

Organising and prioritising

Advice & Support for:

Overview



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Organising and prioritising - a guide for all audiences

The ability to organise and prioritise helps us to plan daily activities and manage our time effectively. However, some autistic people may find organising and prioritising difficult. Here, we explain why this can be the case, and list some ways to help.

An autistic person may have difficulties with:

processing information

predicting the consequences of an action (if I do this, what will happen next?)

understanding the concept of time

'executive function' (coping with daily tasks like tidying up or cooking).

One or all of these can affect a person's ability to organise, prioritise and sequence. For example, if you struggle to understand the concept of time, how do you plan what you will do over the course of a week?

Strategies to help

Here are some ways in which people on the autism spectrum can organise and prioritise daily activities and tasks. At first, other people may need to have a lot of involvement introducing the strategies. You may use the strategies in more than one place, for example at home and at school, so it is important that everyone who is using them - be it family members, employers, teachers or

It is important that everyone who is using them - be it family members, employers, teachers or friends - uses them consistently.

Over time, some autistic people will be able to use the strategies independently. Others may always need support.

Visual supports

Pictures, written lists, calendars and real objects can all be good ways of helping autistic people to understand what is going to happen and when. For example, a person might have a daily timetable with pictures of a shower, clothes, breakfast, their school, dinner, a toothbrush, pyjamas, and a bed to indicate what they will be doing, and in what order, that day. Find out more about visual supports.

Colour coding

Colours can be used to indicate the importance or significance of tasks (and therefore help to prioritise tasks and work through them in a logical sequence).

For example, work in a red tray or file could be urgent, work in a green tray or file could be pending, while work in a blue tray or file is not important or has no timescale attached to it.

Colours can also help people to distinguish between paperwork, for example different household bills.

Voice recording

Recorded messages, on a dictaphone or smartphone, can be a useful auditory reminder of tasks, work, events or deadlines.

Lists

Lists can remind us of the tasks we need to do, and to help us prioritise. Lists can also be a good way of registering achievements (by crossing something off when you've done it), and of reassuring yourself that you're getting things done. Lists can be visual, written, or in the form of a task list app.

Alarms and alerts

Computer calendars can have important dates stored on them, or reminders about when to pay bills. Instructions can be sent to the person's mobile phone by text - text messages lend themselves to this especially well as you are forced to keep instructions brief and simple. A text message is also an unobtrusive and discreet way of contacting or supporting an autistic person.

Task boxes, envelopes and files

Store work or belongings in set places, so they aren't misplaced or forgotten.

Times of day, days of the week

You can use times of day (morning, afternoon or evening) or days of the week to help plan and organise tasks, social activities and other events. For example, Saturday is shopping day, Wednesday is bills day, Thursday night is homework night.

Social stories™ and comic strip conversations

Social stories™ and comic strip conversations can be a good way of illustrating the consequences of an action. They can help people to understand why it's good to be organised, and what might happen if we don't meet deadlines or attend an activity at a particular time. Find out more about [Social stories™ and comic strip conversations](#).

Teaching materials: time and sequence

You may find that teaching materials such as sequence cards, games, timers and clocks help some autistic people to understand the concept of time and sequences. Materials like this can be used at home and at work.

Budgets

We all need to learn how to manage our money, to budget, control spending and pay bills. Many autistic adults will manage their own money or bills, to varying extents, while children may have pocket money. It can help to set out very specific guidelines about managing money and the consequences of spending. Try our free managing money online module.

At school

Homework, assignments and deadlines can cause great anxiety for some people. Others will not register their significance. The following strategies can help:

clear monitoring

regular meetings with teaching staff

colour coding of files.

Some people may need help in understanding the end goal of what to them may seem continuous work and deadlines.

Processing of instructions can be difficult, so it may be useful to use communication books, online learning environments, and voice recordings to reduce the pressure on the student of trying to remember what they are supposed to be doing.

At work

Strategies to use in the work environment include:

using files and colour to identify and clarify the importance and deadlines for particular pieces of work.

making a clear to do list at the beginning of the day - you can then cover up or mark off work which has been completed

arranging regular meetings with your line manager to ensure work is understood and is progressing

using the computer programs available to help organise work - for example colour coding emails relating to importance of response

using the calendar as a reminder for meetings or deadlines.

Further information

Read about our [Brain in Hand app](#), designed to help manage anxiety.

Article sources

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