

# Capabilities Statement for Social Work with Autistic Adults

## Introduction



Department  
of Health &  
Social Care

This *Capabilities Statement* was made for the Department of Health and Social Care for England

**BASW**  
England

The professional association for  
social work and social workers

It was made by the British Association of Social Workers.



It was co-produced with autistic adults, their family and friends carers.



‘Capabilities’ means something that someone can do.



This statement explains all the things a social worker must be able to do to support autistic adults.



In this statement, we use the term ‘autistic adults’ because that is what people told us they wanted to be called.

## Social work and autism



Autism affects 1-2% of people in the UK.



Autism affects everyone differently.



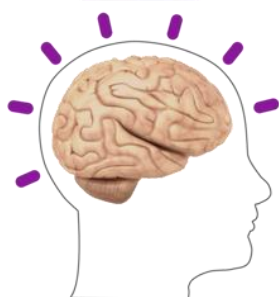
Some autistic adults have difficulty communicating or understanding things.



Some autistic adults might be very good at certain things.



Autistic people often experience sensory issues with things such as touch, hunger or sound.



Many autistic adults also have other medical conditions such as epilepsy, and mental health issues.

Some autistic people also have learning disabilities.



Some autistic people think it is important to have a medical diagnosis, some do not.



Social work with autistic adults is not about whether they are diagnosed or not, it is about meeting peoples' needs and making sure they are included in services.



Social workers can be helpful in connecting people to other services and helping them in the community and in hospitals.



Social workers are also important in supporting autistic adults to have independence.



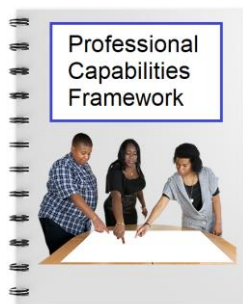
They can also help in preventing crisis.



This capabilities statement talks about the important things social workers need to be able to do to support autistic adults well.



As well as the things in this statement, social workers working with autistic adults must to be able to do all the normal things social workers need to do.



These normal things are explained in a different document called the *Professional Capabilities Framework*.



## How we made this statement



We did lots of research to make this statement. This included:



- Focus Groups and workshops



- Telephone interviews



- Looking at services



A group of autistic adults, carers, social workers, and academics met regularly to direct the project.



## Who is the Capabilities Statement for?



This guide is for anyone who does social work with people with autism.

It will be useful for:



- Autistic adults and their families to know what to expect from social workers.



- Social Workers to know how to do their job well.



- Researchers and academics to help include people in research.



- Local authorities to develop services.

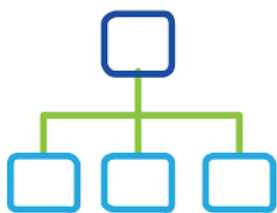


- Managers to support social workers well.

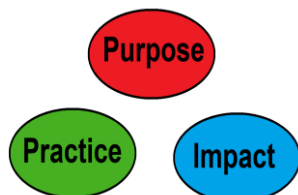


- Teachers to teach social workers well.





## Structure of the Capabilities Statement



The Capabilities Statement is set out in three headings: Purpose, Practice, and Impact.



- **The Purpose** section says how social workers should think about what is right and wrong and how they should deal with peoples' rights.



- **The Practice** section explains the knowledge, skills and thinking ability social workers need to have.



- **The Impact** section talks about how social workers need to be professional, organised and good leaders.

## What people said



Getting the right help at the right time  
is important

If you've met one autistic person, you've met one  
autistic person (therefore do not generalise)



All behaviour is communication

A social worker who doesn't understand autism can be  
damaging as they don't understand autism...Referrals  
should mention that you are an autistic person so that  
you can receive support from specialist social worker.



