

What is Autism?

A workbook for young people



This is a good question!



Autism Spectrum Condition (or Autism Spectrum Disorder) is a common condition.

Let's have a look at some facts about what Autism is...

- In the UK, about 1 in 100 people have an Autism Spectrum Condition.



- Having Autism means you may think and remember things differently to other people.

- Some people find it difficult or even painful to make eye contact



- Autism is a lifelong condition which we are born with. No one knows what causes it but we can learn ways to help with the things we find difficult

- Some people find it difficult when things change or don't go the way they want them to



- Some people find it hard to start a conversation, know what to talk about and read people's facial expressions and tone of voice



- No one knows why people have Autism.

- There are a lot of famous people who have Autism, including Chris Packham (TV wildlife presenter), Satoshi Tajiri (the creator of Pokemon) and Albert Einstein (Famous Scientist)

Everyone is unique! We are all different



We all look different on the **outside**:

- Different height – some people are short and others are tall
- Different weight – some are slim whilst others are not
- Our hair colour and style are different

We are also different on the **inside** with our personalities:

- Some people are calm, whilst others like to be rushing around,
- Some people like busy places, whilst others don't like being in crowds,
- Some people worry a lot, others don't seem to worry about things

Some of us have **special differences** which affect what we can do, but if we know what difficulties they cause, we can think of ways to overcome or manage them:



Some people wear glasses to help them to see better,
Some people have hearing aids to help them to hear more clearly,



Some people use a wheelchair to get about more easily
Some people use an inhaler to help their breathing



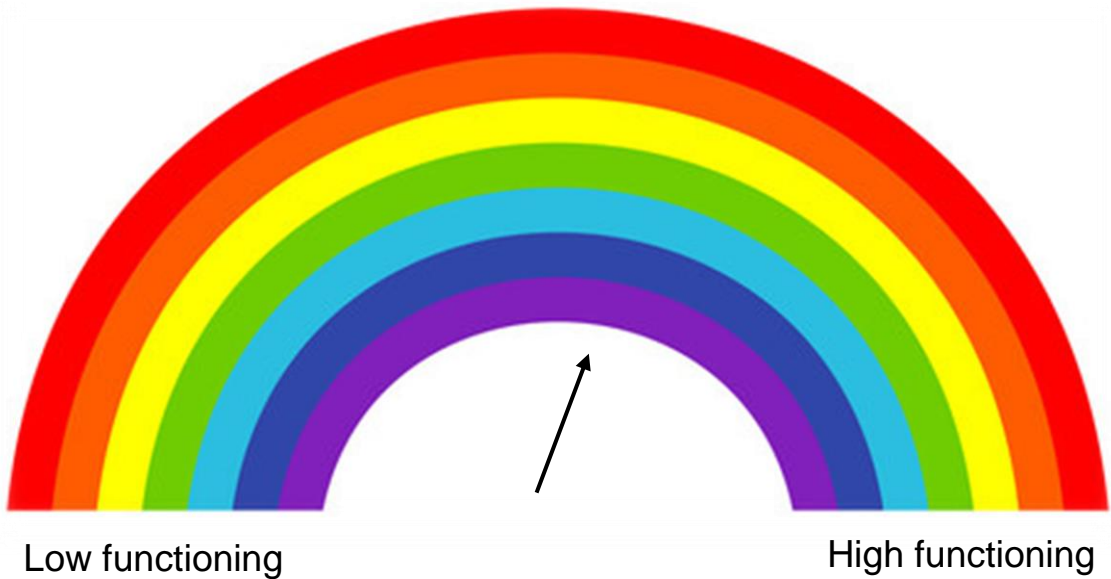
This is the same with Autism... it is just a 'difference' in the way our brains process information (how they work)



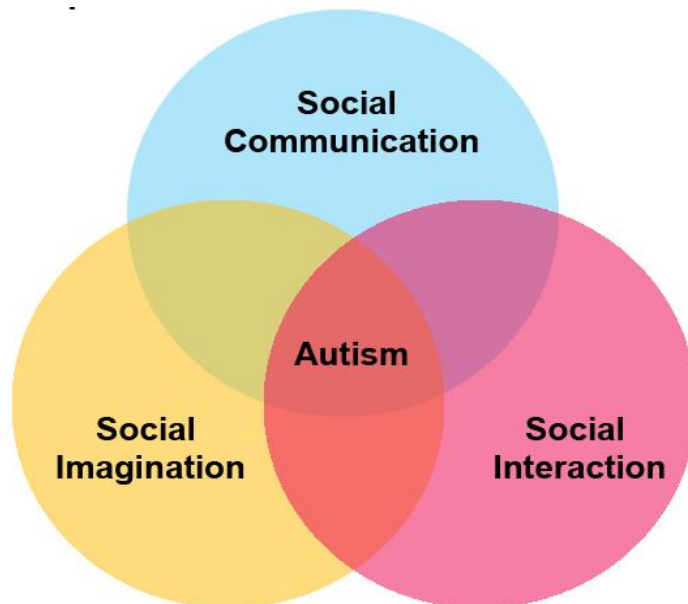
Like 2 computers: both are great and do the same thing but in a slightly different way



