

**Autism Peer Support Worker Curriculum**



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We work with partners to plan, recruit, educate and train the health workforce.

Contents

**Introduction 4**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | **1** |
| 1.1 |
| 1.2 |
| 1.3 |
| 1.4 |
|  | **2** |
| 2.1 |
| 2.2 |
| 2.3 |
| 2.4 |
| 2.5 |
| 2.6 |
| 2.7 |
| 2.8 |
| 2.9 |
| 2.10 |
| 2.11 |
|  | **3** |
| 3.1 |
| 3.2 |
| 3.3 |

Relationship between the curriculum and the

capability framework **4**

Principles of the curriculum **5**

Outline structure of the curriculum **6**

Knowledge for autism peer support workers curriculum -

Learning and teaching strategy **7**

**Underpinning understanding and knowledge 8**

Underpinning understanding and knowledge for peer

support workers **8**

Knowledge of autism, its history, and its key aspects **9**

Communication **11**

Sensory processing and the environment **12**

Mental health and wellbeing **13**

Knowledge of health issues more prevalent in the autistic population **14**

Knowledge of local services and sources of autism support **16**

Knowledge of professional, legal, ethical, local and government policy frameworks for Peer Support Workers **17**

Knowledge of, and ability to work with, issues of

confidentiality, consent, and information sharing **18**

Knowledge of safeguarding procedures **20**

Knowledge of self-harm and suicide prevention, and

procedures for maintaining safety **21**

**Core Relational Skills 22**

Enable choice, control, and empowerment **22**

Ability to draw on and share lived experience **23**

Ability to develop and maintain a mutual and reciprocal

peer relationship **24**

Ability to engage and support families and carers **26**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | 3.4 |
| 3.5 |
| 3.6 |
|  | **4** |
| 4.1 |
| 4.2 |
| 4.3 |
| 4.4 |
| 4.5 |
| 4.6 |
| 4.7 |
| 4.8 |
| 4.9 |
| 4.10 |
| 4.11 |
|  | **5** |
| 5.1 |
| 5.2 |
| 5.3 |
| 5.4 |
| 5.5 |
| 5.6 |
| 5.7 |
| 5.8 |

Ability to use active listening and communication skills in

a peer relationship **27**

Ability to work with difference **29**

**Working in partnership- supporting people as an 31**

**autism peer support worker**

Ability to support personal autonomy and independence **31**

Ability to help people engage in activities that are meaningful

to them **33**

Ability to help people develop coping and problem-solving skills **34**

Ability to collaboratively discuss support options **35**

Ability to contribute to co-production of individual

support plans **36**

Ability to facilitate access to sources of support **37**

Ability to support transitions in support **38**

Ability to contribute to a team **39**

Ability to work with other organisations and services **41**

Ability to offer a personalised perspective **42**

Ability to promote the rights of autistic people being supported **43**

**Additional skills, areas of awareness and signposting 44**

Ability to work with people in groups **45**

Ability to support people’s use of digital interventions **46**

Understanding and working with conditions that affect autistic people: Mental Health **47**

Understanding and working with conditions that affect autistic people: Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) **48**

Understanding and working with conditions that affect autistic people: Other neurodevelopmental conditions **49**

Understanding and working with conditions that affect autistic people: Problems with sleeping (insomnia and non-restorative **50**

sleep)

Understanding and working with conditions that affect autistic people: Learning disabilities **51**

Understanding and working with conditions that affect autistic people: Common co-occurring health issues **52**



## Relationship between the curriculum and the capability framework



**1. Introduction**

The curriculum is closely mapped to the capability framework which provides a detailed account of the knowledge and skills associated with models of autism peer support. At the heart of the curriculum lies an explicit emphasis on the development of autism peer support workers skills and capabilities for lifelong learning.

The aim of this curriculum is to support the training of the autism peer support worker to deliver high-quality, effective support for autistic people. The curriculum is a structure tool for trainers to layer up knowledge of the capabilities and how to use them. It provides a sequence of how to deliver the capability framework. This curriculum is based on intended learning outcomes aligned to the capabilities which set out how the learning outcomes are to be achieved. This enables autism peer support workers to identify the knowledge and skills required to develop and demonstrate proficiency in the capabilities in the overall curriculum learning outcomes.

**4 V02 07-2022**

**1** continued



## Principles of the curriculum

Curriculum principles are the values reflected by autism peer support. Core to autism peer support roles is the value that is placed on the use of lived experience of autism (including the experience of supporting autistic people) and recognition of this as a form of expertise. This means that the areas of knowledge described in the capability framework and curriculum are embedded in an autism peer support workers experience and are therefore applicable to all sections of the curriculum.

These include:

* Equal and trusting relationships underpinned by respect, mutuality, and reciprocity.
* Respecting diversity
* Exercising choice
* Making use of one’s own strengths, skills, and strategies
* Understanding communities
* Working inclusively
* Strengthening connections
* Direct guidance
* Strengths based personalised support



## Outline structure of the curriculum

The curriculum is laid out in five sections, each containing several units. The first section sets out areas of knowledge relevant to autism peer support; the second identifies the core relational skills that lie at the heart of the autism peer support worker role.

The third focuses on working in partnership and contains two areas: supporting people as a peer support worker and working with teams to promote people’s rights. The fourth addresses self-care and support. The final section sets out some optional skills. Autism peer support workers would not be expected to undertake training in all the areas listed in this section but may build up (and so extend) their skills over time.

Underpinning

understanding and knowledge

Additional skills,

areas of awareness and signposting

Units

Core Relational

Skills

Working in

partnership- Supporting people as an autism peer support worker



## Knowledge for autism peer support workers curriculum

**Learning and teaching strategy**

The specific learning and teaching strategy will be decided by the training provider.

An overarching teaching strategy would usually link learning within teaching days and supervised practice and include:

* an emphasis on experiential and skills-based workshops providing students with a strong foundation in the ethos and practice of peer support.
* skills-based competences developed through experiential work and role play.
* use of vignettes and scenario-based learning.
* self-directed study to include general and specific reading, plus reference to online resources.

It is strongly recommended that appropriate supervision with individuals with specific experience of peer support work is integrated with training. This would ensure that supervision is provided by someone with first-hand experience of the types of issues that may arise.

