

Strategies and Resources: Management of Conflicting Needs

Terms such as “fully accessible” or “barrier-free” are never truly accurate. With such a wide range of different disabilities, it is not possible to fully meet everyone’s needs at once. Although universal design is important for common access needs, it is important to know that access needs are often very individual.

Autistic people can have very different access needs from each other. Sometimes, these needs can conflict or “compete” if they are within the same space or environment. This can be stressful and difficult to solve for all involved.



Examples of types of needs:

- **Sensory needs:** A less sensory stimulating environment, or vice versa.
- **Processing needs:** Extra time for processing what has been said, or a quieter environment
- **Communication needs:** Easy read documents, clear or simpler language, or alternative communication methods.
- **Energy needs:** Individuals may have different levels of energy to engage in various activities and this may require compromise
- **Physical needs:** Some people may require adaptations or support with, for example, moving or navigating a room.
- **Mental health needs:** Time to decompress, and be left alone, or additional support or reassurance may be needed.

Prioritising/Middle Ground:

Sometimes conflicting needs cannot be fully accommodated, and compromise may be needed, and in some cases one person's needs may need to take priority.

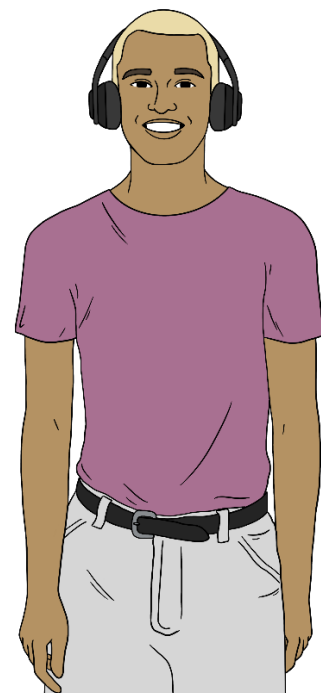
For example, one person may require support with physical or sensory needs that may cause sensory issues for another person, depending on the severity of those needs the other individual may need to make their own adaptations, possibly with use of tools to find a middle ground between the two.

Personal vs External Accommodations:

Sometimes conflicting needs may be accommodated through personal adaptations and tools, along with external or environmental changes.

For example, if someone needs bright light to be able to see properly, but you are sensitive to light, wearing tinted lenses or sunglasses could provide a compromise that works for both people.

External accommodations are often supported top-down or systemically. For example: A company could support employees to work under flexible or compressed hours to meet their personal needs, and requirements, such as, people with insomnia working flexible hours to enable them to work a sleep supportive schedule.



Expectations:

Discussing needs and expectations around shared and differing needs can be vital, interpersonally and professionally, so that conflict and issues with unmet needs can be avoided and compromise planned ahead of time.



Examples:

- **Conflicting need: Touch.** Ted is touch-seeking and needs deep pressure for regulation and touch for connection. Bill is sensitive to touch and it can be overwhelming.
- **Strategies:** Negotiation of type of touch, amount and time. Communication of when at limit or when in need. Potential for “not now, but later”. Tools like weighted blankets for deep pressure and layers of clothing as a barrier for skin contact.
- **Conflicting need: Ted needs louder sound, due to difficulty processing sound and hyposensitivity. Bill needs quieter sound due to overwhelm.**
- **Strategies:** Prioritising Ted’s need for louder noise where there is a need to process what is being said (TV shows, video meetings). Using subtitles to assist processing. Ear plugs and ear defenders. Using headphones.
 - **Compromise:** quieter sound for music in the car, as Bill needs to concentrate on driving.
- **Internal conflicting need: Both Ted and Bill find it helpful to have things visual but get overwhelmed by visual clutter.**
 - **Strategies:** Labels, dump trays, neat piles, shelves, prioritising important spaces during tidying (such as the kitchen).



- **Conflicting need: Energy and support needs.** Both Ted and Bill are easily fatigued, but both can need support with tasks from the other. This can mean that both have too low energy to support the other when they need it. This can also mean that one can have high energy and want to socialise whilst the other has low energy.

Mental Health Impacts:

Without discussion and compromise differing needs can lead to conflict, or to one person struggling with unmet needs that can potentially have a serious impact on Mental Health.

There may also be internal conflicting needs, for example feeling too low energy to socialise, but also feeling lonely and isolated. These can be very difficult to navigate and require accommodations or strategies to manage these issues.



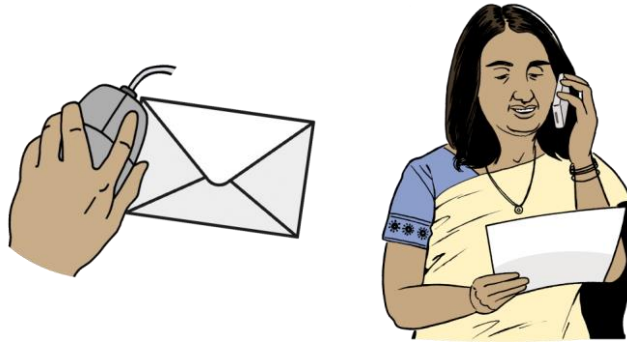
Strategies:

- Planning ahead is a vital strategy for managing conflicting needs. Do some self-reflection on what your access needs are or fill in a communication/access profile.
- If you are going to a new event or environment, check ahead what facilities they have and about pre-existing accessibility features. If there are things that conflict with your needs or an adjustment you need isn't already in place, get in contact and discuss it with them.
- Engage in constructive negotiations where all parties work together to find a mutually beneficial solution.
- Ask for external mediation outside of the parties in conflict over needs, and seek a mediator that enables constructive discussion.
- Recognize that you may each have unique challenges and priorities and offer understanding.
- Evaluate the importance of each conflicting need and prioritize them based on urgency and impact on that group, or individual.
- Be conscious of the legality of conflicting needs and refer to The Equality's Act 2010, and legal documentation on reasonable adjustments.
- Encourage problem-solving and creativity between parties sharing conflicting needs, as there may be a solution that has yet to be found.

Please remember that your needs as an autistic person are important and you should be supported to self-advocate for those personally and in-work.

Contact Us

This guide was produced by the **Autism AIM – Mental Health Equity Project**, part of The Advonet Group. We are a free service co-led by and run for autistic adults (aged 18+) in the West Yorkshire area.



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