Autism is a spectrum condition



This means that everyone with Autism is different too – we have the same main features but everyone experiences them differently. The three main difficulties are:



We will look at each of these separately. Let's start with what people say about social communication:

I like to talk about things that interest me

I like pictures to help me to understand things

I know a lot of words but don't always understand what they mean

My feelings are like everyone else's – I just don't know how to express them

I don't always notice when people are talking to me

I don't know how to 'do' a real conversation

It might take me a while to realise what I'm being asked to do

Social Communication

I can't say what I need to say – the words don't come out

I ask the same questions because I forget quickly

I sometimes struggle to pay attention to what people say

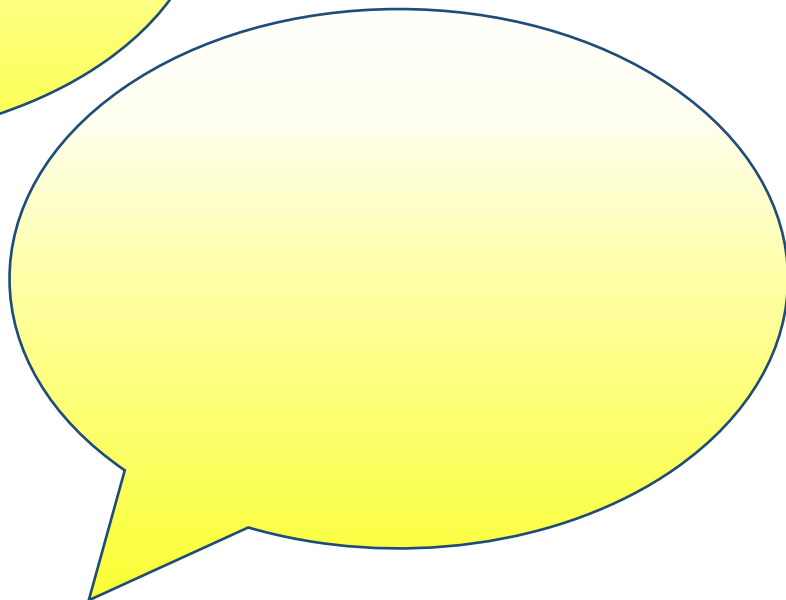
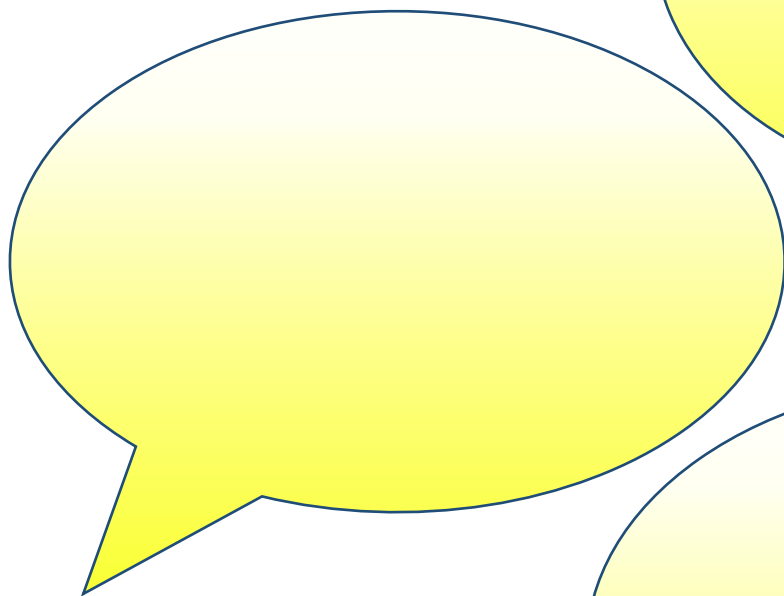
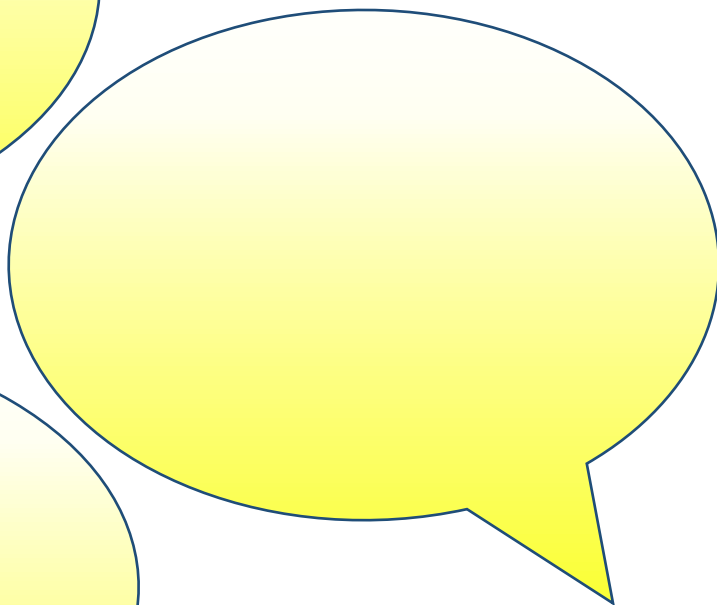
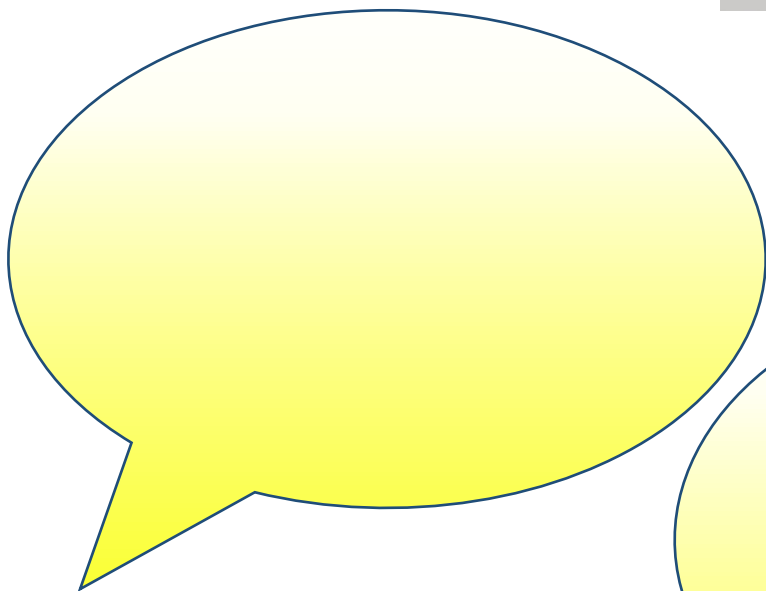
It may take me some time to understand what you're saying