### Usual structure of training

Training is expected to be spread across several days (to facilitate learning between teaching sessions, and to help services to release staff to attend).

### Assessment of competence/training evaluation

Specific details of formative and summative assessments of learning and competence will be for training providers to identify, in part depending on whether and how credits for the programme will be assigned. However, it is assumed that supervision of peer support workers will include direct observation of their practice, in turn affording competence-based feedback, with local arrangements in place to manage any areas of significant concern.



## Underpinning understanding and knowledge for peer support workers

**2. Underpinning understanding and knowledge**

**Aims:** To help peer support workers reflect on the beliefs, values and attitudes associated with peer support, the principles on which peer support is built, and the relevance and value of their own experience.

### Capabilities covered in this unit:

* Ability to understand the values that underpin peer support and how they shape the ways in which peer support workers work with and support people.
* Ability to understand that the peer support role is rooted in the development of an equal and trusting relationship, characterised by mutuality, reciprocity, and respect.
* Ability to draw on knowledge that peer support is strengths-based and non- directive.
* Ability to draw on experiential knowledge of the principles on which peer support is based:
  + Building safe and trusting relationships based on sharing lived experience of autism and services.
  + Respecting the diversity of each person’s experience, and their particular background or cultural context.
  + ensuring that relationships are built on the values of mutuality and reciprocity.
  + recognising and placing value on peers’ personal experiential knowledge.
  + enabling people who are supported to exercise choice, to make use of their own strengths, skills, and strategies, and to build connections with their families, friends, support networks and wider communities.



## Knowledge of autism, its history and its key aspects

**Aims:** to help autism peer support workers have an overview of what our current understanding of what is meant by the term autism.

### Capabilities covered in this unit:

* **Understanding:** To know basic established facts about autism including, how common it is, that autism is termed “neurodevelopmental” or a “different” developmental route and that it is lifelong. To also be aware that our knowledge and understanding of autism is evolving and that we are still learning. That good understanding will help build and establish trust. Equally, to be aware there are some “false trails” in existence (e.g., unfounded theories about the nature or causes of autism, often promoted via social media and the internet) and that when reading about new or contemporary concepts and ideas, to view these from a critical perspective and to thus consider how they might fit with our established knowledge and beliefs. Also, to be aware of the mandatory training that is being rolled out soon to all healthcare works as part of the “Oliver McGowan initiative.
* **Diagnosis:** To be aware of how an individual may be able to obtain a diagnosis and to be aware of the impact that may have on the individual, depending on when in the person’s lifetime that diagnosis was obtained.
* **Terminology:** Be able to use respectful terminology and avoid use of terminology that may have been acceptable in the past but is not anymore. e.g., do not use references to ‘disorders,’ ‘functioning levels’ etc. except when explaining historic, and now defunct terminology and descriptors.
* **Characteristics:** Understand what common autistic characteristics may look like in real life situations e.g., at home, at work, in the classroom, in care settings, in the community.
* **Acknowledging difference:** Recognise that each autistic person is different and that autistic individuals are as diverse as the rest of the population. That every autistic person has a different combination of traits, different sensory profiles from one another and is unique.
* **Autistic processing:** Be aware of how autistic people may become overwhelmed, need time, and quiet space to process and understand information.
* **Use of language:** Be aware that autistic people often take language literally, so it is important to use clear, unambiguous language. Responding positively when autistic people use direct language and give direct feedback.



* **Body language:** Be aware that body language is not always indicative of individuals feelings and intentions. An autism peer support worker should always ask a person what they think/feel and act on this information rather than making assumptions.
* **Social interaction:** Be aware of some key differences in social interaction e.g., processing time, difficulties with small talk, social rules, understanding and interpreting emotions.
* **Sensory issues:** Understand how sensory issues can impact on autistic people (covered in much more detail later) but especially, don’t touch without consent.
* **Special interests:** Recognise the importance of passionate interests and hobbies.
* **Predictability:** To be aware that autistic people may have a strong preference for routine and familiarity so avoid last minute changes in arrangements and springing surprises.
* **Resources:** Know where to access resources and further information about autism.



## Communication

**Aims:** to be able understand the very significant impact the use of language and mediums of communication can have when building relationships with an autistic person.

### Capabilities covered in this unit:

* **Overview:** Understand that effective communication, in all areas of life, is critical for supporting the autonomy, wellbeing and quality of life of autistic people and continue to support the development of functional communication throughout the lifespan.
* **Non-verbal language:** Understand and promote the role of non-verbal communication e.g., written information (including text and email), signing, symbol-based communication, assistive technology and the appropriate (i.e., where the person has consented) and also to avoid the inappropriate) use of touch - and provide access to non-verbal means of communicating whenever appropriate.
* **Clarity of language:** Understand that the provision of information is specific and clear – avoiding ambiguities.
* **Processing time:** Understand the importance of providing time and space for autistic people to process and understand information and to make and communicate decisions.
* **Behavioural communication:** Recognise that behaviour can be a form of communication and avoid assumptions about the meanings that can be attached to behaviour. To be aware that a person may express a view verbally, but that their body language may suggest they actually have an opposing view, but for whatever reason are unable or unwilling to state it.
* **Self-expression:** Understand the importance of being able to communicate ones needs to reduce frustration.
* **Diversity & Uniqueness:** To be able to use a range of communication techniques to convey information, according to the different abilities and preferences of autistic people, recognising that each autistic person may have a unique way of communicating.
* **Environmental factors:** Recognise the impact of the environment and sensory needs on communication – knowing how to find the right time, place, and situation for important communications.
* **Linking with families & carers and utilising their knowledge:** Understand the importance of and promote effective communication with families and carers. Also, to recognise the expertise and insight that families and carers may be able to offer to support effective communication with the autistic person. An autism peer support worker should always ask a person what they think/feel and act on this information. The role of the autism peer support worker is to work for the individual and those needs will not always be congruent with the needs of family/carers.



