

INSPIRED SUPPORT

Positive and Proactive Support Policy



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Effective from:	September 2022	Review date:	September 2025
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Inspired Support's Autism Consultant and Deputy Safeguarding Lead receives email updates from Skills for Care, 39 Essex Chambers and the Social Care Institute for Excellence and will update this policy as needed prior to the review date.

1. Policy Statement

Our Mission Statement as a society is to inspire, support, celebrate and equip autistic and neurodivergent people to be meaningfully occupied and fulfil their potential in life.

In order to achieve this, everything we do must stem from a balanced view of neurodiversity. We must understand that autism and other forms of neurodiversity are simply differences in neurological development and functioning, however some neurological differences may cause challenges in aspects of daily life that could benefit from targeted support. Our support should be underpinned by the recognition that many of the daily challenges faced by autistic and neurodivergent individuals result from unaccommodating environments, rather than because of a “disability”.

In adopting this balanced view of neurodiversity we can derive three important implications for intervention.

Firstly, we must accept, celebrate and account for the individual differences of those who access our services. We must also oppose any attempt to “cure” or “normalise” as there is increasing evidence that trying to impose “normal standards” (whatever they may be) upon individuals can have a damaging effect and lead to “masking”, which is the suppression of natural autistic traits and responses.

Secondly, we must carefully consider the physical and social environment around each person and personalise the support we offer in line with their individual sensory needs. This must be a joint approach, with knowledge and understanding shared amongst everyone supporting an individual, including parents and caregivers, so that we can be consistent, detailed and holistic in our approach. Wherever possible we should work to support autistic and neurodivergent individuals to help them to build self-awareness and understand some of their daily challenges. Through this they can develop skills and strategies to overcome these challenges.

Finally, we must consider those aspects of autism that can cause challenges for those we support. A balanced view would suggest that we should not regard behaviour as being of concern, unless it causes harm or discomfort to the individual, or violates the rights of others. Therefore we must consider whether we are seeing a person showing us characteristics of autism which cause no harm, or cognitive or behavioural phenomena, which might have a detrimental impact on the person’s quality of life if left unaddressed. This requires us to look beyond observable behaviour and consider the sensory and emotional experiences of autistic and neurodivergent individuals, ensuring we do not attempt to reduce or eliminate natural coping and self-regulating strategies, such as repetitive motor mannerisms or self-stimulatory (stimming) behaviours. Eliminating such behaviours can lead to individuals being unable to avoid experiences that they fear or dislike, calm themselves, or communicate intense emotions. There is also increasing evidence that atypical developmental processes can actually prove beneficial to that individual’s personal development trajectory; examples are echolalia and hyperlexia as alternative routes into functional spoken language.

2. Our Approach

If we focus solely on the reduction of behaviours that define an autism diagnosis, we fail to consider that these behaviours are the outcome of different underlying neurology. The way we support individuals should instead be informed by their preferences, wishes and aspirations, and take into account their developmental trajectory and natural way of learning. This strengths-based approach to supporting individuals refocuses intervention efforts away from reducing deficits and toward enhancing those activities or skills that naturally lead to learning, social connection and well-being. Intervention efforts should not interfere with unconventional characteristics that cause no harm to an individual or others, such as monotone voice or preference to being alone.

There are poignant accounts from autistic adults who describe the use within early interventions of overbearing physical prompting, ignoring of communication attempts, or outright removal of their right to communicate “no” and how that left them passive, traumatised and vulnerable to abuse. Therefore we must always enable autonomy and choice through the support we provide. To have autonomy one must have functional communication, so we must support every individual in being able to communicate (not simply through speech), so that they can convey how they feel, their choices, likes and preferences. This is a fundamental requirement if we are seeking to personalise the support we provide. Our approach must also be regularly reviewed so that we can ensure we are in fact contributing to the long-term well-being of those we support and promoting autonomy of the individual.