I worry what to say if someone talks to me

Sometimes people's faces and words don't match up

Do you ever think or feel the same way?

Write down some things you find difficult to do with social communication:





So what can we do to help ourselves?
Write some ideas here to help with communication. You
could ask someone you trust what they think too.



There are some ideas over
the page to help you...



- Practise turn taking in a conversation by using a ‘talk ball’ – only the person with the ball can talk, whilst the other person listens.
- Practise watching the TV with the sound off and see if you can guess how the person is feeling by looking at their facial expression or body language. ‘Mr Bean’ videos are also good for this!
- Practise jokes and sarcasm at home with your family. Ask your parents to model it for you to help your understanding.
- Write a list of ‘conversation starters’ you can use with your peers or family members.
- Play emotion charades with your family.

Now we have looked at social communication,
let’s see what people say about social
interaction...

I'm not naughty – I just forget not to do things

I don't always know how to react to people

I can make friends but I find it hard to keep them

Making eye contact feels a bit uncomfortable so I don't do it

I don't like crowds

I may not understand why you are upset

I don't understand why you play 'imaginative' games

I don't always understand why you do or say things

Social Interaction

I want a friend but I don't know how

If I'm nervous or anxious – I run

I want to be with other people but I worry that I will get on their nerves or annoy them

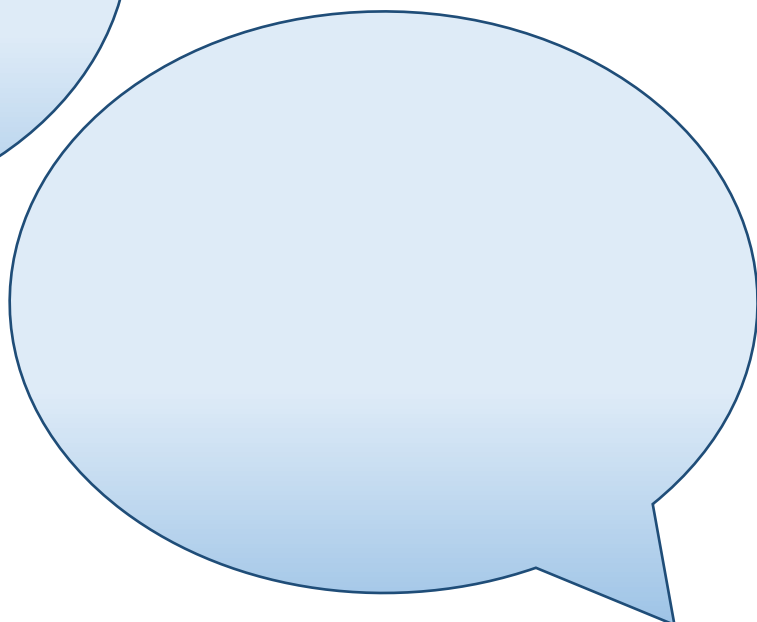
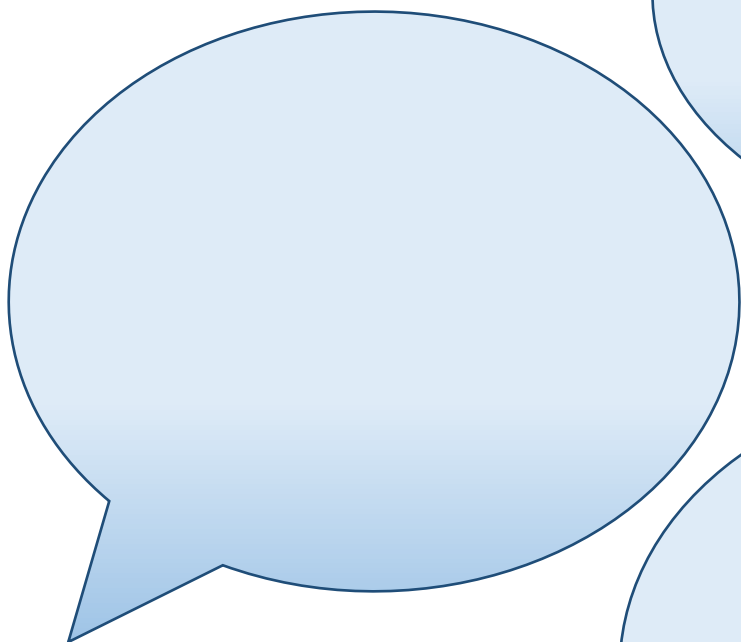
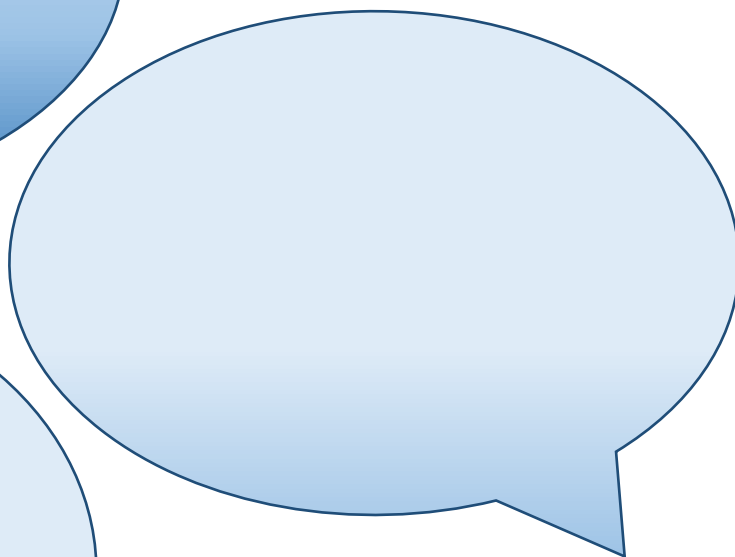
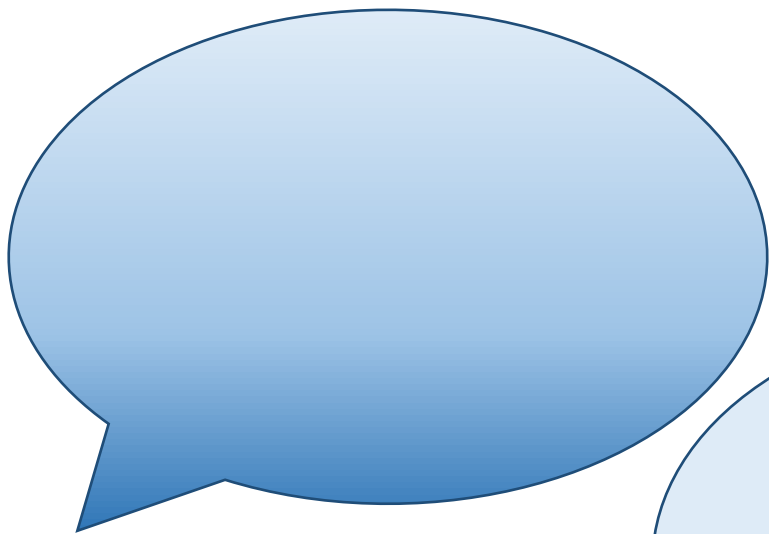
Sometimes I just like to be left alone