## Sensory processing and the environment

**Aims:** To have a good insight into how a multitude of potential sensory factors can impact on the individual.

### Capabilities covered in this unit:

* **Individualised diversity:** Recognise difference and understand that not every autistic person will have the same sensory profile, level of over-or under-sensory sensitivity, or indeed any sensory sensitivity in some areas and that each person’s tolerance of sensory stimuli will vary according to other factors and over time.
* **Reasonable adjustments:** Know how one might create environments to support autistic people and understand how to adjust environments to enable areas to be inclusive and welcoming to everyone.
* **The importance of enabling time out:** Recognise the importance of accessible quiet spaces and the autistic person’s right to take a break if that is their choice - and acceptance/provision of adaptations (such as noise cancelling headphones, sunglasses, dimmable lights etc.).
* **Developing an awareness of an individual’s sensory differences:** Be able to identify sensory issues and in developing proactive approaches to the environment e.g., making sure that assessments, meetings, interviews, appointments are planned for, asking the question about any adjustments that might be required to the environment.
* **Being aware of the sensory burden:** Be able to recognise sensory overload and know how to respond.
* **Understanding the importance of stimulatory behaviours:** Acknowledge, understand, and reassure regarding the use of sensory stimulation behaviours (e.g., ‘stimming’).



## Mental health and wellbeing

**Aims:** to develop a knowledge of how being autistic can affect a person’s mental health and welfare and vice-versa.

### Capabilities covered in this unit:

* **Overall awareness:** Understand that mental health conditions are common and can be overlooked in autistic people. Equally, people who are autistic can experience high levels of anxiety caused by being in environments that are not autism friendly.
* **An understanding of how possible past trauma(s) may impact on the individual:** Understand the role of trauma in the lives of autistic people, which may lead to a wide range of mental health problems in later life and the importance of building trusting relationships and providing support to make choices to enable empowerment.
* **Developing an alertness to the signs of mental distress:** Recognise when an autistic person may be experiencing mental distress, including suicidal thoughts and intentions.
* **Equality of treatment and overmedication issues:** Recognise that autistic people have a right to equitable access to treatment, including reasonable adjustments, if required, including the usage of appropriate medication. But also, to be alert to recognising the issue of and risks attached to the possibility of over medication of autistic people and know how to address this, i.e., seeking clarification and justification from the prescriber.
* **Behaviours of concern:** Understand that autistic people with mental health needs may present with behaviour which may challenge, masking other difficulties such as with self-expression and communication.
* **Self-expression:** Create opportunities for autistic people to express their feelings, including feelings of loss, grief and bereavement, and anger and frustration, in ways which are meaningful to them. However, it is important that the autism peer support worker recognises that their role is that of a supporter and they are not a therapist or clinical counsellor.
* **Service knowledge:** Know the function of different mental health and social care services that autistic people may need to access (such as occupational therapists, counsellors, speech and language therapists, psychologists, psychiatrists, and mental health nurses) and where and how to signpost an autistic person with a suspected mental health condition.
* **Coordination:** Know how to coordinate and communicate with key people and services to support an autistic person with a mental health condition.



## Knowledge of health issues more prevalent in the autistic population

**Aims:** to be aware that autistic people are at greater risk of some health issues than the general population.

### Capabilities covered in this unit:

* **Co-occurring health issues:** Be aware that autistic people may live with other conditions or impairments that will also impact on their lives, for example, physical impairments, visual impairment, chromosome disorders, mental health conditions (including eating disorders), epilepsy, allergies, gastrointestinal conditions, or other neurodevelopmental conditions such as ADHD, Dyslexia, Dyspraxia, Dyscalculia and Tourette’s Syndrome.
* **Typical reactions to medication:** Understand the benefits and risks of prescribed medication (including psychotropic medication) on physical and mental health and the choices and rights of patients – including the potential for autistic people to have atypical reactions to medication.
* **Medication management:** Be able to identify and support with additional needs around taking medication (such as needing prompting) and making sure that the medication regime is regularly reviewed by a suitably knowledgeable clinician.
* **Understanding the importance of families and carers:** Understand the role of, and importance of, families and carers in supporting the health and wellbeing of autistic people.
* **Health Action Plans (HAPS):** Contribute to development of, and ongoing use of, health action plans with autistic people, (which may be GP led or written by the individual themselves in partnership with other health and social care professionals) including identifying reasonable adjustments and unmet support needs.
* **An awareness of difficulties that may occur in pain identification:** Be able to recognise the potential impact of sensory differences on the autistic person being able to recognise themselves when they are feeling unwell, and the potential for differences in interpreting pain sensations being both hyper and hypo sensitive to pain and more likely to mask pain as a result. Understand that some autistic people may not report pain or seek help early due to a variety of factors such as alexithymia, communication difficulties, anxiety, difficulties with initiative and/or their high pain threshold.



* **Services awareness and appropriate referring:** to be able to signpost autistic people to specialist healthcare services where they can access assessment, diagnosis and support and ensure they are aware of any expected timeframes. Encourage them to persist in liaison with specialist services, providing support to do so when needed.
* **Accessing services and understanding health advice:** Support autistic people to make healthcare decisions including advocating for reasonable adjustments such as provision of accessible information and processing time. Equally, to be aware that living as an autistic person can cause the person to have experience of mental and physical stressors that can have a long-term impact on the persons overall health.



## Knowledge of local services and sources of autism support

**Aims:** to develop a good knowledge of services in the locality and nationally that you may be working with and know how to access/signpost.

### Capabilities covered in this unit:

* **The roles of healthcare and social care professionals:** Know the function of different healthcare and social care services that autistic people may need to access, such as psychologists, speech and language therapists, optometrists, occupational therapists, dietitians, and physiotherapists - and the barriers autistic people may face in accessing them.
* **Local and national autistic support services:** Have an ability to draw on a working knowledge of the local and national statutory and non-statutory, good quality, autistic support options (as well as local community organisations, activities and resources) with which autism peer support workers will be engaging to help people achieve their personal goals, including: - what each organisation, service or resource is able to offer, how to access each organisation or service, whether services apply criteria that restrict access, and any limits (or gaps) in the services being provided.



## Knowledge of professional, legal, ethical, local and government policy frameworks for Peer Support Workers

**Aims:** to ensure that the autism peer support worker always act ethically and within local and national policy, legal and professional frameworks, as appropriate.

