



**AUTSCAPE**  
Effective Living

18 August – 21 August 2009

Emmaus Centre, UK

## **Section 1: The Autscape Experience**

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## Introduction

With just under two weeks to go until Autescape, we hope you are getting excited about the experience. We understand how important it is, especially for autistic people, to know what to expect. In these documents we will give you as much information as we can. Some of it will be venue specific. The website will contain updates as they become available and some will be given out at orientation.

This is for your information and you may do with it as you will. Print it, transfer it to a PDA or laptop, or just read it. We suggest you print the relevant sections from part 3 and carry it with you.

The information pack consists of these files:

1. Experience – what to expect at Autescape and how to deal with challenges
2. Programme – presentations and presenters' information and schedule
3. Lists, maps and forms (emergency contact, travel information, packing list)

If you have any questions, feel free to contact us, preferably by e-mail:  
info@autescape.org

If you can't e-mail, phone: 07941 343 026 or 07801 400 723.

## Arrival

1. There is a picture of the entrance to the venue grounds in part 3 of this pack. When you arrive at the venue grounds, continue up the gentle hill until you reach the building at the top. This is the conference centre.
2. Go through the double doors to reception for registration.
3. Name badges will be laid out on a table alphabetically. Please take yours.
4. Collect an initiation badge from a box.
5. Proceed to the registration table and say your name or show your name badge to the organisers, who will be wearing either blue headwear, or a blue sash
6. If you would like to be escorted to your room (recommended), please wait in the seating area nearby for someone to take a small group.

## Day participants

Non-residential conference members are welcome to register on the Tuesday. Registration on Wednesday and Thursday will take place between 8:30am and 9:00am. If you cannot make registration at any of these times please contact the registrar (email: registrar@autescape.org) giving your approximate arrival time. You only need to register on the first day you are attending. If you arrive earlier or later than planned, please ask at Reception for an organiser.

Day participants are welcome to stay for the evening meal and to join in the evening activities. They may also use the kitchenettes throughout the day to prepare drinks and snacks.

## Getting involved

On the final day of Autescape we will have the **Annual General Meeting (AGM)** where the new committee will be elected. If you want to have a say in who organises the next Autescape, make sure to join in the AGM on **21 August 2008 at 11:30 AM** in the

Downstairs Conference Hall at the Emmaus Centre. If you have missed the chance to be nominated for the committee, you can still join a sub-committee or otherwise get involved.

At Autscape we need a number of volunteers to help with collecting questions at presentations, setting up rooms, escorting participants to their rooms, and various other tasks. If you would like to volunteer, please let us know before or during Autscape.

### **Entertainment evening**

On Thursday evening there will be an informal event where we can share our entertaining talents and interests. Please bring your musical instruments, favourite poetry reading, comedy routine, juggling equipment, gymnastic routine or other activity (of up to five minutes) to share with us. Piano accompaniment can be arranged if you have sheet music available.

If you would like to participate by performing in some way, please contact us so that you can be added to the list of performers. You can also inform one of the organisers during Autscape, if you decide later that you'd like to take part. If you don't feel like performing, that's fine, too. You are welcome to come along and enjoy the show as an audience member.

### **2009 Venue**

The venue for Autscape 2009 is in West Wickham; see part 3 of this pack for the exact address and information on how to find the venue.

The Emmaus Centre is a new venue for us this year. Remember the organisers will also need time to learn their way around and may not be able to instantly answer your questions. The venue staff may also take some time to get used to our ways. Please be patient.

We have explained our communication badge system to the venue staff. The venue sometimes hosts silent retreats and hence the staff are used to people who prefer not to speak and instead use gestures such as pointing to indicate their needs; for example their lunch choice.

If you have a car parked on site and its alarm goes off the staff will contact you regardless of your badge colour. Otherwise the alarm noise disturbs other people.

Essentials will be on sale at the back of the dining hall. An honesty system is in use. This means you pay for your items by putting your payment into a box.

All the cold tap water is filtered and is drinkable.

### **Phone Internet access**

Part of the building has a Wifi signal. If you wish to use this you can walk around the building looking for a good signal and somewhere to sit comfortably to use your device. There are also two computers you can use for internet access.

As the venue is up a gentle slope mobile coverage is good. There is a payphone.

### **Kitchenettes**

There is a kitchenette near the conference facilities on the ground floor and the first floor as well as on each floor of the accommodation wings. Each kitchenette has a little fridge. Please label food you store in these fridges to avoid mixups. Kitchenette

facilities also include biscuits, tea/coffee, toaster, kettle and microwave. Should one kitchenette not have anything you are looking for please use a different one. Remember to wipe up any spills and clean up any crumbs or messes.

