

National Autistic Society

Know yourself series



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Welcome

Welcome to the **moving forward** guide from our **Know yourself series**. This guide will explore how to approach transitions, independent living and adult responsibilities to help you in life **moving forward**.

All the videos and guides in the *Know yourself* series are written and led by autistic people. We know it's so important for young autistic people to see and hear information from other autistic people, as this can help you learn from other people's experiences.

If you haven't already seen the first five episodes in the series, you can watch them all and access more resources at autism.org.uk/KnowYourself

To go with this guide, here is a short video of five young autistic people giving their perspectives on growing up and **moving forward**:



Watch our 'Moving forward' video

Introduction

Within this series so far, we have explored:

1. **Understanding yourself.**
2. **Energy accounting.**
3. **Exploring your identity.**
4. **Setting yourself up for success.**
5. **Understanding others.**

These are all available at autism.org.uk/knowyourself

This guide is here to help you think about how to prepare for life transitions, becoming an independent adult and keeping up with life's demands in manageable ways. It goes beyond your teen years and into what you can begin to expect and need to consider as you become a young adult.

Self-awareness

Understanding yourself is incredibly important as an autistic person, and often the first step to building independence. If you haven't already, we recommend exploring the first guide in the **Know yourself series** on [understanding yourself](#).

Understanding how you are similar and/or different to other people can help you navigate the world more easily. Having a good understanding of your needs will likely be helpful when it comes to thinking about things like how other people can best support you and how you can best support yourself.



“Identity is one of the most important aspects of being human. It is a sense of self, the little puzzle pieces that make us who we are... Identity plays an incredibly significant part in how we see, interact with, understand and experience the world around us, as well as shaping the challenges we face and the opportunities we have.”

Chloé Hayden, 2022

Why do I need to understand myself?

Understanding yourself can help with feeling better about yourself and help you to make decisions about what you want to do.

For example, knowing:

- **your strengths** and what you are good at can help you decide what you want to do in life
- **what makes you anxious** and how you need other people to communicate with you can help you build honest connections with others and avoid miscommunications
- **what planning you need** to do or what sensory things might be useful can help you tackle new environments and avoid unpleasant ones.



Understanding yourself is a lifelong process because your situation and needs can change over time. This process can help you to build the life you want and set realistic and achievable goals for yourself.

Self-care is also a vital skill to learn as an adult, and the best way to look after yourself is to know and accept yourself for who you are. We will talk more about self-care in this guide.

Being autistic

Experiencing the world differently from non-autistic people has positives and negatives. The better you understand yourself, the more you can play to your strengths, and the easier it is to adapt when you are faced with challenges.

Other people may not always understand autism or your specific needs, so understanding yourself better will help you to express your needs, manage them yourself and get the right support when necessary.

Remember, accepting support is never a sign of weakness. Sometimes, it's hard to feel different and ask for support with things other people seem to manage okay. Asking for help or doing things differently despite being scared or unsure shows strength. Don't let the fear of judgement, which doesn't always happen, stop you from living life on your terms.



“For me, there is nothing wrong or bad about being autistic... I can take my glasses off, but I can’t take my autism off. I can dye my hair another colour, but I can’t change that I’m autistic. Recognising that autism isn’t a bad thing changed everything for me.”

Sarah O'Brien, 2023



“Working out what things are trickier for me because of my sensory issues has helped me to understand how to adapt my environment to suit me better. This means I can work for longer without getting overwhelmed. Understanding that my needs fluctuate is also very important for me, it allows me to have self-compassion when I can’t manage something that I can usually cope okay with.”

Phil Wroe, 2024

Moving forward - transitions

Moving to a new school or college, leaving education, starting a job or leaving home are all major life changes that can be difficult and overwhelming. Alongside this, getting used to new environments, different people and routines can be especially challenging for some autistic people.

What might help with transitions?



Visual supports

Could you get pictures or virtual tours of what to expect eg school building, work office, lunch room, teachers or managers?



Planners and diaries

Knowing when events are happening or what is happening next in your day or month can help you plan and use energy accounting so you don't become overwhelmed.