### Capabilities covered in this unit:

* **Policy & professional guidance:** An ability to draw on knowledge that the autism peer support workers local policy, and ethical and (where relevant) professional guidance represents a set of principles that need to be interpreted and applied to unique situations.
* **Codes of conduct**: An ability to draw on knowledge of the local codes of ethics and conduct that apply to all professionals in the service, and how these are implemented in relation to: capacity and consent, confidentiality, information sharing, and data protection.
* **Establishing and maintaining professional boundaries:** An ability to maintain boundaries, for example by communicating the limits and boundaries of the role with the people they support, maintaining clear and appropriate personal and sexual boundaries with people they support, as well as their families and carers. Not accepting gifts, hospitality or loans that may be interpreted as attempting to gain preferential treatment. To be able to identify when a boundary has been crossed and determining how to respond appropriately.
* **Working within your competence:** An ability to recognise and work within the limits of the autism peer support worker’s qualifications, knowledge, skills, and experience, training, and supervision. Where appropriate, refer to colleagues, services, or organisations with the relevant level of training and skill. Ability to maintain standards of competence.
* **Continuing Professional Development (CPD):** An ability to maintain and update skills and knowledge through participation in continuing learning and development and an ability to seek opportunities to increase knowledge and skills.



## Knowledge of, and ability to work with, issues of confidentiality, consent, and information sharing

**Aims:** for the autism peer support worker to be confident that they are working within the required professional standards regarding maintaining client confidentiality, within a framework of consent to share.

### Capabilities covered in this unit:

**• Knowledge of policies and legislation:** An ability to draw on knowledge of local policies on confidentiality and information sharing, and the ways these are applied when working within and between teams or organisations.

**• Informed consent:** Ability to gain informed consent. An ability to give people being supported the information they need to decide whether to proceed with meetings with an autism peer support worker, for example: what these meetings and support would involve, the potential benefits of these meetings. To also be aware of the provisions of the Mental Capacity Act 2005 and especially regarding a presumption of capacity and the right for an individual to make informed, unwise choices if they so choose. In that same context to be also aware that an autistic person’s approach to what is a risk and to risk assessment may vary. The autism peer support workers objective is to, as far as possible, ensure that the autistic person they are working with are making as fully as possible, informed choices.

**• Explaining confidentiality issues:** An ability to invite, explain and to actively respond to questions regarding peer support.

**• Understanding that client consent can be withdrawn at any time:** To be aware that individuals have a right to withdraw or limit consent at any time: NB In the event of consent being declined or withdrawn, an ability to respect the individual’s right to make this decision and the ability to seek advice from senior colleagues or a supervisor when required

**• Knowledge of confidentiality and information sharing protocols and legislation:** To draw on knowledge that a duty of confidentiality is owed to the person to whom the information relates.

**• Information guardianship:** To have an ability to ensure that a person’s information is treated as confidential and used only for the purpose for which it was provided.



* **Breaches of confidentiality:** An ability to draw on knowledge that confidentiality is breached where the sharing of confidential information is not authorised by the person who provided it or to whom it relates.

Also, an ability to draw on knowledge that there is no breach of confidentiality if: information was provided on the understanding that it would be shared with a limited range of people or for limited purposes, and information has been shared in line with that understanding. Or where there is explicit consent to the sharing of information.

An ability to draw on knowledge that it is appropriate to breach confidentiality when withholding information could: place the person, or family members or carers, the Autism Peer Support Worker, health professionals or members of the public, at risk of significant harm, or prejudice the prevention, detection or prosecution of a serious crime, or lead to an unjustified delay in making enquiries about allegations of significant harm to others.

* **Safeguarding primacy:** An ability to draw on knowledge that safeguarding needs usually take precedence over issues of consent and confidentiality.



## Knowledge of safeguarding procedures

**Aims:** to be confident in the Autism Peer Support Workers knowledge of how to identify and raise safeguarding concerns.

### Capabilities covered in this unit:

* **Policy matters:** An ability to draw on knowledge of local and national safeguarding policies.
* **Identify and actioning safeguarding concerns:** An ability to draw on knowledge that safeguarding concerns can arise across the lifespan, from infancy through to old age.
* **Types and ranges of abuse:** An ability to draw on knowledge of the types of abuse and neglect that could trigger a safeguarding concern, such as: physical abuse, domestic violence, psychological abuse, financial or material abuse or exploitation, sexual abuse or exploitation, neglect, abuse in an organisational context.
* **To have an alertness to signs and indicators of possible abuse:** Able to identify signs or indicators that could flag the need to institute safeguarding procedures. Where neglect, abuse or exploitation is suspected, an ability to respond appropriately by discussing these concerns with the person being supported and explaining (and agreeing) what actions need to be taken, raising and escalating concerns in line with local safeguarding procedures.



## 2.11 Knowledge of self-harm and suicide prevention, and procedures for maintaining safety

**Aims:** To be confident that the Autism Peer Support Worker is alert to and able to deal with signs and symptoms of self-harm or suicidal intent.

### Capabilities covered in this unit:

* **To gain a knowledge of the factors that may result in the person self- harming of feeling suicidal:** An ability to draw on knowledge of the factors that contribute to, and increase the risk of, self-harm, self-neglect, and harm to others. An ability to recognise and respond to expressions of distress and self-harm, and to acknowledge and discuss these feelings with the person in an open and non-judgmental way.
* **Knowing what to do:** Where there is evidence that a person may present a significant risk of harm to themselves or others, an ability to respond to this in a timely manner by: exploring the reasons for the person’s acute distress, to determine whether there are any immediately applicable strategies that may be helpful, and that the person has the resources to implement them. Equally, where the autism peer support worker knows or suspects that they do not have the necessary expertise required in this area, to be able to seek input from more specialist agencies.

If these strategies are ineffective, discussing, explaining, and agreeing on the next steps with the person, drawing on knowledge of local policies and procedures for responding to risk, maintaining safety and safeguarding (specifically, the risk of harm to self or risk to others.



## Enable choice, control, and empowerment

**3. Core Relational Skills**

**Aims:** To help autism peer support workers to understand approaches that support choice, control, and empowerment over one’s own life, and to draw on their lived experience to aid this.

### Capabilities covered in this unit:

Ability for autism peer support workers to draw on their lived experience and knowledge of personal choice, empowerment, and processes of self-determination.

