job with our autism

When it comes to talent, look, height, acting delivery etc that is all your call and we

respect your decision as professionals in that manner. We are very aware that there are many jobs we are entirely wrong for and those include jobs centred around autistic characters. That is the industry we are in and we entirely understand that concept. Please don't misunderstand or misjudge our actual ability. Please have faith that if you like what you saw our autism isn't a reason to not hire us. If we auditioned and came to see you it's because we feel that we can do it and we feel we can take on the demands the job entails – if those details are not yet available we may ask for them to be disclosed before accepting a job offer. Please don't decide that our autism is going to cause us stress or difficulty in this job etc. That is something entirely for us to decide. We are professionals - many of us highly trained - we know ourselves better than anyone else could and we don't need those decisions made for us. What we need is a space to be ourselves and feel safe. Conversations surrounding access must be had. Some autistic people will require no access needs met, others will require multiple, it is integral to have those conversations on a person first basis. One of the major goals of this guide is to provide enough of an education on autism that the community feel safe to disclose their access needs – something we do not presently feel.

Please let autistic artists know they didn't get the job

This is a tough one that sounds again like we're asking for more when in fact we're asking for fair. Most people can process that not hearing from a professional means we didn't get the job. Sadly - with some autistic people those two things don't always connect on processing standpoint. We may be holding out to hear from you because in our minds silence means maybe and maybe

isn't a concept we're often very good at. Our minds often work in binary a lot and on a yes/no format. A no may take you a couple of extra moments out of your day as a director and we appreciate that effort to tell us no. Unlike some people who can move on without an answer – we can struggle mentally with that a lot. A no is far kinder to our position than a silence. We accept no as well as we accept yes because although one connotes bad news and one good - they both connote absolutes - something most of us work entirely in.

Telling an autistic creative they got the job

It is important to understand that communication issues may affect all areas of an autistic creatives communication including positive reactions. If a response to a job seems either overly excited, entirely underwhelmed, entirely overwhelmed or even stressed those things do not necessarily connect directly to how the autistic creative is feeling or their willingness to take the job or their ability to do the job. Normalise a difference in communication for the positive as much as the negative.

Asking an autistic person who got the job or is present if they think there's anything that can be done to help them with access

Please feel free to ask us about our autism - that is ultimately the goal of this guide. We want to tell you. We want to make this process as streamlined as it possibly can be for you and for us. Always ask permission to inquire about a person's autism first but many of us are willing to tell you. Also feel free to say why our suggestions or questions don't quite work within the project for practical

reasons such as space, time, budget. We're going to appreciate those things and process them a lot better if they're explained - not all suggestions will work and we understand that but we do need to get to a place where we can make access suggestions and them be taken seriously and accommodated where ever physically possible.

Remember every autistic artist is different and is operating differently. Some of us may not need anything made more accessible - but some of us might.

On stage and off stage differences

It is not uncommon for an autistic creative to appear different in a production setting on stage or in front of the camera than not. This does not mean the autism is "gone" or missing in those moments. Acting and creating for some dilutes autistic behaviours as the task or character becomes embodied. We are after all actors and very good ones at that due to a history of masking our autism to blend into neurotypical society. Many of us do this every day and have even been conditioned to do so. Stimming may decrease and the appearance of "Neurotypical" may often be presented during acting and creating. This is because acting for many of us provides a way as previously stated of embodying a different person and a different world as it does for any other actor. It also aids in processing. When giving direction or communication please remember that though the actor may be "masking" as neurotypical for the part, they are still autistic and their access needs still stand.

Outside of the workplace it is not uncommon for social situations to arise (even within the workplace such as press nights etc). Please do not force or peer pressure autistic creatives into situations outside of the work place they

do not wish to take part in. Access needs can be met on set and in a rehearsal room with a cast – but they cannot always be met in the outside world of clubs, bars and social events. Trust in the creative to know their own comfort levels and do not push them on it.

Difference isn't less

Difference isn't less nor is it more. It is different. We don't want more nor do we want less, we want equity. We want fair. Difference doesn't mean incapable. Difference doesn't mean stressed or unstable. Difference doesn't mean liability or lazy. Difference means difference.

Why should I hire an autistic actor specifically for an autistic role?