Preparation

New routines can be anxiety-provoking. Practicing a new routine before you need to follow it can help. This is because practice makes things familiar and helps with knowing what to expect. For example, this might be trying out a new route before you need to take it, practicing packing your bag or trying on your uniform. When you practice a new routine, you can also involve a friend or an adult who can explain things and help you with the process.



“Preparation is everything to me. I like to have a couple of back up plans as well in case something goes wrong. I know that if I prepare well I am less likely to be stressed. If I’m going to a new place I always check out the route on the internet first and do a ‘drive through’. This enables me to notice things along the route so that when I am actually driving I recognise places and know I’m going the right way.”

Autistic adult, 2023



Chat to a trusted adult

If you are anxious and need to understand how something works or what the social expectations might be, you can ask a trusted adult, like a parent or teacher. Doing this can give you some extra insight, help lower your anxiety levels and help you feel safe.



“When I’m struggling, I like to chat to my aunty who is autistic. She seems to understand what I am struggling with and can help explain other people’s behaviour when I can’t work out what is going on. She’s like an autistic mentor, and it really helps.”

Neurodivergent teenager, 2024

Adult responsibilities

Understanding yourself as an autistic adult can mean you will be able to put into place some simple tools and strategies to support you with adult life.

Moving into adulthood can feel very daunting, but it isn't a sudden switch. Instead, there is a gradual increase in responsibilities and expectations. You can learn little by little as you go, and this guide will explore some of the things you might encounter as an adult.

As you get older, you may want to become more independent. Here are some things you might want to think about:



Household tasks

Managing money

Self care

[Watch the video on 'Moving forward'](#) in the *Know yourself* series to hear autistic young people discussing the parts of moving into adulthood they found challenging and some of the ways they support themselves.



Do you openly share about being autistic with others?

ANDY

When I was first diagnosed, I told everyone I was autistic



When it came to things like relationships and intimacy,

NELLIE



I have to energy account based on what I have to do

Independent living

Household tasks like doing your food shopping, cleaning and home maintenance are all responsibilities you may have as an adult.

Many people struggle to juggle all of life's commitments and household responsibilities. It can be challenging to have enough energy left to do it, motivate yourself or find enjoyment in completing independent living tasks.

Challenges with planning can make this even harder for an autistic adult to manage. Autistic people may struggle with daily organising and planning, especially for less favoured tasks, such as housework or life-based admin tasks like paying bills.

Here are some strategies that autistic people have found helped them:

- to do lists (paper or tech)
- reminders (smart speakers or mobile reminders)
- apps or AI (eg Sweepy, a chores app)
- people to remind you (support networks)
- schedules (choosing set days for set housework can help)
- online shopping/home delivery
- personal and hygiene care apps (eg Finch, a self-care app)
- mental health support app (eg Headspace, a meditation and sleep app)
- make tasks enjoyable (eg listening to your favourite music/audiobook while cleaning).



Reduce the steps

Some autistic people have shared that reducing the number of steps involved in less preferred tasks can help make the tasks more achievable.

Meal planning

You might enjoy cooking, but planning, getting a recipe and going to the shops for ingredients might make it too much of a task. You could split each of these steps on different days to make it more manageable or cook a small selection of healthy recipes to create a cooking routine, making it easier to cook the same things regularly.

There are also online cooking boxes that you can order where recipes and ingredients are delivered to your door to reduce the number of steps needed to reach the cooking stage – this lets you just cook the meal.



“I set up lots of routines and try and force my brain to remember to organise, plan and then cook, but it only lasts so long. What works for me is buying in pre-made dinners, it may appear to cost more but I waste less so its cheaper than buying ingredients just to bin them and buy takeaway food.”

Rachel, 2024

Laundry

Laundry can be a daunting task and one that seems to never stop.

There are lots of different strategies to support the potential overwhelm with this task. Here are some strategies autistic people have shared:

Wash all clothes together on a cold wash to avoid having to separate.

Have a basket for clean clothes. It doesn't all need to be put away in one go.


Decide which clothes need to be ironed and which don't, or buy non-iron clothes

Tumble drying can help reduce any need for ironing.