Ability to draw on the key principles of person-centred approaches, namely that:

* there is a focus on people’s strengths and on helping them to foster hope and optimism, and to:
  + identify, define, and work towards the life they want to live, and towards having a sense of autonomy over their life.
  + build the skills and strengths to manage challenges and setbacks.
  + build their sense of self-esteem and develop a positive identity.
  + support their ability to meet challenges in life through self-development and self-management.
* social inclusion is an important feature of autonomy and independence

Ability to draw on knowledge of factors that can affect a person’s autonomy (for example, societal factors, familial relationships, traumatic experiences, and environmental influences).

Ability to understand the importance of helping people to become active participants in their own care.



## Ability to draw on and share lived experience

**Aims:** To give autism peer support workers an understanding of issues related to drawing on, and sharing, their lived experience.

### Capabilities covered in this unit:

Ability to draw on and share lived experience of autism and life experiences, as a core role of a peer support worker.

Ability to draw on knowledge of the benefits, and risks, of sharing lived experience through self-disclosure, and to consider whether sharing lived experience:

* is appropriately timed.
* is relevant and appropriate to the other person’s experience.
* matches the intensity and challenge and meaning of the person’s experience.
* retains a focus on the person’s needs, aims and goals.

Ability to ensure that the main aim of sharing is to help the person, rather than being an opportunity for the peer support worker to gain relief or support for themselves

Ability for the autism peer support worker to judge whether:

* they are comfortable with others knowing about the information they are sharing.
* they have resolved the issues that they are sharing.

Ability for peer support workers to safely share their personal experience in a way that supports, empowers, and brings hope.

Ability for peer support workers to step back from their own experience and reflect on how this may be different to the experience of others.

Ability to share specific experiences without indicating that these should be taken as solutions to the person’s problems.



## Ability to develop and maintain a mutual and reciprocal peer relationship

**Aims:** To give autism peer support workers an understanding of the knowledge and skills associated with building mutual and reciprocal peer relationships.

### Capabilities covered in this unit:

Ability to draw on knowledge of factors that can make for a positive peer relationship, and factors that can have a negative effect on the peer relationship.

Ability to build trust, develop rapport and be respectful.

Ability to demonstrate warmth, sensitivity, genuine concern, and provide encouragement and support.

Ability to listen and respond to the person’s concerns in a manner that is non-judgmental, supportive, and sensitive, and that conveys an accepting attitude when they describe their experiences and beliefs.

Ability to accept as valid the person’s experiences and concerns and help them discuss these.

Ability to help the person being supported express any concerns or doubts they have about the intervention they are receiving.

Ability to establish the boundaries and purpose of the peer relationship in the initial meeting, including discussing the limits to confidentiality and information sharing.

Ability to understand how the person being supported understands themselves, their experience, and the world around them, paying attention to any cultural, spiritual, or personal beliefs that are particularly important to the person.

Ability to see and acknowledge that other people may have differing perspectives and to express this through interactions with them.

Ability to establish the person’s point of view by having an open and non-judgmental discussion and accepting their experiences as valid.

Ability to recognise when there are strains in the peer relationship and address these.

Ability to determine a person’s readiness to explore options or attempt something new, in a manner that builds on their strengths and promotes self-determination.



Ability to draw on knowledge of the potential barriers to engagement and the ability to actively work with the person being supported or with colleagues to address these.

Ability to be open to the possibility of meeting in a variety of locations.

Ability to balance flexibility in the meeting location with the need to maintain personal safety.

Ability to prepare the person being supported for an ending of the peer support work or relationship



## Ability to engage and support families and carers

**Aims:** To give autism peer support workers an understanding of issues related to drawing on, and sharing, their lived experience.

### Capabilities covered in this unit:

Ability to draw on knowledge of the significance of families, carers, or a person’s wider social or community network in planning and providing support.

Ability to draw on knowledge of the impact that supporting an autistic person can have on families and carers.

Ability to engage the person’s family or carer (when appropriate) to help them:

* support the person.
* ask questions when they are uncertain or confused.

Ability to help families and carers access organisations and services that offer information, advice or support relevant to their needs.

Ability to provide support or information to families and carers to help them navigate the systems, policies, processes, or legal structures that may affect them.



## Ability to use active listening and communication skills in a peer relationship

**Aims:** To give autism peer support workers an understanding of knowledge and skills associated with effective communication.

### Capabilities covered in this unit:

Ability to draw on knowledge that communication skills will help peer support workers gain an accurate sense of the concerns, needs and strengths of the person they support.

Ability for the peer support worker to show that they are paying attention to the person being supported.

Ability to listen attentively to the person.

Ability to help the person expand on or explore relevant issues.

Ability to ask both ‘closed’ and ‘open’ questions and to know and understand the limitations of these.

Ability to judge when questioning is being experienced as helpful and when less so. Ability to listen to the person with empathy.

Ability to maintain an awareness of one’s own perspective or frame of reference in order not to inadvertently impose it.

Ability to convey a basic and empathic understanding of what has been said or conveyed.

Ability to check the person’s understanding by asking them to summarise the discussion and any decisions that may have been agreed.

Ability to ask the person whether all the issues that they wished to raise have been discussed.

Ability to remain composed and continue to communicate sensitively with people experiencing distress.

Ability to attend to indications that the person is finding topics distressing, or hard to discuss.



### Overcoming barriers to communication

Ability to draw on knowledge that where verbal communication is challenging for a person, other forms of communication may be an effective and appropriate alternative.

Ability to identify practical barriers to communication and to identify ways to minimise their impact.

Ability to implement reasonable adjustments to enable alternate communication.

Ability to address any difficulties a person has communicating or expressing themselves by making appropriate adjustments.

To gain an accurate sense of the person’s account, an ability for the peer support worker to be aware of (and avoid) any ‘filters’ they may find themselves imposing.



## Ability to work with difference

**Aims:** To help autism peer support workers understand the issues relating to working with difference.

### Capabilities covered in this unit:

**Knowledge of the significance for practice of specific beliefs, practices, and lifestyles.**

Ability to draw on knowledge that the demographic groups included in discussion of ‘different’ beliefs, practices or lifestyles are usually those that are potentially subject to disadvantage and/or discrimination.

Ability to draw on knowledge that because people will often be a member of, or identify with, more than one ‘group,’ the implications of different combinations of identity and lifestyle factors need to be held in mind.

Ability to maintain an awareness of the potential significance for practice of social and cultural variation across a range of domains.

