



# Bristol Autism Spectrum Service

## Guide to Employment Support Allowance



## Guide to Employment and Support Allowance

### Employment and Support Allowance - What is it

- Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) is a benefit if you are considered too disabled or ill to work
- So you may qualify for Employment and Support Allowance if you are unable to work (if you're judged able to work but are currently unemployed you can still claim Jobseeker's Allowance or Universal Credit).
- If you are a full-time college or university student you can still qualify for contribution based ESA. To qualify for income related ESA as a full-time student you need to be receiving DLA (or PIP).
- If you are a part time college or university student – you can usually claim income related ESA if the course is less than 16 hours/week (discuss with the college or university if you are not sure whether your course counts as part-time). You can claim contribution based ESA regardless of whether the course is full or part time.
- If you are successful in your claim for ESA it is possible you can still work up to £115.50/week and less than 16 hours under 'permitted work' rules and not lose your ESA money

- To claim ESA call 0800 055 6688. If you are unsure about phoning to make your initial claim (or find talking on the phone causes you anxiety) you can ask for the ESA1 form to be sent to you instead, for completion at home or download one here

[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/419631/esa1-print.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/419631/esa1-print.pdf)

## ESA quick test

This is a quick test to see if you think you might be eligible to claim ESA.

The actual questions in this quick test relate to the mental ability part of ESA.

You will see there are scores of 6, 9 or 15 for each of these mental abilities.

*You need to score an overall score of 15 to pass the test for ESA.*

You can sometimes qualify for ESA even if you do not get 15 points if there would be a substantial risk to your or anyone else's mental or physical health if it was decided that you did not have limited capability for work, and this risk could not be reduced significantly by adjustments in the workplace or by you taking medication.

Tasks highlighted in **PURPLE** are those that will put you in the Support Group for ESA.

Please note – this quick test only covers questions relating to the mental ability part of ESA.

There are also quite a few questions in the ESA50 form, relating to your physical abilities, not covered in the following list. So, if you have additional physical limitations eg restricted movement, difficulty with walking, reaching, lifting, using the toilet you may also score points for those activities.

Have a look at the ESA50 form – <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/capability-for-work-questionnaire> for the full list of questions you will need to answer, if you decide to apply.

## Learning tasks

- Cannot learn how to complete a simple task, such as setting an alarm clock. 15 points.
- Cannot learn anything beyond a simple task, such as setting an alarm clock. 9 points.
- Cannot learn anything beyond a moderately complex task, such as the steps involved in operating a washing machine to clean clothes. 6 points.

## Awareness of everyday hazards (such as boiling water or sharp objects)

- Reduced awareness of everyday hazards leads to a significant risk of: (i) injury to self or others; or (ii) damage to property or possessions, such that they require supervision for the majority of the time to maintain safety. 15 points.
- Reduced awareness of everyday hazards leads to a significant risk of (i) injury to self or others; or (ii) damage to property or possessions, such that they frequently require supervision to maintain safety. 9 points.
- Reduced awareness of everyday hazards leads to a significant risk of: (i) injury to self or others; or (ii) damage to property or possessions, such that they occasionally require supervision to maintain safety. 6 points.

## Starting and finishing tasks (which means planning, organisation, problem solving, prioritising or switching tasks)

- Cannot, due to impaired mental function, reliably initiate or complete at least 2 sequential personal actions. 15 points.  
Cannot, due to impaired mental function, reliably initiate or complete at least 2 personal actions for the majority of the time. 9 points.
- Frequently cannot, due to impaired mental function, reliably initiate or complete at least 2 personal actions. 6 points.

### **Coping with change**

- Cannot cope with any change to the extent that day to day life cannot be managed. 15 points.
- Cannot cope with minor planned change (such as a pre-arranged change to the routine time scheduled for a lunch break), to the extent that overall day to day life is made significantly more difficult. 9 points.
- Cannot cope with minor unplanned change (such as the timing of an appointment on the day it is due to occur), to the extent that overall, day to day life is made significantly more difficult. 6 points.

### **Coping with social engagement due to cognitive impairment or mental disorder**

- Engagement in social contact is always precluded due to difficulty relating to others or significant distress experienced by the individual. 15 points
- Engagement in social contact with someone unfamiliar to the claimant is always precluded due to difficulty relating to others or significant distress experienced by the individual. 9 points.
- Engagement in social contact with someone unfamiliar to the claimant is not possible for the majority of the time due to difficulty relating to others or significant distress experienced by the individual. 6 points.