I want to play but I don't understand the rules

Turn taking and sharing can be difficult

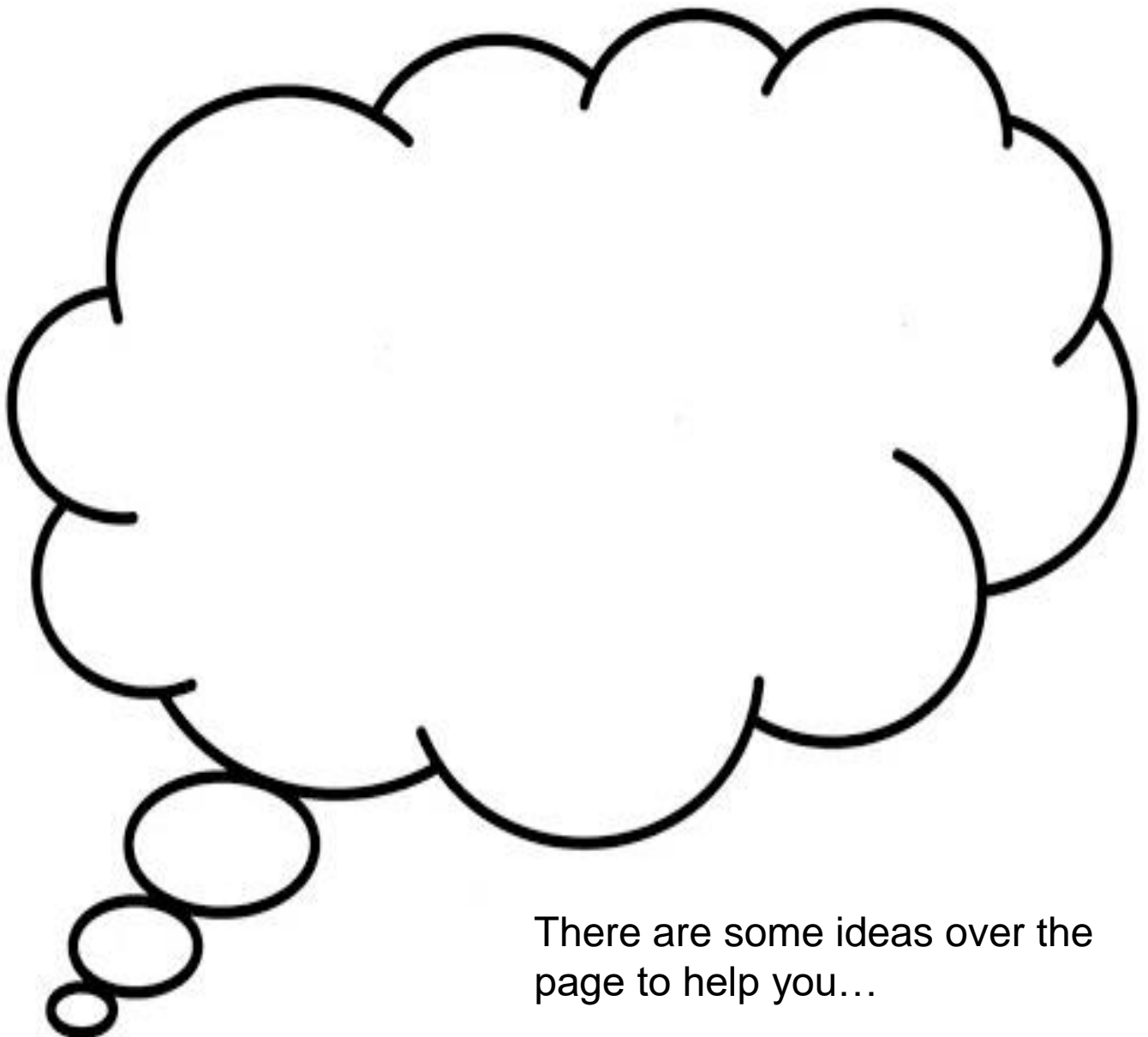
Do you ever think or feel the same way?

Write down some things you find difficult to do with social interaction:





So what can we do to help ourselves?
Write some ideas here to help with interaction. You could ask
someone you trust what they think too.



There are some ideas over the
page to help you...



- Ask your parents to model interactions they have when you are out together e.g. with their friends or with a shop assistant
- Use the 'arm's length' rule when knowing how close to stand to someone
- Practise!! Ask for feedback from your family on how you interact and how you can make it even better
- Watch TV programs with your parents and discuss why the characters act like they do in different situations
- Understand the differences between 'friends', 'acquaintances' and 'strangers'
- Remember: It's okay not to want friends, as long as you have the skills needed

Now we have looked at social interaction, let's see what people say about thoughts and behaviours...

Sometimes I feel overwhelmed by everything and shut down

Sometimes things are too exciting – I don't know what to do with myself!

It's hard to sleep because my brain keeps going

I don't like it when things change

I like spinning, rocking and being upside down because it's fun!