### Knowledge of social and cultural factors that may have an impact on access to support.

Ability to draw on knowledge of social and cultural issues that commonly restrict or reduce access to support.

Ability to draw on knowledge of the potential impact of social inequalities and exclusion that autistic people face.

Ability to draw on knowledge of the impact of factors such as socioeconomic disadvantage or disability on practical arrangements that influence attendance and engagement.

### Communicating respect for a person and their family or carers.

An ability to draw on knowledge of relevant beliefs, practices, and lifestyles.

Ability to identify the individual needs and support available that someone might need due to them being from a specific cultural or sociodemographic group.



### Gaining an understanding of the experience of specific beliefs, practices, and lifestyles.

Ability to work collaboratively with people to develop an understanding of their culture and world view, and the implications of any culturally specific customs or expectations for the ways in which problems are described and presented.

Ability to take an active interest in a person’s social and cultural background, and to demonstrate a willingness to learn about their sociocultural perspectives and world view (for the purpose of engaging with them).

### Demonstrating awareness of the influence of the autism peer support worker’s own background.

Ability for autism peer support workers of all backgrounds to draw on an awareness of their own group membership and values and how these may influence their perceptions of the person being supported.



## Ability to support personal autonomy and independence

**4. Working in partnership- Supporting people as an autism peer support worker**

**Aims:** To help peer support workers gain knowledge regarding support to enable choice, control, and skills relevant to helping people achieve this.

### Capabilities covered in this unit:

Ability to support people by helping them to:

* Identify their goals.
* gain, or regain a sense of autonomy and choice over decisions that impact on their lives.
* identify their strengths, values, and aspirations.
* make sense of their experience of autism (and the impact of cultural beliefs and interpretations on the ways they understand their experiences).
* engage in actions that can lead to personal growth and development.
* develop a positive expectation of the future by promoting belief in the possibility of independence.
* build, or rebuild their sense of identity outside of services.
* develop and maintain positive relationships.

Ability to help people identify and prioritise their own personal goals, by helping them to:

* identify goals that enable them to engage with their community.
* identify resources that will help them achieve their goals.
* identify their hopes, strengths, accomplishments, and challenges in order to achieve their goals.
* celebrate successes as they move towards achieving personal goals.



Ability to support people to develop the skills to manage difficult situations, setbacks, or challenges.

Ability to support the person to make their own decisions and empower them to exert more autonomy over their life.

Ability to help people develop self-determination and self-management skills. Ability to explore with the person how to create a support plan.

Ability to support people to identify and choose the relevant support, networks, services, or resources required to achieve their goals.



## Ability to help people engage in activities that are meaningful to them

**Aims:** To identify knowledge and skills relevant to helping people engage in meaningful activities.

### Capabilities covered in this unit:

* Ability to draw on knowledge that, for many people, engaging in activities that have meaning and purpose can support an independent life.
* Ability to help people identify activities that are meaningful to them.
* Ability to help people to identify (and problem-solve) issues or concerns that make it difficult for them to access and engage in meaningful activities.



## Ability to help people develop coping and problem- solving skills

**Aims:** To identify knowledge and skills relevant to helping people to develop coping and problem-solving skills.

### Capabilities covered in this unit:

Ability to work with the person being supported to:

* discuss their strategies and identify the external resources available to them.
* identify (and reinforce the value of) existing coping strategies that could work for them.
* identify when (and discuss why) strategies they use do not work well.
* explore different strategies together that may be more effective.
* consider how to implement skills and strategies that may be more effective ways of coping with difficult situations.
* identify any potential barriers to implementing new coping strategies.

Ability to support people to develop the skills to reflect on and review their coping strategies over time.

Ability to explain the rationale for problem solving.

Ability to help the person select problems, on the basis that these are relevant for them and are ones for which achievable goals can be set.

Ability to help the person specify the problem(s) and break down larger problems into smaller (more manageable) parts.

Ability to identify achievable goals with the person, bearing in mind their resources and likely obstacles.

An ability to help the person:

* generate possible solutions
* select a preferred solution
* plan and implement preferred solutions
* evaluate the outcome of implementation, whether positive or negative
* test beliefs or assumptions that might get in the way of problem solving.

Ability for the peer support worker to maintain a focus on encouraging the person to arrive at their own solutions.



## Ability to collaboratively discuss support options

**Aims:** To identify knowledge and skills relevant to helping people consider support options.

### Capabilities covered in this unit:

Ability to engage a person in a collaborative discussion of support options open to them.

Ability to convey information about support options in a manner that:

* is tailored to the person’s capacities, context, and circumstances.
* helps the person raise and discuss queries or concerns.
* ensures that the person has a clear understanding of the support options open to them.

Ability to judge when the person’s agreement to pursue an intervention is based on a collaborative and active choice.

Ability to explore with the person how they might discuss with a health professional, issues, or concerns they have regarding treatment or intervention options.



## Ability to contribute to co-production of individual support plans

**Aims:** To identify knowledge and skills relevant to helping autism peer support workers contribute to individual support plans.

### Capabilities covered in this unit:

Ability to support people collaboratively to participate in the development of their support plans.

Ability to discuss a person’s support plan with them, including any goals or objectives that would benefit from input from the autism peer support worker.

Ability to help people develop an advance directive or statement, where appropriate.



## Ability to facilitate access to sources of support

**Aims:** To identify knowledge and skills relevant to helping access sources of support.

### Capabilities covered in this unit:

Ability to draw on knowledge of available sources of support.

Ability to ensure that information about these sources of support is up to date and accurately characterises the nature of support on offer.

Ability to draw on knowledge of social activities, or programmes within local communities and to help people access and engage in them.

Ability to identify organisations and services that are accessible to a person.

Ability to convey information about organisations and services, to help the person make informed choices about the options they wish to pursue.

Ability to help the person consider the type of support that matches their needs and situation.

Ability to discuss with a person the reach, responsibilities and limits of organisations and services, to identify those that are both suited to their needs and acceptable to them.

Ability to facilitate access to a service through administrative or practical help.

Ability to draw on knowledge of the potential challenges that people may face when trying to access services, and to help people problem-solve to address these challenges.

Ability to draw on knowledge regarding the aims of signposting.

Ability to pass on contact information in a way that makes it likely to be remembered and used.