### **Appropriateness of behaviour with other people**

- Has, on a daily basis, uncontrollable episodes of aggressive or disinhibited behaviour that would be unreasonable in any workplace. 15 points
- Frequently has uncontrollable episodes of aggressive or disinhibited behaviour that would be unreasonable in any workplace. 15 points.
- Occasionally has uncontrollable episodes of aggressive or disinhibited behaviour that would be unreasonable in any workplace. 9 points.

## Getting about

- Cannot get to any place outside the claimant's home with which the claimant is familiar.  
15 points
- Is unable to get to a specified place with which the claimant is familiar, without being accompanied by another person. 9 points
- Is unable to get to a specified place with which the claimant is unfamiliar without being accompanied by another person. 6 points.

## **There are two types of ESA**

There are two types of ESA – income based ESA and contribution based ESA.

If I am entitled to ESA, you will be on one or the other type or a combination of the two.

When you make a claim you will not be asked which type of ESA you want to claim, because the DWP will usually work out which type of ESA you should get...

...However, it is worth noting if you get contribution based ESA it is often worth applying for income based ESA as you may get more money and it also entitles you to free NHS prescriptions/housing benefit.

To claim a top up of income based ESA ask DWP for an ESA3 if they do not send it automatically once you receive an award of contribution based ESA. (There is no point making a claim for income based ESA if you have savings over £16000 (see next section).

## **Income based ESA**

You can qualify for income based ESA if you meet the criteria (unable to work) and you do not have too much money from income and /or savings.

When the Department for Work and Pensions work out how much money you have they will take your income into account but also your partner's income (if you have a partner who you live with).

(If you live with your parents or friends their income is not taken into account.)

If your savings add up to £16,000 or more, you cannot get any income-related ESA.

If your savings are below £6,000 they are ignored.

If your savings are between £6,000 and £16,000 you may still be able to get income-related ESA, but the weekly amount I am paid will be reduced.

## **Contribution based ESA**

You may qualify for Contribution based ESA if you are judged unable to work and you have made national insurance contributions previously to your claim (eg you have been in paid employment) or qualified under the now abolished 'youth rules'. The amount of contributory ESA you get will be reduced if you have an occupational or personal pension of more than £85 a week.

You can usually only receive Contribution based ESA for one year if you are in the work related activity group.

You can receive Contribution based ESA ongoing if you are in the support group.

If your contribution-based ESA stops after a year because you are in the work-related activity group (explained below) you can transfer onto income-related ESA as long as your income and savings are low enough.

NB – You will not automatically be transferred onto income based ESA after one year so make sure you claim.

### **How often is ESA re-assessed**

ESA claimants are regularly reassessed using the work capability assessment, often once a year. In practice this varies.

### **Claiming ESA if I am under 20 years of age**

You can claim ESA from age 16 onwards but not if someone is claiming child benefit for you at the same time.

If a parent is receiving child benefit and child tax credits it is sometimes a good idea to stay on these.

If your parent is NOT receiving child benefit and child tax credits (or only child benefit) it is sometimes a good idea to make a claim for ESA in your own name.

Get advice about claiming ESA if your parent/s do claim child benefit and child tax credits as there are several factors to take into account. Contact the National Autistic Society (NAS) helpline on 0808 800 4104 and request a phone appointment with their welfare rights service manager Jane Owen-Pam or email her [welfarerights@nas.org.uk](mailto:welfarerights@nas.org.uk).

## ESA - How much will you get

How much you get depends on your financial circumstances, whether you qualify for contribution based ESA or income based ESA and how disabled I am judged to be.

Your ESA may be all contribution based or all income based ESA or a combination of the two types.

(If I am in the work related activity group you can only get contribution based ESA for one year.)

How much you get also depends on whether after the 13 weeks I am judged to have a limited capability for work or a limited capability for work-related activity. In other words, you get more money if I am judged to be more disabled and unlikely to work.

These are the basic weekly rates for ESA during the 'assessment' period of 13 weeks:

First 13 weeks if I am aged under 25 = £57.90

First 13 weeks if I am aged 25 or older = £73.10

From 14 weeks onwards. If I am eligible the maximum you can receive is over £100.