1. Acting is acting but until autistic actors are given the same equal platform as everyone else - the parts designed best for us should go to us. Until we can list theatre stars and film stars by the bucket load who're autistic we really should be giving the people who know the topic matter through lived experience the best the chance to show it and represent it to our wider community and yours.
2. Nobody can mimic autism as well as an autistic person can. It is simply a biological impossibility that a neurotypical brain can process an Autistic or Neurodiverse thought pattern.
3. Casting non diversely for these roles often leads to negative and misinformed stereotypes that further feed back into general society creating the wrong idea about autism.
4. Not hiring us in roles about us keeps autistic actors out of work more so than needed and adds to the large 78% unemployment demographic for the autistic community across all sectors

(Data from office of national statistics)

5. Your project about autism will shine so much brighter for actually involving autism.
6. We're equally as talented as other actors, we're just not given the same chances.
7. If you believe your project about autism isn't accessible to autistic actors you have to ask yourself if you're really creating a positive project or a misinterpretation of a disability. If your film/play is about autism and yet the hundreds of autistic artists that come forward to you are not able to do the task.. Is your show really about autism?
8. Your voice is very valid in all that concerns you - but it isn't valid in all that doesn't. We need to strip back this idea that non minority groups can "Speak for" minority groups and that their words are equally valid. They are simply not more valid. We don't need speaking for - we need to speak. Speaking doesn't always mean with words, it can mean with writing, directing, acting, mime, dance. Speaking is with the purest energy whatever makes you authentically you.

It is never appropriate but often done to place a puppet or dummy in place of an autistic actor in these roles. Please refrain from this deeply insulting and troublesome loophole in production.

Pushing it further than autistic roles

There are many roles that are not necessarily autistic roles but are for example: Dance, non speaking roles, or even puppetry that could involve a larger amount of autistic talent with diverse access needs. These roles need to be

open to the nonspeaking autistic community. Why not give them the opportunity to be involved in your silent theatre or film project because communication without words is something they know so well and are so good at? Autistic people have access to a lot of worlds that neurotypical people do not so in turn - we have access to creating really vibrant art with that even if the plot/character isn't directly centred around autism.

A minority within a minority/ Intersectionality

Autism is not specific to any race, gender, religion or sexuality. It can also be accompanied by other disabilities. It is vastly important as we move toward more narratives focusing on Black, POC, LGBTQ+, Trans stories that the disabled and autistic communities are not forgotten in those spaces. Disability can be intersectional as much as it can't. The default for autism has long been "Straight white male". This is simply a myth and we need to actively encourage more disabled stories from minority groups and diverse racial backgrounds going forward.

Autism but not the focal point.

Roles where the character is just autistic by chance need to be introduced more. Where autism isn't the talking point. It isn't the driving force of the plot. Similarly we should not be vetting the content autistic actors perform in terms of genre i.e. Horror or scenes involving sex. It is common that the topic matter and the roles specifically for autistic people shy away from anything that is considered taboo or adult. This is infantilizing. As long as the story is dealing with autism correctly or the autistic actor is comfortable there is no reason why an autistic character can't be a central love interest with adult scenes or take part in a horror movie narrative. This was done

exceptionally with a deaf actor in “A Quiet Place” in 2018 and wonderfully by autistic actor Sir Antony Hopkins in “The Silence Of The Lambs” 1991.

Terminology

All terminology is subject to the autistic person you are with/employing. Their preference matters above all however there are some suggestions of what not to use vs what is more appropriate by the community at large:

NO

- High Low Functioning Autism
- Person With Autism
- Suffers From Autism
- Differently Abled
- Special Abilities
- Special Needs
- The R Word
- Specially abled
- Any alternative way of saying disabled.
- Any slur or comparison to popular culture autistic characters ie: Rainman.
- Mute/Speechless
- Mental Health (Autism is not a mental health condition. Mental health is vastly valid and important and can intersect but do not assume an autistic person also has any mental health conditions)

Any language that insinuates or links to spectrum or mental health disorders ie: describing the weather as bipolar or using autism or any other condition as an adjective. “I’m very OCD about ____” etc is simply not ok language in any environment.

YES

- Autistic Person
- Disabled
- Stimming (or to stim)
- Autistic Meltdown

- Sensory Overload
- Autistic Burnout
- Motor issues
- Language processing
- Executive function
- Process
- Non – Verbal, Non Speaking.
[Dependant on individuals preference]
- Access needs

But maybe check first.

- Asperger’s Syndrome (Many still identify with this term – it is however no longer used or diagnosed professionally by the NHS or otherwise due to the dark historical and anti-Semitic connotations of Doctor Hans Asperger).
- Neurodiverse (This is totally acceptable but it is a wide field covering lots of different disabilities. They can often overlap. If a person speaks of themselves as just autistic – It is best to use just that)
- Atypical NAtypical (Personal preference)

It is never appropriate to ask for proof of medical diagnosis of any neurodiverse condition for a multitude of reasons from the very simple privacy element through to the fact that many ND people are not officially diagnosed through difficulty accessing the systems but have diagnosed themselves where those systems failed them.

ALL INFORMATION IN THIS GUIDE ACTS AS A FOUNDATION FOR UNDERSTANDING. PLEASE APPROACH AUTISTIC PEOPLE YOU WORK WITH BEFORE ASSUMING THEY NEED ANY THESE ADAPTATIONS MADE.

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