Cleaning and tidying your home

People have different needs when it comes to their environment and how clear, tidy or organised this is. Some people can only function in a well-organised and tidy environment. Others don't have the same need and are okay with their environment being less tidy. Some people have more time to invest in cleaning and organising while others have less. Some people might hire in support or be supported by carers in this task.

There is no right way to have your home, as long as it is comfortable for you. However, you should try to ensure your house is not dirty, as this risks germs and ill health. For example, keeping your kitchen and bathroom hygienic is important, as this will minimise the chances of germs spreading. Many people use strategies like the ones on the next page to support themselves, but find what works best for you.



Create a visual plan
for what tasks need
doing and when.

Have a spare
washing up bowl to
keep used pots and
cutlery in. Then wash
them all up at the end
of the day.

Have small bins
around the house.
Empty all when
one is full.

Remember to be kind to yourself! Try not to compare yourself to other people or judge yourself by their standards.

Managing money

You might be naturally good with money or struggle to save anything, but as you become a more independent adult, learning to budget and plan with your money can sometimes feel overwhelming.

Saving your money or planning how much money you need for each thing you want can help you learn the skills of saving and budgeting for later in life.

It is important to have a bank account to keep your money safe and learn some money safety guidance.

The National Autistic Society has a **free** online course created by autistic people called **'Managing money'**. This course has lots of information on the challenges you may come across and gives strategies on how you might like to manage your money as you grow older.

The course includes:

- **Banking and savings**
 - bank accounts, using cards, banking security
- **Reasonable expenditure**
 - budgeting, paying bills, getting the best deal
- **Debt**
 - why people get into debt, impulse buying and what you can do if you are worried about the money you owe.

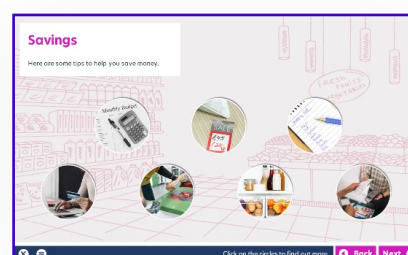
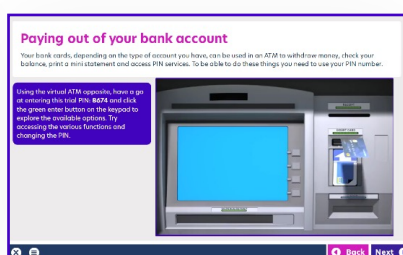
Budgeting

Using a spreadsheet allows you to keep track of how much money you have and where you are spending your money. The example provided here shows a single budgeting set up. You can use this example or create your own to fit your needs.

Here is a basic example of a budget. Click **here** to open a blank spreadsheet to create your own.

INCOME MONTHLY: £	OUTGOINGS MONTHLY: £	REMAINING BALANCE: £
Part time job: 900	Rent: 350	Total - Total Income - Total Outgoings: 400
Benefits: 300	Food: 250	
	Railcard: 30	
	Electricity: 80	
	Pet insurance: 15	
	Mobile: 20	
	Internet & phone: 20	
	Car insurance: 20	
	Charity Giving: 5	
Total: 1200	Total: 800	Total: 400

When you are ready, click **Next** to continue. [Back](#) [Next](#)



Available at autism.org.uk/managing-money

There are lots of ways to manage your money, but here are some other ideas from autistic adults:



Important things to be aware of when managing money

Scammers may attempt to trick you by impersonating a trusted organisation like your bank, a delivery company or HMRC. Scams can happen over the phone, on social media, in person or even through secure messaging apps.

It's helpful to be aware and never give out your personal information or bank details over an unexpected message or call. Scammers often create a sense of urgency to rush and panic you – this is a sure sign that they are criminals. Always stop and think, 'Is this real or a scam?' before sharing your personal information or sending money. We'll talk more about keeping safe later in this guide.

Self-care

Self-care is about self-regulating, feeling empowered and understanding your personal needs and boundaries.

Here are some reminders of some of the things that might help you:

Managing sensory sensitivities

Understanding your sensory likes, preferences, needs and stressors will allow you to learn and use more supportive tools and items to help you feel calm and happy.