The actual amount you might receive if you eligible for ESA will depend on your financial circumstances and certain other benefits I am receiving.

### **ESA can help with other benefits**

If you receive income based ESA you may receive other benefits such as disability premiums and entitlements. For example if you get PIP you may a disability premium which will increase how much ESA you receive.

### **Backdating claims**

Write on the ESA50 form that you wish for your claim to be backdated up to three months BUT only if I am claiming and no one was receiving Child Benefit or Child Tax Credits for you just prior to your claim. Get advice if unsure by emailing [welfarerights@nas.org.uk](mailto:welfarerights@nas.org.uk)

Your claim can be backdated for three months if I am successful in claiming and then get a GP note to state you were not fit for work those three months prior to your claim.

## Employment and Support Allowance - Work Capability Assessment

- To apply for this benefit (ESA) you must undergo a ‘work capability assessment’
- The ‘work capability assessment’ is the term used for several assessments during the first 13 weeks of your claim for ESA
- The ‘Work capability assessment’ includes:
  - completing the ESA1 (initial claim form)
  - completing the ESA50 questionnaire
  - possibly having a medical face to face assessment
- Get information and support in completing the assessment forms /questionnaires  
[www.autism.org.uk/benefits](http://www.autism.org.uk/benefits)

To qualify for ESA you must score at least 15 points in the work capability assessment.

It is OK for someone else to complete the EAS50 on your behalf but make sure this is clear on the part where you sign the form (see page 18 of the ESA50).

You do not have to have a formal diagnosis of autism /Asperger syndrome to claim ESA. If you do have a diagnosis state this and say who diagnosed you and when. If I am in the process of being assessed to see if you have autism/Asperger syndrome explain this.

Page 4 asks you to state anyone who supports you. You may wish to write the Bristol Autism Spectrum Service or if you have a social worker /mental health worker you could write their name.

Be aware that Part 1 of the EAS50 asks you a lot of questions about your 'Physical functions'. Many of these may not be relevant to you. However, questions 6 and 7 about communicating with other people are likely to be relevant so make sure you answer these as thoroughly as you can.

## Help with answering some of the questions in the ESA50

The following are some examples from the Limited capability for work assessment that might be relevant to you, if you have a diagnosis of Asperger syndrome and are applying for ESA.

Remember if any of these questions apply to you include them but also give *examples* of how it applies to you.

As well as using these prompt questions have a look at the prompt questions relating to filling in the PIP form (see above). There is some cross-over between the two forms.

**Part 1. Question 6. Communicating with people**

**Making oneself understood through speaking, writing, typing, or other means which are normally, or could reasonable be, used, unaided by another person**

Cannot convey the presence of a simple message, such as the presence of a hazard	15 points
Has significant difficulty conveying a simple message to strangers	15 points
Has some difficulty conveying a simple message to strangers	6 points

*See if any of the following statements apply to you:*

I have difficulty communicating with other people, even people in my own family to the extent that I will not come out of my room

I sometimes have days when I do not talk to anyone at all

I cannot talk to other people

Even when I know an answer or know that I should say something I cannot connect my voice to my thoughts

My processing of sound is affected by autism and means I cannot generate responses to what other people say

I cannot speak out loud because of anxiety

I am mute 75% of the time

I find it very difficult to give a simple message especially if it is someone I have not met before

I find about 75% of the time that I am too anxious to talk at all

I only have one tone of voice and cannot raise my voice or shout out loud even if there is an emergency

I am often ignored when I try to talk because I am unable to look at people's faces and have a very quiet voice

Part 1. Question 7. Other people communicating with you

Understanding communication by—

- (i) verbal means (such as hearing or lip reading) alone
- (ii) non-verbal means (such as reading 16 point print or Braille) alone, or
- (iii) a combination of (i) and (ii),

using any aid that is normally, or could reasonably be, used, unaided by another person

Cannot understand a simple message due to sensory impairment, such as the location of a fire escape.	15 points
Has significant difficulty understanding a simple message from a stranger due to sensory impairment.	15 points
Has some difficulty understanding a simple message from a stranger due to sensory impairment.	6 points

*See if any of the following statements apply to you:*

I have an auditory processing delay due to autism, meaning that when someone speaks I do not 'hear' what they say