By working closely with those we support, we can develop informed personalised plans underpinned by the above principles. Detailed personalised support plans should reduce the risk of stress, fear or dysregulation – which may result in behaviour of concern. The first step is to ensure that we recognise those situations or environments which may trigger an emotional reaction in the individual we are supporting, and that we are proactive in our support of them. It is important that we use our knowledge of that person to reduce escalation, calm them, distract them from concern or remove the perceived threat.

3. Supporting People to Reduce Behaviour of Concern

The Royal College of Psychiatrists defines behaviour of concern as: *“Behaviour that can be described as challenging when it is of such intensity, frequency or duration as to threaten the quality of life and/or physical safety or the individual or others and is likely to lead to a physically restrictive, aversive or result in exclusion.”*

At Inspired Support we prioritise effective planning and monitoring to develop proactive strategies and promote early intervention, which should ultimately reduce the need for restrictive practice.

We recognise that, in order to effectively reduce behaviour of concern, we must provide person-centred support and be aware of each individual’s needs across all of our services. In order to do this, we have developed a range of assessment tools which enable us to:

- Carry out a sensory assessment of each learner, so that we are aware of processing differences. We can use our understanding in this area to create support plans which remove unnecessary challenges, or which allow us to work with the individual to develop coping strategies.
- Carry out a communication assessment, which allows us to understand receptive and expressive communication (verbal and non-verbal).
- Work in partnership with customers.
- Understand individual customers’ history.
- Understand any additional needs or co-occurring conditions.
- Create person-centred environments

When behaviour of concern does arise, we should support the individual during the early stage of intervention to replace the behaviour of concern with something more meaningful to them. For example, rather than using an assault such as a grab to get the attention of others, the individual can be supported to replace this with the use of a communication aid, such as PECS.

4. Guidance

Lead workers will support new workers to understand the needs of each individual they will support. This will involve a detailed exploration of care and support plans, person centred plans and any behaviour support plans, details of how autism (or other forms of neurodiversity) affect the individual, as well as a detailed examination of the ways in which they like to be supported, and why.

It is essential for workers to understand the differences in the way an individual processes information or sensory stimulation, so that they can anticipate situations or places which may be challenging or identify when the individual is being adversely affected by their environment. Inspired Support has access to an Autism Consultant who will consider information provided in order to develop strategies to enable workers to support individuals so that they can move away from challenging or dysregulating situations. This may include:

- Discussing customers’ presenting behaviours of concern.
- Identifying specific mentoring or support needs in individual areas.
- Identifying resource needs.
- Reviewing the effectiveness of current programmes.

Promoting Positive Proactive Support and Respect

Positive proactive support seeks to enable customers to achieve a good quality of life and to access and enjoy events or activities that inspire them. All of our workers must reflect respect for the individual and their unique dignity.

We can do this by:

- Promoting positive emotions. Happiness is essential for well-being. Positive emotions modelled by staff may inspire positive emotions in those we support.
- Ensuring customers have access to a wide range of activities which ensure that they remain engaged.
- Creating opportunities for individuals to develop relationships. This may be with family members, peers or workers.
- Enabling customers to make a positive contribution through activities, events or other opportunities that may arise. This is likely to promote self-esteem and provide meaning to their lives.
- Supporting individuals towards achieving meaningful goals, as well as recognising and celebrating success.

“Using person-centred, value-based approaches, promoting positive and proactive support and respect to ensure people are living the best life they possibly can, should in theory promote happiness and reduce behaviours of concern and the need for restrictive practices.”
(Martin Seligman, 2011)

5. Recording and Monitoring

We strongly recognise the importance of recording (legal requirement) and monitoring in relation to our model. Workers are expected to record behaviour of concern within all service areas and this is done in sequential order which is crucial to the monitoring and evaluative process. Records should be written on ABC forms and logged in the record books and cross referenced with daily diaries (workers should refer to ABC guidance for further information).

We rigorously monitor and evaluate our data recording to identify patterns and develop strategies to reduce the use of restrictive practices.

Workers must ensure that all records are stored safely, and the information held is strictly confidential in adherence to the General Data Protection Regulations. Workers must not share data with outside agencies unless prior consent has been granted by the director.