Ability to establish that a person is willing and able to access the organisation, service, or support.

Ability to follow up with the person to see whether they have accessed the organisation, service, group, activity, or programme, or whether they need a different type or level of support.



## Ability to support transitions in support

**Aims:** To identify knowledge and skills relevant to supporting transitions in support.

### Capabilities covered in this unit:

Ability to draw on knowledge that transitions (within and across organisations) can be distressing and may be times of greater risk for the person.

Ability to draw on knowledge of circumstances that may trigger transitions. Ability to support the person during the transition.

Ability to discuss a person’s feelings about the transition, and to work with them to:

* identify and overcome barriers that make it less likely that they will stay in contact with the new service.
* discuss their concerns and feelings.
* identify issues that may make a transition or transfer of support problematic.

Ability to draw on knowledge that people may require additional support and preparation to successfully navigate transitions.

Ability to help the person to develop skills in independence, assertiveness, and self- advocacy.

Ability to provide continuity of support during a transition.

Ability to discuss concerns that a transition is not going well with an appropriate colleague or supervisor.

Working with teams and promoting people’s rights.



## Ability to contribute to a team

**Aims:** To identify knowledge and skills relevant to helping autism peer support workers contribute to their team.

### Capabilities covered in this unit:

Ability to draw on knowledge of the team’s shared goals, values, culture, and practice.

Ability to draw on knowledge of the roles and responsibilities of other team members.

Ability to work as part of the service or organisation while retaining the perspective and ethos of peer support.

* Ability to work effectively with colleagues to:
* enhance existing services and support on offer.
* identify and resolve potential conflict or disagreement regarding the support provided to a person.
* improve their knowledge and understanding of the autism peer support worker role, how they fit within the team, and the values and principles underpinning peer support.

Ability to consider how best to respond to team dynamics that may challenge effective working within the team.

Ability to draw on basic conflict resolution strategies to help resolve difficult team dynamics.

Ability to raise concerns about unsafe staff practice by following the service’s policies and procedures.

Ability to communicate effectively with the team (both verbally and in writing) about the support they are currently providing to people.



Ability to draw on knowledge that a concurrent record of progress for each person being supported should be entered into the person’s personal record (usually after each contact), in line with the requirements of the local service, to:

* document progress.
* communicate important information to other members of the team.

Ability to ensure that records are maintained after each contact with the person being supported (or where relevant, with professionals connected to them).

Ability to write a concurrent record of progress.

Ability to discuss challenges to team communication (for example, with a colleague or supervisor) and to consider how these can be best managed.



## Ability to work with other organisations and services

**Aims:** To identify knowledge and skills relevant to helping autism peer support workers work with other organisations and services.

### Capabilities covered in this unit:

Ability to draw on knowledge that collaborating with other organisations or services will directly benefit the person’s support.

Ability to identify and connect with organisations or services that are already involved with a person, or their family members or carers (where appropriate).

Ability to identify the roles and responsibilities of other organisations and services in relation to the range of support a person receives.

Ability to contribute to meetings with other organisations or services to support the planning and coordination of a person’s support.

Ability to recognise challenges when working with other organisations and services, and to work with colleagues, a supervisor or team leader to plan how these can be managed.

Ability to recognise when it is appropriate to share information with other organisations or services.

Ability to maintain effective communication with professionals in other organisations when it is relevant to the person’s support.

Ability to identify potential barriers to effective communication and, where possible, to develop strategies to overcome these.



## Ability to offer a personalised perspective

**Aims:** To identify knowledge and skills relevant to helping autism peer support workers offer an autonomous perspective.

### Capabilities covered in this unit:

Ability to offer a person-centred perspective, for example working with staff to:

* discuss (and possibly challenge or improve) their attitudes and perceptions about autism.
* improve their awareness of the importance of treating people with dignity, respect, kindness, and consideration.
* improve their understanding of person-centred support.
* understand the importance of people defining, owning, and leading their own personal choices.
* understand the importance of co-production.
* help them understand the autism peer support worker’s role and remit.

Ability to help professionals, organisations, or services to be well-informed about the perspectives and concerns of people being supported.

Ability to support co-production in service development and evaluation, and to work with services to co-produce and co-deliver staff training.

Ability to work with staff to make reasonable adjustments and ensure that environments, communication and processes are culturally sensitive and free from discrimination.



## 4.11 Ability to promote the rights of autistic people being supported

**Aims:** To identify knowledge and skills relevant to helping autism peer support workers promote the rights of people being supported.

### Capabilities covered in this unit:

Ability to draw on knowledge of an individual’s right to control their health and wellbeing.

Ability for the peer support worker to help people:

• navigate the systems with which they are in contact.

• understand the policies, processes or legal structures that might affect them.

• be aware of their rights and the best practice guidance to support autistic people.

• understand the choices and options they may have over the support they receive.

Ability for the autism peer support worker to amplify the voice of the person they are supporting.

Ability to help people raise and discuss questions and concerns about their support with relevant professionals.

Ability to help people plan (and rehearse) how they could raise concerns about their support (for example, with whom and in what settings).

Ability to speak on a person’s behalf (with their consent), to promote their needs, aims and rights in situations such as team meetings, with organisations and services, and with family members.

Ability to work with people being supported to address problems with, or barriers to, accessing organisations and services, or infringement of their rights.

Ability to listen to a person’s complaints or concerns about their care or treatment and respond in a prompt, open and constructive way.



### Capabilities covered in this unit:



**5. Additional skills, areas of awareness and signposting**

Ability to maintain the core experiential, relational and nondirective role of the peer support worker while supporting people to make use of skills to support their care.

Ability to develop plans with the autistic person around their individual behaviours that occur when distressed or in a crisis and how they would like to be supported.

Ability to identify services and support that may be helpful to an autistic person and/or their family.

Ability to explain the rationale for recommending a service or support type and to answer any questions or concerns that the autistic person has.

Ability to work with the autistic person to monitor and review the benefit of the service or support type being used and, if indicated, to adapt, change or stop the work or support being provided.

Ability to work with the autistic person to problem-solve any difficulties the autistic person may experience with making use of the service or support type.

Ability to respond to, and discuss with the autistic person, any feedback regarding the service or support.