I am autistic, I do not have autism



Being an autistic adult is like a children's shape  
sorted - you're being forced into holes which you  
do not fit in

## The Capabilities



These are all the capabilities that a social worker should have to work with an autistic adult:

### Purpose



**Recognising individuals' strengths and helping them be the best they can**



Social workers should:

- Make sure the autistic adult is at the centre of what they do
- Understand strengths-based approaches to social work
- Focus on what individuals can do





## Supporting the human rights and dignity of autistic adults

Social workers should:

- Understand how the Care Act 'right to assessment' affects autistic adults and know about human rights laws
- Understand the discrimination autistic adults might face
- Listen to autistic adults because they are 'experts' about their needs and the barriers they face



## Making sure people have a choice and can speak up for themselves

Social Workers should:

- Understand different ways to help people speak up for themselves





- Promote self-advocacy to help people speak up for themselves and what they want



- Understand the Equality Act 2010 and other laws to challenge and discrimination

## Practice



### Understanding autism and other medical conditions



Social workers should:

- Work with people to understand how being autistic impacts them every day



- Get the right training to make sure they know about autism and other conditions



- Understand that not all adults who seem like they have autism will have or want a medical diagnosis



### Working with people in a way that creates a positive relationship

Social workers should:

- Make sure they don't make people anxious when they visit them

For example by writing ahead of their visit, being on time, and respecting their needs



- Be professional and think about how the way they act can create a good relationship with people



- Asking autistic adults, their family and carers if they are doing a good job





## Checking on and planning peoples care



Social workers should:

- Make sure they are good at working in a way they helps people use their strengths and have a good relationship with their support worker



- Support the autistic adult prepare for assessments by telling them what it will be about



- Make sure people's care plans include their rights



## Responding to sensory and communication needs



Social workers should:

- Include the sensory needs of autistic adults in their assessments



- Understand the way people like to communicate



## Working together and co-production



Social workers should

- Think about what co-production means and how they can use it to work together



- Make sure people are included in planning their care



## Supporting people to make decisions for themselves



Social workers should:

- Understand the *Liberty Protection Safeguards* and how they work with other laws

These are rules to make sure people can make their own decisions if they can



- Assume that autistic adults can make their own decisions and help make sure they can



- Make a plan that says what the person wants and any times when they may not be able to make decisions





## Helping people stay healthy



Social workers should:

- Understand why autistic adults might be less healthy



- Help autistic people to get their rights to medical care like everyone else



- Speak up for people to make sure they get the best health care



## Knowing how to keep people safe



Social workers should:

- Understand the laws about keeping people safe and how they all work



- Make sure they have the skills to help people be safe in lots of different places



## Understanding and applying the law

Social workers should:

- Understand the Care Act 2014, the Mental Capacity Act 2005, the Mental Health Act 1983, and the Autism Act 2009



- Update their knowledge of the law through regular learning



- Think about how the law works with values to improve social work



## Helping autistic adults plan for changes in their lives



Social workers should:

- Understand the rules about the change from childhood to adulthood  
This includes the Children and Families Act 2014, the Care Act 2014 and the Mental Capacity Act 2005





- Understand how life changes affect people and make sure planning for these changes is person centred



- Speak up if they don't think people are getting good enough support



### Supporting family and friends' carers



Social Workers should:

- Understand and use the law to support carers



- Work with family, friends, and carers of autistic adults to have a good, trusting relationship.



- Provide information about money, decisions and care in a way that people can understand



## Supporting parenting



Social workers should:

- Understand what the laws say about 'parental responsibility' and what rights autistic parents have



- Take time to get to know how autism affects people's ability to parent and make sure they have any adjustments or support they need

## Impact



## Being a good leader and working with other organisations



Social workers should:

- Understand their local autism services and how people can access services



- Work with people and professionals to tell the people in charge if anyone cannot access services



## Preventing crises and behaviour that challenges



Social workers should:

- Create care plans using the guidelines in the Capabilities Statement



- Work with autistic adults and their carers to prevent crises and/or behaviour that challenges.



- Have a crisis plan for each person



## Being responsible for your learning



Social workers should:

- Meet with their boss often to talk about how they can do their jobs better
- Think about how being a social worker gives them power, and use that power to help others