I usually only hear about 25% of what other people say because I am always thinking about my worries and anxious thoughts

I am too busy listening to my own voices in my head to be able to tune into other people

I take things that other people say literally and has this led to problems

I find it hard to follow what other people are saying because of an auditory processing delay caused by autism

I lose track of the words as they are spoken by other people because of an auditory processing delay caused by autism

I often only hear a few words of anything that someone else says because of an auditory processing delay caused by autism

I require information to be written before I can understand it because of an auditory processing delay caused by autism

I am unable to tune into everyday conversation because of an auditory processing delay caused by autism

I do not know if other people are talking to me or talking to someone else or just out loud so I do not process what others say because of an auditory processing delay caused by autism

I find that you often misunderstand other people because of an auditory processing delay caused by autism

Because I cannot judge how close to stand to people or read faces I spend all my time trying to work out body language and how to stand not too close to people, so by the time I have achieved this the conversation has moved on and I have missed even simple requests or information

I frequently misunderstand the meaning of the words that other people speak. I am unable to work out what words mean because people talk too quickly

**Part 1. Question 10. Staying awake when conscious**

At least once a week, has an involuntary episode of lost or altered consciousness, resulting in significantly disrupted awareness or concentration	15 points
At least once a month, has an involuntary episode of lost or altered consciousness, resulting in significantly disrupted awareness or concentration	6 Points

*See if any of the following statements apply to you:*

- Because of my autism I am often not able to participate in conversations and this makes me often fall asleep during points in the day when I am around other people.
- I frequently just fall asleep without any warning during the day
- I get so tired out during the day coping with everyday tasks that I often just fall asleep during conversation eg from too many people or interactions

Part 2. Question 11. Learning how to do tasks	
Cannot learn how to complete a simple task, such as setting an alarm clock.	15 points.
Cannot learn anything beyond a simple task, such as setting an alarm clock.	9 points.
Cannot learn anything beyond a moderately complex task, such as the steps involved in operating a washing machine to clean clothes	6 points.

*See if any of the following statements apply to you:*

- I have difficulty with setting an alarm clock
- I easily get frustrated and damage things if they do not work straightaway
- I find that even if I have been told or shown how something works I will need it to be re-explained again and again. Each time I do the task it is like doing it for the first time again
- I require a very quiet environment in order to process information and learn new tasks. Because it is often impossible to achieve a quite enough environment without any distractions I am unable to learn new tasks, e.g. cars noise outside or conversations in the room
- I lack confidence to try anything new, like working a new washing machine or cooker
- I have difficulties according to how stressed or depressed I am or whether anyone is watching me whilst I am doing it

- I am unable to follow someone else's verbal instructions to operate a moderately complex task like using a washing machine
- I am unable to understand a new washing machine, because I am so stressed and anxious I am unable to think straight or take on new information
- I am unable to read or write so have no confidence trying to learn new tasks
- I always get someone else to set up my TV, laptop, PC
- I need help to manage new appliances such as new things such as a new cooker or microwave
- I find I am too anxious to understand instruction manuals
- I have problems reading new instruction manuals

Part 2. Question 12. Awareness of everyday hazards (such as boiling water or sharp objects)	
Reduced awareness of everyday hazards leads to a significant risk of: (i) injury to self or others; or (ii) damage to property or possessions, such that they require supervision for the majority of the time to maintain safety.	15 points
Reduced awareness of everyday hazards leads to a significant risk of (i) injury to self or others; or (ii) damage to property or possessions, such that they frequently require supervision to maintain safety.	9 points.
Reduced awareness of everyday hazards leads to a significant risk of: (i) injury to self or others; or (ii) damage to property or possessions, such that they occasionally require supervision to maintain safety. 6 points.	6 points

*See if any of the following statements apply to you:*

I have a reduced awareness of everyday hazards that has led to accidents to myself or others

I have frequent accidents indoors due to clumsiness or loss of concentration

- I frequently lose possessions like money, wallet
- I have meltdowns in public places and other behaviour that attracts negative attention from passers-by

- I need someone to go out with me during the day to keep me safe from injury
- I get into arguments in public because of how I talk or how I come across
- I put myself in danger with other people whilst out of my home
- I have behaviour problems whilst out in public
- I have limited road sense and have been involved in accidents or near misses because of this
- I need someone to supervise me during the day or night to prevent hurting myself or others or damaging property
- I have frequent meltdowns when I damage property or hurt myself or others

**Part 2. Question 13. Starting and finishing tasks**

**Initiating and completing personal actions (which means planning, organisation, problem solving, prioritising or switching tasks)**

Cannot, due to impaired mental function, reliably initiate or complete at least 2 sequential personal actions.	15 points.
Cannot, due to impaired mental function, reliably initiate or complete at least 2 personal actions for most the time	9 points.
Frequently cannot, due to impaired mental function, reliably initiate or complete at least 2 personal actions.	6 points.