Hobbies and intense interests:

Immerse yourself in your passions when you can – don't underestimate how important your hobbies are for keeping you regulated.

Creating structure:

Think about developing a routine and setting specific times or days of the week for certain activities – for example, hygiene routines or housework. It can also be helpful to schedule a 'reward' after these tasks, such as spending time doing something you enjoy.



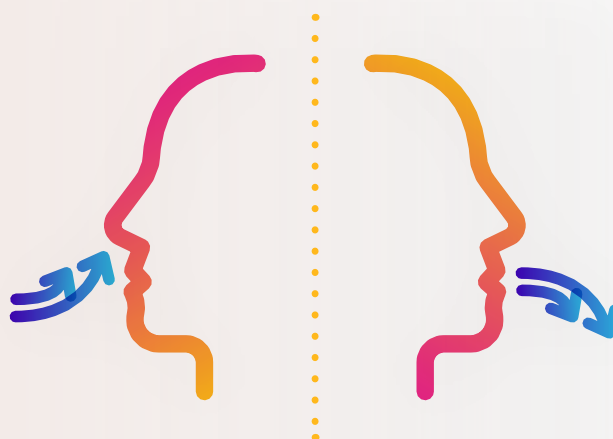
Taking breaks:

Take short breaks throughout the day to keep your energy levels up. Also, don't be worried about asking friends and family for time alone! Autistic people often need more time alone to decompress after work or a day at college. Explaining this to your friends can help them understand and support you more.

Mindfulness activities:

Mindfulness activities such as yoga, grounding exercises and controlled breathing can all be helpful during stressful or anxiety-filled times.

'Interoception' is the awareness of our bodies or internal states, and autistic people can sometimes struggle to interpret and regulate the physical signs of stress like a racing heart or tightness in your chest. These exercises help calm your body's response to stress, which may not be as obvious but plays a huge part in regulating your nervous system.



Taking care of your body:

This can include taking care of your appearance and personal hygiene. It's really important to do this as otherwise, you might end up smelling bad without realising - and not everyone will tell you this.

If you find some personal hygiene tasks especially difficult, it's good to think about creating routines to help you remember to do it. You can also think about any sensory sensitivities you have to try and find alternative ways of doing things or using products you like.

When showering or bathing, it can help to try:

- using timers for how long you spend in there
- sensitive or unscented soaps or body wash
- wet wipes or body wipes as an alternative way of washing.

When brushing your teeth, it can help to try electric toothbrushes, bristles that are softer, alternative to nylon bristles such as polyester filament bristles or toothpaste with different flavours.



Exploring what works for you:

What works for one autistic person may not work for another.

Keeping safe

As you become increasingly independent, it is important you keep yourself safe.

Keeping safe can mean lots of things, including keeping yourself, your information, money, passwords and possessions safe.

Personal and financial information

There are lots of people you shouldn't give your personal information to, including strangers or people you don't know well. Your personal information can include your home address, phone number or passwords.

If you are not sure whether or not it's safe to share information, ask a trusted adult like a parent or teacher.

It is important to understand money safety and the rules about sharing financial information with other people.



“I didn’t realise that you can give someone your bank account number and sort code safely, but you should never reveal the long card number on the front of the card. I only found out when I sent someone a photo of my bank card so that they could transfer me some money - luckily it was a family member!”

Autistic teenager, 2023

In-person safety

- don't go to someone else's home that you don't know well without a trusted friend, parent or guardian knowing
- don't invite people that you don't know into your home
- Ask for ID from professionals coming to your door.

The above points are even more important when you are alone.

If you are out at night and you are alone, stick to well-lit areas and try to go directly to where you are going, always making sure someone knows where you are.

If you are meeting someone else, you can text them to let them know where you are and when they should expect to see you. Alternatively, you can text a trusted person to let them know if you arrived safely.

- > Some mobile phones and apps will let you share your location with other people so they know where you are.

Online safety

You may go online for gaming, social media, shopping, researching, watching videos or other reasons.

Online activities are a great way to socialise and to be in contact with others. There are lots of ways to engage with the online world, which opens up possibilities of finding people with similar interests, talking to people across the world and lots of other positive interactions.