Thoughts and Behaviours

When things don't go the way I want, I can get upset or angry

I have special interests that I think about all the time

I love peace and quiet unless it is me making the noise

I may need extra support at school to keep on task

Being in new situations can be scary

Plans and routines are comforting

Staying still and moving when asked is tricky

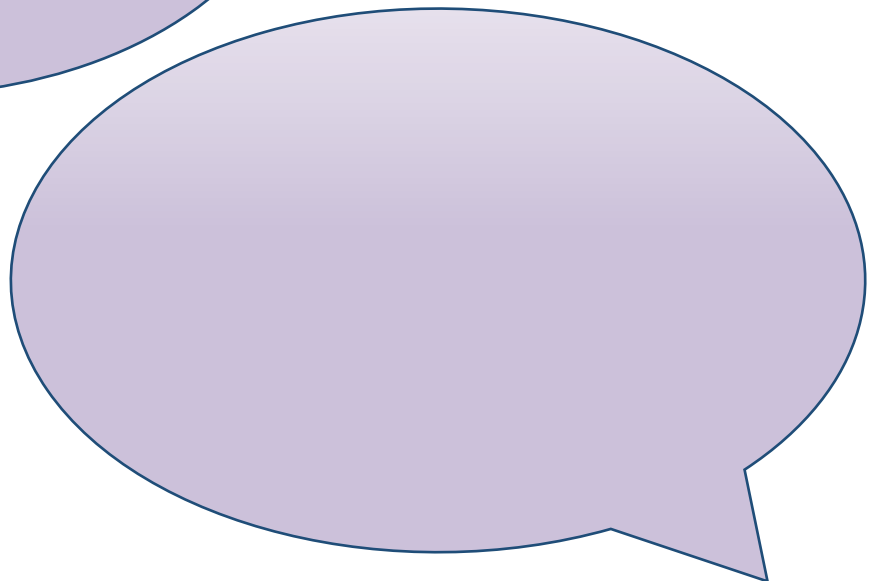
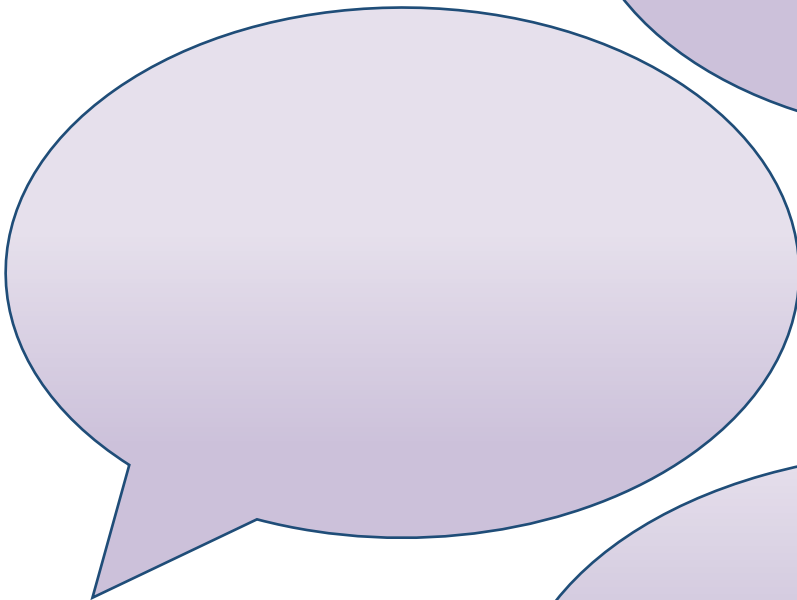
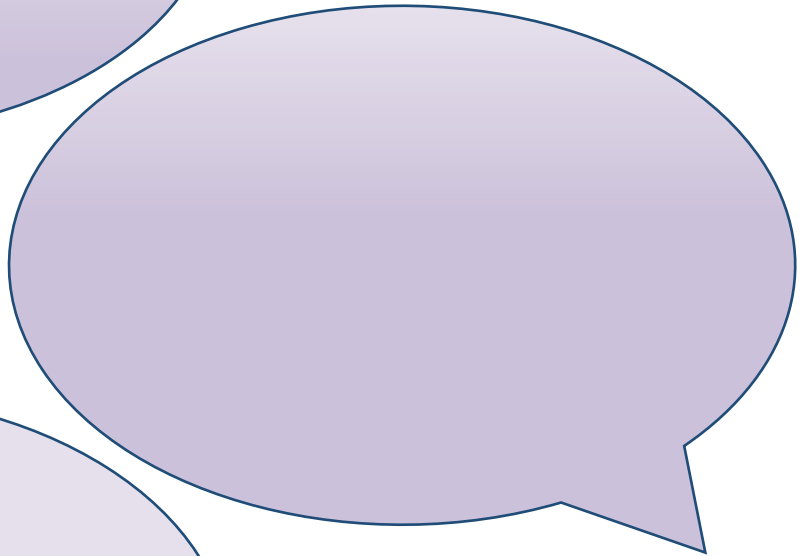
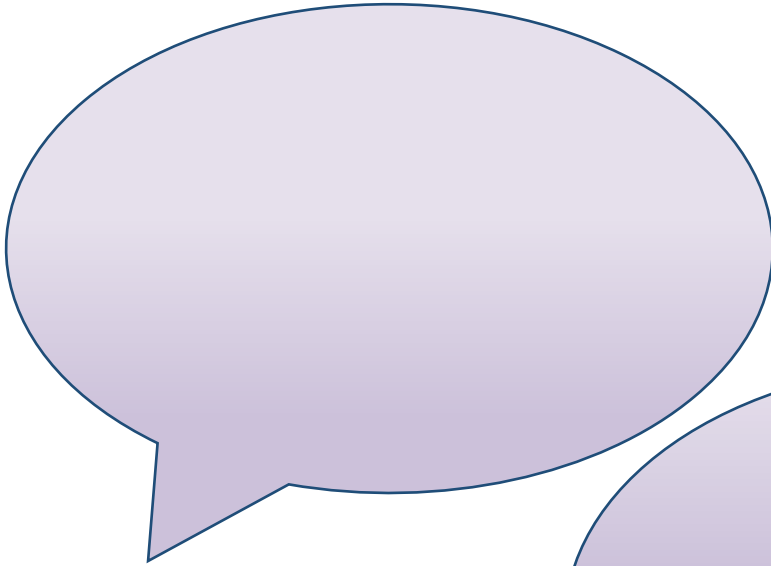
I like doing the same things because I know what's going to happen