*See if any of the following statements apply to you:*

- I often forget to do at least two actions without prompts or reminders, for example washing, dressing, cooking a meal, going shopping
- I spend many hours each day not really doing anything
- I constantly lose things and forget what I am meant to be doing such that daily routines are disrupted and not completed
- I have executive functioning difficulties – that is problems with organizing, making a plan and making sure the plan is completed in a reasonable timescale
- I often find that jobs which should take a short time do not get done for months on end
- I have problems with concentrating
- I have problems with switching attention from one thing to another, or I need someone else to remind me to not spend all day on one task

- I have difficulty listening to other people's instructions or advice so I forget what I am meant to be doing
- I suffer from mental health problems - depression or anxiety which make completing daily living tasks less likely to occur
- I have attention problems
- I have attention difficulties/hyperactivity, but I am still not achieve the things I set out to do each day
- I require reminders/prompts to complete personal tasks eg washing and brushing teeth
- I frequently forget appointments, lose items, forget what time it is,
- I am very disorganised and leaving the home when I occasionally need to takes over 30 minutes of checking and re-checking I have not left anything unlocked etc
- My anxiety and depression affects my executive functioning and so compound the difficulties caused by autism
- I need a prompt or supervision to complete daily living tasks such as getting meals, brushing my teeth, getting to bed on time, washing
- I need verbal prompt to get out of bed in the morning
- I forget to eat
- I forget to go to bed
- I forget to drink
- My clothes need to be laid out the night before in a special sequence to ensure I can get dressed in the morning
- I have difficulties putting clothes on in right order
- I must do things in a certain order in the morning that affects your ability to get dressed, fed and ready for the day. It takes me more than twice as long as everyone else just to get ready in the morning or to do any daily task like shopping or washing clothes
- I need help to choose clothes because I am unable to make decisions like this
- I like to wear the same clothes every day and need reminding to wash your clothes
- I have difficulty with the routine of getting dressed For example, do clothes go on inside out or in the wrong order, putting socks over shoes

Part 2. Question 14. Coping with changes	
Cannot cope with any change to the extent that day to day life cannot be managed	15 points.
Cannot cope with minor planned change (such as a pre-arranged change to the routine time scheduled for a lunch break), to the extent that overall day to day life is made significantly more difficult	9 points.
Cannot cope with minor unplanned change (such as the timing of an appointment on the day it is due to occur), to the extent that overall, day to day life is made significantly more difficult	6 points.

*See if any of the following statements apply to you:*

- I find that I cannot cope with minor unplanned change (such as the timing of an appointment on the day it is due to occur) to the extent that overall day to day life is made significantly more difficult
- I have long routines and rituals that if broken ruin my day and mean I cannot reliably manage the rest of the day
- I need people to talk and respond to me in a highly consistent way. If they don't (which they rarely do because other people are not robots) I get paranoid or angry, for example think they are blanking or ignoring me. This puts me in a bad mood and I cannot manage my day

- I have a strict structure before I leave the home and this takes too much time so I am always late for anything in the morning. I cannot get anywhere before 2pm
- I experience anxiety if an appointment date/time changes
- If someone changes the daily routine I find I am unable to manage the rest of the day without stress
- My day needs to be timetabled - any alteration causes me to have a meltdown/panic attack/feel stressed
- I have meltdowns/anger or other behaviour when my routines are changed
- I lack the flexibility to cope if a bus is late or a train does not turn up, if this occurs I get upset and 75% of the time I know I will have to go back home in a terrible mood
- I cannot understand why other people do not think the same way as I do so if I overhear a conversation or read a newspaper that contradicts the truth as I see it I get angry. This then prevents me thinking straight.
- I always have to go the same way to places and if a route is unavailable I will not travel
- I sometimes put on clothes when they are too dirty to wear because I insist on wearing the same clothes
- I have obsessions about clothes eg spend a long time getting ready and refuse to leave your home if certain clothes are not available or do not look right