Kitchenettes and Bathrooms are cleaned each morning. In the afternoon they are checked and if needed cleaned again. Biscuit supplies are checked in the morning and afternoon.

## Venue grounds and surrounding areas

The venue grounds include an attractive rose-garden and small woodland area. The paths through the garden are designed to be accessible.

The convent has its own private garden; this is clearly marked. Please do not enter this garden.

Between the venue and the venue gates are some flats for senior citizens. Please try to keep the noise volume down if walking by these at night time to avoid disturbing the residents.

On one side of the venue there is farmland. There are paths going through the field which you are welcome to follow. There may be horses grazing in the field. We are asked not to feed the horses.

About a kilometre away from the venue there are shops and takeaways. You can reach them either by bus or by a walk though the nearby common. (See part three of this information pack for maps and bus routes). The shops include a pub, convenience stores, cafes, restaurants and a takeaway.

## Accommodation

The accommodation is split over two wings of the same building. Each floor in each wing contains a mini kitchen where you can prepare snacks and hot drinks as well as communal bathroom facilities (including both baths and showers).

All bathroom facilities are in separate rooms, as you would find in a house; there are no cubicles in the accommodation this year. Most bathrooms contain a bath with an overhead shower. The disabled bathrooms have a walk in shower instead.

Bedrooms have locks. Each adult in each room a bedroom key. One towel per person is provided. Our rooms will not be serviced during our stay.

There is a numeric keypad door entry system for accessing the venue at night. You will be given the number for this system on the first day. This must not be given to anyone outside Autscape, to prevent strangers from entering the building.

## Getting Along

### House rules

Please help us by following these house rules and the guidelines that follow.

- **Smoking:** Smoking is only allowed outdoors in the designated areas.
- **Alcohol:** You may consume alcohol in the evenings from 8pm in the main lounge. Please do not drink alcohol in any other location, including bedrooms, the meeting rooms or outdoors. The sale of alcohol is strictly forbidden.
- **Photography and Filming:** People who do not wish to be photographed or filmed will be wearing a black circle. Permission must be sought from every individual in a photograph before any publication.

- **Please stay away from the convent garden.** This is a well marked area for the venue staff. If you do happen to stray in, you may be asked why you are there.

## Autistic needs and behaviour

We take autistic needs into consideration throughout the planning and running of Autescape. Of course, there's no way we could anticipate, let alone accommodate, every need of every autistic person. We are doing our best within the constraints of our knowledge, energy and resources. It is important to remember that nearly everyone at Autescape, including presenters and organisers, is also autistic. They may be struggling to cope just as much as you.

That said, autistic behaviour is totally normal and expected at Autescape. Stimming (repetitive movements), echolalia, distractibility, atypical body language, and perseveration (obsessiveness), to name but a few possibilities, are expected and accepted. Appearing, or indeed being, completely NT (neurologically typical, or 'normal') is also perfectly acceptable. Most important, **be yourself!**

## Help

### ***Expectations***

By coming to Autescape, we expect that you can manage certain things, or will bring someone to help you.

- Respect others' space and property
- Follow 'house rules' about things like smoking and drinking
- Make your own choices
- Share a room (if applicable)
- Organise your time
- Take care of your health and hygiene
- Ask for help

### ***Care needs***

Autescape does not provide any formal or professional individual help. It may sometimes be possible to arrange with another participant to help in small ways; for example, your roommate may be willing to wake you in the morning. However, this kind of help must be voluntary and must not be an unfair burden on others. Due to their own limitations, others may not be available or 100% reliable, even if they wish to help. If you require extensive or essential assistance, please bring a carer who can provide that for you.

### ***Organisers on duty***

Nevertheless, we recognise that things go wrong for all of us from time to time. If you have queries or problems or need help understanding something, two organisers will be on duty at all times. A duty rota will be displayed in the Information Centre and the people on duty will wear blue headwear or a blue sash so that you can identify them. They will also have a blue communication card.

Between midnight and 8am the two people on duty will be asleep, so please only contact them at these times if it is VERY IMPORTANT. Whenever possible, please

allow organisers who are not on duty to have a rest; come to one of the organisers on duty with your problems.

### Sensory issues

Sensory issues, and mechanisms to reduce them, will be common and totally acceptable. No one will think it odd or cause you any difficulty for wearing sunglasses, earplugs, headphones or whatever you may require. Unfortunately, some of the rooms do have fluorescent lighting, but we will keep its use to a minimum.