However, online activity can have potential risks.

Being online and able to communicate with so many people can increase the risk of people being taken advantage of or put in danger. Sometimes, people online are not who they say they are and may try to exploit you in some way.

You should always be careful when using online platforms:

Don't share your personal details

with people online, such as your address, family members' names, phone number, passwords or financial information.

Be aware that people are not always who they say they are

- sometimes, people lie about who they are online to trick you into sharing information or doing something that they want from you.

People may pretend to be your friend in order to get you to give them money as a favour, possibly by saying they have an emergency or need help paying fees.

People on gaming platforms may target others for fake in-game items, job offers or account hacking scams to gain passwords, bank details and personal information.

Someone might try to get you to keep your contact with them secret

or ask to meet you on your own - these are high-risk things to do, and you should speak to a trusted adult about them if someone asks you to do this online.

You should never post something online that you wouldn't want everyone to know.

Posting things online that are offensive or abusive could mean you end up in trouble now or in the future. If you wouldn't say it to someone face-to-face, don't say it online. For example, posting these things could cause damage to your relationships or your prospects of getting or keeping a job.



If you are planning on meeting an online friend for the first time, make sure you check it's okay with your parents or another trusted adult beforehand. Let them know where and when you are meeting your friend. If someone asks you to meet up with you without telling anyone, don't go.

Avoid impulse buys. For example, spending money on things you don't need because online adverts entice you – this kind of spending could end up putting you into debt.

Some social media and online adverts are also scams, so always check if a company is trustworthy before making a purchase. If you see something usually very expensive for a much lower price, it's probably fake – don't fall for it, and think if it's real or a scam first.



Asking for support

You might have heard of people talking about needs assessments or reasonable adjustments.

A 'needs assessment' looks at what things might need to be put in place to help you.

'Reasonable adjustments' are changes that other people should make to give you the same access to opportunities that non-autistic people have and to enable you to succeed. Places like schools and workplaces are required to make reasonable adjustments by law. Reasonable adjustments fall under three broad categories:

- **changes to the way people usually do things** eg policies, routines or expectations
- **changes to the physical environment** eg having a quiet area or changing lighting
- **changes by providing auxiliary aids or services** eg assistive technology, fidget toys or a mentorship programme.

For instance:

If someone cannot cope with the noise of the school clock ticking, it would be a reasonable adjustment for the teacher to replace it with a silent clock. This would mean that no student would be left struggling with the noise in this environment.

A workplace might allow someone to start their work earlier or later to avoid a busy bus, which would overwhelm them. This enables the person to get to work more easily and helps them to do their job more effectively.

A support worker might use communication cards with someone who struggles to communicate in times of stress. This helps them manage their overwhelm and reduce the demands of verbal conversation in those moments.



“I started a new job, but often the bus was late or didn’t turn up at all, which really stressed me out. I explained the problem to my boss and they agreed that it didn’t matter if I had to get the next bus, I could just stay a little later to make up for it. This really took the stress away.”

Matt Wroe, 2024

Now that you have access to the whole of the *Know yourself* series, you could consider all of your needs and ask for any adjustments that you think would make things more accessible for you.

Below, you can click on and read our other guides in the *Know yourself* series for lots more information and support ideas:



Summary

Growing up and becoming more independent is something we all have to do, but you don't have to do it alone.

Hopefully, this guide can help you navigate parts of your life as you move forward.

It is okay to feel scared by the uncertainty of growing up and moving forward. Remember, everyone is different and meets their goals at different times. Take your time to find out what you need to live your life in a way that works for you.

Don't judge yourself by unrealistic standards. You might find it useful to look at/ explore the experiences that other autistic people have shared about growing up, including:

- **Siena Castellon** - her book called *The spectrum girl's survival guide: How to grow up awesome and autistic* (written at age 16)
- **Naoki Higashida** - his books called *The reason I jump* (written at age 13) and *Fall down 7 times, get up 8* (written from age 18 to 22)
- **Charlotte Amelia Poe** - their book called *How to be autistic* (written at age 21).

If you want to find more videos, books, blogs and more from autistic people, please look at our [Know yourself other resources](#).





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