Ability to support autistic people who are experiencing any form of acute difficulties or crisis, by:

* drawing on own lived experience to inform the support being offered and keeping in mind the needs of the person and their values. Ability to develop plans with the autistic person around their individual behaviours that occur when distressed or in a crisis and how they would like to be supported.

Ability to use active listening skills to provide a sense of safety and reassurance.

* working with others to find or create safe spaces for the autistic person.
* using knowledge of local resources, services, and support to connect or signpost people to the appropriate service.

Ability to help autistic people who are experiencing, or have experienced a crisis to carry out, develop or update crisis plans alongside the services providing care.



## Ability to work with people in groups

**Aims:** To identify knowledge and skills relevant to working with autistic people in groups.

### Capabilities covered in this unit:

Ability to draw on lived experience when working with colleagues to plan the basic structure and content of a group

Ability to contribute to establishing an environment that is physically and emotionally safe

Ability to understand and work with the environmental factors that might be overstimulating or distressing

Ability to work with the difficulties that autistic people may experience with interpersonal or group situations

Ability to help all participants to feel comfortable, so they can contribute and participate

Ability to explore and address any barriers to participation in the group including the unique challenges that can inhibit autistic people participating in groups

Ability to engage with group members and build a positive relationship with each autistic person

Ability to monitor and manage group dynamics with specific consideration to the needs of autistic people

Ability to match and adapt the content and pacing of sessions to the needs and views of group members

Ability to promote and encourage regular attendance, while not stigmatising those who fail to attend sessions



## Ability to support people’s use of digital interventions

**Aims:** To identify knowledge and skills relevant to helping autistic people engage with and use digital support and interventions.

### Capabilities covered in this unit:

Ability to draw on knowledge of digital support and interventions that autistic people can use to support themselves.

Ability to draw on knowledge of the various formats that can be used to access digital interventions.

Ability to support autistic people to use digital interventions to improve their wellbeing, self-help, self-management and access to services and support.

Ability to work with the autistic person to evaluate the relevance, usefulness or effectiveness of the digital support.



## Understanding and working with conditions that affect autistic people: Mental Health.

**Aims:** Ability know what to do to support autistic people who are struggling with common co-occurring conditions.

### Capabilities covered in this unit:

Ability, knowledge, and awareness of how autistic people may have problems with their mental health which they may need to be supported with. These problems may include:

Ability to understand how anxiety may affect the autistic person including the feeling of being worried a lot of the time.

Ability to understand how depression may affect autistic people and support with feeling unhappy, irritable, or hopeless.

Ability to understand and support how obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) affects autistic people including their feeling a need to keep doing certain actions repeatedly.

Ability to understand and have awareness of different types of treatments available for autistic people with mental health difficulties, including medicines or talking therapies e.g., cognitive behavioural therapy.

Ability to maintain the core support element of the role of the autism peer support worker whilst also encouraging people to make use of psychological approaches to help them better manage their own mental health. This may include supporting behavioural activation under the guidance of clinical professionals.

Ability to provide support and have a knowledge of how symptoms of mental disorders such as anxiety can present as a physical symptom.



## Understanding and working with conditions that affect autistic people: Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD).

**Aims:** The ability to recognise and have knowledge of how to support autistic people who have attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).

### Capabilities covered in this unit:

Ability to understand and support the symptoms of ADHD which may include.

* Finding it hard to concentrate, getting distracted easily and needing self- regulatory activities such as stimming to aid concentration.
* Acting without thinking.
* Finding it hard to sit still.

The ability to have awareness, support, and signpost autistic people with ADHD, to offer extra support in education or work and potential need to take medicine for their ADHD.



## Understanding and working with conditions that affect autistic people: Other neurodevelopmental conditions.

**Aims:** the ability to understand, support and have knowledge of how to support autistic people who have other neurodevelopmental conditions, e.g., dyslexia, dyspraxia, dyscalculia, dysgraphia, and others.

### Capabilities covered in this unit:

Ability to work with autistic people with these conditions in a person centred and empowering way to support with the impact on the individual.

Ability and awareness of how extra support in education and work can often help.



## Understanding and working with conditions that affect autistic people: Problems with sleeping (insomnia and non- restorative sleep).

**Aims:** Ability, awareness, and knowledge of how to support autistic people with problems sleeping (insomnia) and non-restorative sleep.

### Capabilities covered in this unit:

Ability to support and have awareness of the symptoms and impact of insomnia which may include

* finding it hard to go to sleep
* waking up several times during the night
* not needing much sleep, which can impact on others, and the persons, functioning.

Ability and the knowledge to support individuals to consider changes to bedtime routine and sleep hygiene which may help.

Ability to support and have awareness that in autistic people there may be other underlying physical reasons for their sleep difficulties.



## Understanding and working with conditions that affect autistic people: Learning disabilities.

**Aims:** For autism peer support workers to have knowledge and awareness of how learning disabilities may impact on autistic people.

### Capabilities covered in this unit:

Ability, knowledge, and awareness of how an autistic person with a learning disability may find it hard to:

* Understand new or complex information
* Learn new skills
* Look after themselves and manage activities of daily living.



## Understanding and working with conditions that affect autistic people: Common co-occurring health issues.

**Aims:** Ability, knowledge, and awareness of how to support autistic people who may also have health issues.

### Capabilities covered in this unit:

Ability, knowledge, and awareness to support the following health issues which are more likely to be present with autistic people and that they may be required to develop additional skills to support people with these issues.

These health issues may include:

* + - Symptomatic hypermobility, Ehlers-Danlos Syndromes, hypermobility spectrum disorders.
    - Complex symptoms that can affect the whole body/brain systems.
    - Laxity of the joints, soft tissues.
    - Pain (incl. fibromyalgia pain).
    - Chronic tiredness (CFS/M.E.).
    - Dizziness/clumsiness/Confusion (may be present with autistic people with dyspraxia).
    - Eating issues like swallowing, reflux, stomach pains, bloating and bowel/ bladder issues.
    - Vascular issues.
    - Skin differences some leading to thin, easily bruised skin.
    - Headaches or migraines.
    - Epilepsy.
    - Alexithymia.

Ability, to support and have awareness that due to there being an array of issues that there may also be a range of specialist practitioners and expert groups that autistic people could be signposted to.

Ability to support and have knowledge and awareness of how autistic people may mask pain.