While you are welcome to have ‘stim toys’, such as something to fiddle with or lights to look at, please be aware that some people find these very distracting.

### Noise

There will be a system based on the interaction badges to indicate the allowed noise level in different areas.

Type	Colour	Description
Silent	Red	No interaction or unnecessary noise in this area
Moderate	Yellow	Talking allowed, but please refrain from shouting. No sound amplifiers, musical instruments or stereos.
Noisy	Green	Music, films or other loud activity taking place

### Sensory considerations for other participants

Because many autistic people have particular sensory sensitivities, we have a few special rules to avoid inadvertently causing distress.

- **Touch:** Some autistics are very sensitive to touch. Please do not touch anyone without first asking their permission – including children.
- **Noise:** Please be aware of people trying to rest, and keep noise to a minimum near bedrooms and the Quiet Room, both indoors and outside the windows. Please respect noise level signs posted on the door of different rooms. If you have noisy stims or tics, try to contain them during presentations. If this is likely to be a problem for you, please discuss it with us.
- **Lights:** Before using a camera flash, you must gain the permission of everyone in the room. Under most circumstances, flashing light ‘stim toys’ are not a problem. However, they may be disturbing to some people, so please be respectful of that. Presenters may ask for flashing lights not to be used during their presentations.
- **Smells:** Please do not wear scented products at Autscape. If you smoke or drink alcohol, be aware that others may find this aversive. We recommend you wash your hands immediately after smoking and try not to get too close to others until the smell has dissipated.

### Social interaction

There is no requirement to socialise at all, and there will be no disapproval of those who choose not to interact with others.

### Initiation badges

Everyone will be provided with coloured badges they can use to indicate who may initiate social interaction with them.

Type	Colour	Description
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No initiation	Red	Please do not initiate any interaction with me.
Prior permission	Yellow	Please do not initiate unless I have already given you permission to approach me on a yellow badge.
Please initiate	Green	I would like to socialise, but I have difficulty initiating. Please initiate with me.
Neutral	White	I am able to regulate my own interaction.

**Black circle:** Additionally, those who would not like to be in videos or photographs will be wearing a black circle.

Please respect all these badges for the safety and comfort of all participants.

### ***Getting away***

There will be a designated Quiet Room where you can go to relax and 'chill out' if things are getting too much. No interaction or unnecessary noise is permitted in the Quiet Room and there will be some quiet sensory equipment in this room to help you relax.

### ***Merchandise***

This year Autescape will have some merchandise for sale. We hope to have the following:

- Mugs with Autescape logo
- Keyrings with Autescape logo
- Baseball caps with Autescape logo
- Calendar magnets with Autescape logo
- Selection of stimmy toys
- T-shirts (order it at Autescape and it will be posted to you afterwards; knowing your t-shirt size will help) – please write your address clearly for us.

We can take UK cheques or cash.

## **Challenges**

### **Choices**

There are many choices to be made before and throughout the conference, ranging from what you'd like to eat, to which discussions you'd like to participate in.

#### ***What we will do:***

We will try to make it easier on you by giving as much information as possible in advance so you can consider your options.

#### ***What you can do:***

- Consider your options well ahead of time. If you decide what you would like to go to and what interests you, this can limit the stress of having many choices to make when you have a lot of other things to cope with.
- Study the menus in advance. A copy of the menus will be available in the information centre; you can make your food choices, or at least have something in mind, before entering the serving queue.



## Sharing a room

Some participants will be sharing a room with someone they don't know. We understand that this can be very difficult, but it allows as many people as possible to participate in Autescape. Where interaction and noise level choices are not the same, the more restrictive level must be followed.

### ***What we will do:***

We will try to match you up with the most compatible roommate we can find.

### ***What you can do:***

- If noises disturb you, earplugs may help you sleep more comfortably.
- If you are up a lot in the night, please be quiet and respectful of your sleeping roommate.
- You can choose to have a 'no interaction' room, and please respect it if your roommate would prefer not to interact in the room.

## Busy days

For many participants, the amount of activity at Autescape will be far more than they're used to. This can be exhausting.

### ***What we will do:***

We have scheduled breaks between activities, and the evenings are more relaxed, with social and entertainment activities.

### ***What you can do:***

- Remember to take time out to relax in whatever way works best for you.
- It is more difficult to cope with being busy if you're tired, so adequate rest and sleep will help you cope with as much activity as you would like.
- You always have the choice not to do a particular activity, or to leave early if you're feeling stressed. Only you can decide what you would like to do with your time at Autescape.