Making a decision is hard – it's easier to only have 2 choices

I seem to think differently to other people

Sometimes my clothes tickle me

Do you ever think or feel the same way?
Write down some things you find difficult
to do with thoughts and behaviours:





So what can we do to help ourselves?
Write some ideas here to help with thoughts and behaviours.
You could ask someone you trust what they think too.



There are some ideas over the page to help you...



- Use a visual timetable or a diary so you can see what's happening in advance
- If you are going somewhere new, look it up on Google first so that you know what to expect
- Ask to be given as much notice as possible if there are going to be any changes
- Have someone who can show you what to do and where to go if there are changes
- Let someone know if you are worrying about a change e.g. Worry box or book

If there is something you dislike, think of ways you can make it better. For example:

- Noise cancelling headphones;
- Favourite smell on a tissue;
- Have something to chew, etc
- Use a sleeping bag if you like being enclosed;
- Go shopping at quieter times with less people

If there is something you really like that calms you, can you add this into your everyday life to help?

As well as experiencing difficulties, people with Autism also have some amazing strengths!
Let's have a look at what some people say:



I can be very honest and trustworthy

Some of the cleverest people in the world are like me

I can notice things that other people can't such as tiny details, sounds or smells

I can focus on something for a very long time

Strengths

I can be very funny

Once you get to know me I am a loyal and trustworthy friend

I am a very tidy person

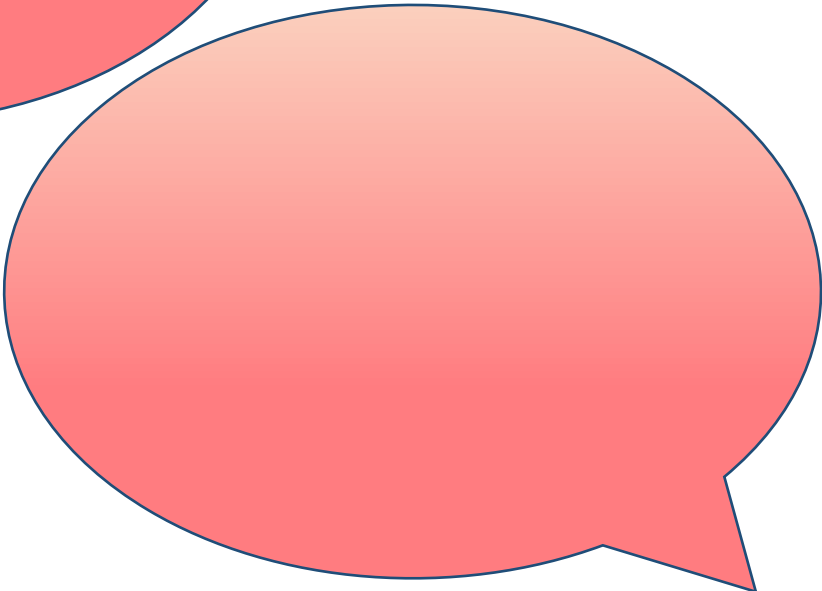
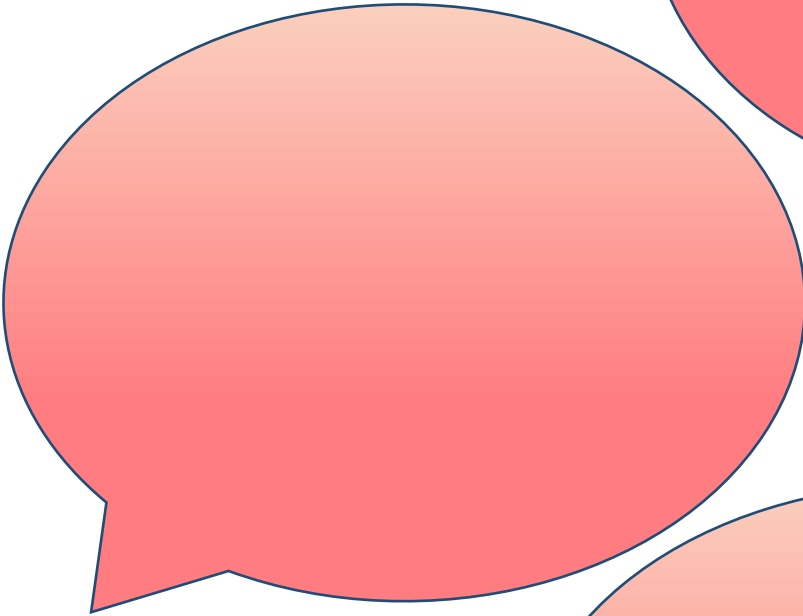
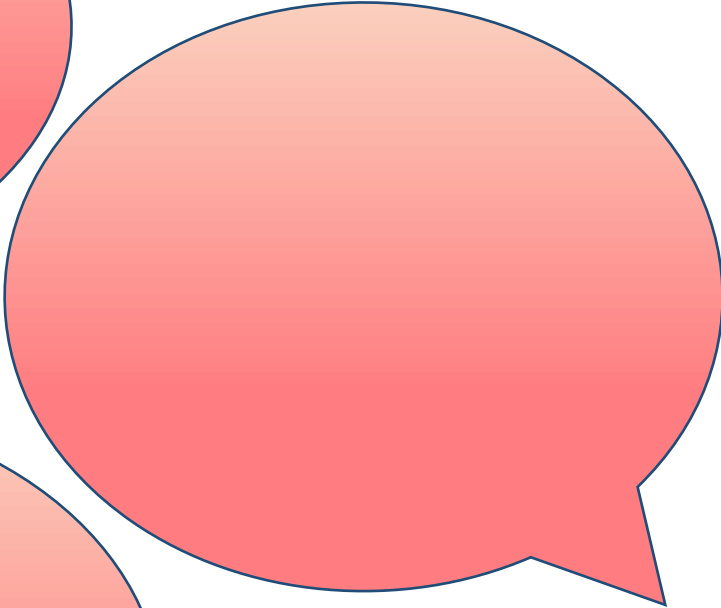
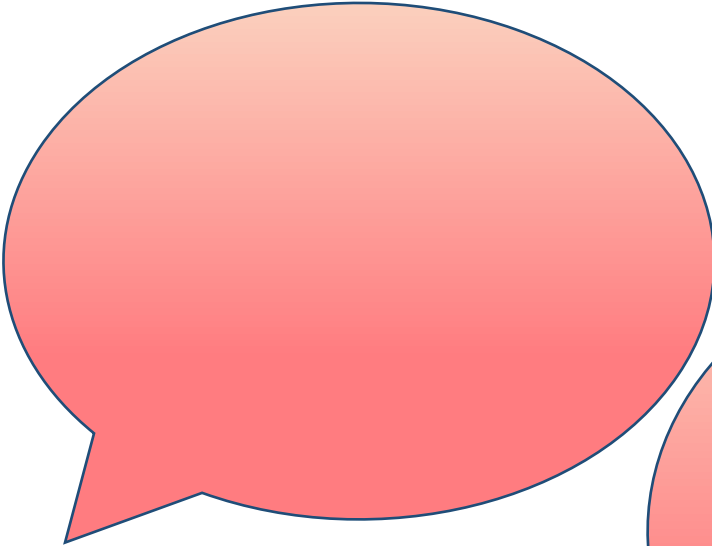
I wouldn't change anything about being me – I am amazing!

I am very good at remembering interesting facts

Sometimes I like to be on my own

I am very good at keeping to routines and following rules

Do you ever think or feel the same way?
It is great if you do. Write down your strengths below, or ask
someone to write them for you.
It's good to share your strengths!!!



Now we know more about our strengths and difficulties, it can be useful to think of something we would like to learn or get better at. If there is anything you would like to practise, write it below:



Things I would like to work on...

1.
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2.
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People who can help me:

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Things I can do to help myself:

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Now you have learnt about how Austim can be and what it means for you.

Remember... everyone is unique and special in their own way!

WELL DONE!