## Unstructured time

Some autistic people don't know what to do if there is a large amount of unstructured time, especially in an unfamiliar place. Knowing what to expect and what to do all the time can help some people cope better.

### ***What we will do:***

We have tried to keep a balance between structured and unstructured time. We have avoided large blocks of totally unstructured time during the day. When there is unstructured time, there are many options for activities you could do alone or with others to fill it. Some of the options won't be determined until the event, but there will be opportunities to suggest or sign up for structured or semi-structured activities for most of the time there.

### ***What you can do:***

- If unstructured time is a problem for you, try to think ahead about how you would like to occupy yourself in the evenings.



- Bring your own entertainment, such as books, music, electronic devices, games to share, musical instruments or other interests and hobbies.
- Consider running a structured discussion one evening, and think of some topics you would like to discuss with others.

## Self-care

Many autistic people have trouble taking care of themselves in various ways, such as nutrition, health and hygiene. You will have to be able to get yourself up, washed and dressed without intervention from others. You will be better able to cope with the demands of being at Autscape if you eat and sleep as regularly as possible.

### ***What we will do:***

The structure of the days will help many people with routines of rising and going to bed and taking breaks. Meals are cooked for you and served at specific times, so your nutrition should be adequately catered for as long as you partake.

### ***What you can do:***

- If you take any medication, you can get a multi-compartment box which you can fill ahead of time.
- Come to meals in good time and ready to eat. The venue ask that we are on time for meals. You may take as long as you like to eat your meal. Take your meal away somewhere quieter if you find it hard to eat with distractions.
- Bring an alarm clock if you have difficulty getting up in the morning. If you have a portable alarm or a mobile phone, you can set it to go off at bedtime or other important times of day.
- When planning how much time you will need in the morning, leave extra for dealing with an unfamiliar environment and having to share bathroom facilities.
- Be prepared to communicate your meal choices by word or gesture by the time you get to the front of the queue.

## Orientation

Knowing where to be and when to be there can be difficult for autistic people, who often aren't able to just 'follow the crowd'. Remembering where things are or what time things are happening can be difficult.

### ***What we will do:***

We will provide you with a schedule, including where each event will take place. The name of the room, its function, and a schedule of its use will be posted on the door of each room. The first session of each day will be a plenary lecture, so everyone who wishes to attend will be going to the same place at the same time.

### ***What you can do:***

- Wander around the facilities as much as you need to in order to find each place you will need.
- Head to activities with plenty of time for getting lost and found again.
- Locate essential facilities such as toilets, fire escapes, and the dining hall *before* you need them.
- Keep your schedule with you.

- Prepare scripts to ask for help or directions, with gestures if necessary (for example, you could point to the name of the activity you're trying to find).

## Overload

The sensory and social input of a conference can be hard to process and cope with.

### ***What we will do:***

We will minimise the use of fluorescent lighting, although it can't be avoided altogether. We have chosen a venue with many quiet areas to retreat to. The social interaction badge system exists so you can participate fully in the conference even when you don't feel up to socialising.

### ***What you can do:***

- Try taking a break from the stimulation for a while.
- Bring whatever you find helpful in reducing sensory overload, such as sunglasses, earplugs or headphones. Take breaks in peaceful places.
- Use the initiation badge you are provided with to indicate if you are not up to socialising.

## Food Service

Autscape registration includes three meals per day for residential participants, unless self-catering. Registration for day participants includes two meals per day (lunch and supper), and day participants who arrive during the breakfast service are welcome to help themselves to tea and coffee which they will find in the kitchenette between the Downstairs Conference Hall and the Lounge. All participants are welcome to prepare snacks for themselves throughout the day if they are hungry between meals.

Meals are served cafeteria style, with a queue and servers, in a communal dining hall. That part is not very autism friendly, but once you have your meal you may take it outside the dining room. If you prefer to have your food in the dining room, but want to eat your meal silently, you can use the no-interaction table in the dining room annexe. No food or drink other than water may be taken to the meeting rooms.

There is a small annexe that opens off the dining hall. This will be a quieter area and the no-interaction table will be here.

### **Mealtimes:**

Breakfast 7:30-8:45

Lunch starts at 12:30

Supper starts at 18:30

We are asked to please arrive punctually for meals. Each meal is followed by a half hour break to accommodate slow eaters and those who need a longer rest. If you need more food or at different times, you may prepare your own food in the kitchenettes.

Menus were not available at the time of writing.