Part 2. Question 15. Going out	
Cannot get to any specified place with which the claimant is familiar.	15 Points
Is unable to get to a specified place with which the claimant is familiar, without being accompanied by another person.	9 Points
Is unable to get to a specified place with which the claimant is unfamiliar without being accompanied by another person.	6 Points

*See if any of the following statements apply to you:*

- I always need a support person with me outside of my home. Without a support person, I get lost, and feel highly anxious and upset
- Everytime I try to learn a journey I must re-learn it. It never becomes familiar because I cannot create an internal map of where I am going.
- I cannot cope with being outside
- I am not confident enough to go outside of my home without support.
- I frequently feel stressed/anxious/scared/paranoid when you leave your home
- I am unable to get to a specified place with which I am unfamiliar without being accompanied by another person
- I am unable to cope with being outside of the home because you suffer paranoia/ panic attacks/ dizziness/nausea/ anxiety/ stomach pains
- I have a very poor sense of direction; cannot tell left from right. I always need another person with me even on journeys to familiar places
- I am unable to follow a map/ bus timetables

- I get sensory overload as soon as I leave my home and this means that I cannot locate where I am on a map or which way to turn. The smells of being outside confuse me and traffic noise and people talking distract me so I cannot tell which way to go.
- When I get lost I just sit down and wait for a passer-by to help me
- I am unable to cope with being on a bus with other people, because I am afraid they might sit too close or touch me. I am never sure when someone might talk to me and this makes me anxious and paranoid
- I am too anxious to ask for help from other people if I get lost, so I never get any better at sense of direction

Part 2. Question 16 Coping with social situations Coping with social engagement due to cognitive impairment or mental disorder	
Engagement in social contact is always precluded due to difficulty relating to others or significant distress experienced by the individual	15 points
Engagement in social contact with someone unfamiliar to the claimant is always precluded due to difficulty relating to others or significant distress experienced by the individual	9 points.
Engagement in social contact with someone unfamiliar to the claimant is not possible for the majority of the time due to difficulty relating to others or significant distress experienced by the individual.	6 points

*See if any of the following statements apply to you:*

- I am unable to interact with people without feeling significant distress and difficulties relating to others, even people that I know well like family and friends
- If I go to a shop I cannot engage in social contact because I am overwhelmed by the thought of speaking out loud. I fear I will say the wrong thing which will make me appear odd and draw attention to me. I also panic that I will give offence or make others dislike me in some way by talking
- I cannot go out for fear of meeting people

- I spend 75% of my time in my room at home without any social contact
- I can go out of my home but I cannot interact socially with anyone I see.
- Other people may start to talk to me but I ignore them because I cannot sustain conversation.
- I do not know what to say or how to look at people
- I always have felt that I am like an alien and other people are playing a complex game together that I do not understand the rules of
- I find that engagement in social contact with someone unfamiliar is not possible for the majority of the time due to difficulty relating to others or the significant distress this causes me
- I find all social contact anxiety provoking and extremely tiring
- I am unable to socialise or interact with other people because it is so tiring that if I try to talk I would then need to spend hours mulling over the conversation and worrying about it
- People have said in the past that I talk too much or too little and whatever I have said it gets me into trouble or it makes others dislike me. I have found that other people ignore me and in any case I cannot now think of anything to say to interest other people or attract them to me.
- I am unable to start a conversation with other people
- Even the thought of interaction causes me so much stress that I have to avoid it
- I spend all my day worrying about things I have said in the past and this prevents me from talking to anyone without suffering paranoia and panic
- If I have one 'bad' conversation during the day it dominates my thinking so much that I cannot talk to anyone else all day
- I lose my ability to talk out loud in when I am in a hectic environment or public place
- Background noise and other people makes me so anxious that I am unable to speak out loud
- I often cannot leave the home because I am too paranoid to face members of the public
- I get too pent up and angry to hold a conversation with others

- I dislike small talk and avoid it at all costs
- I get flustered and say the wrong thing
- I find I am unable to follow group conversations
- I am unable to concentrate on what people say
- I am unable to speak up for myself
- I misunderstand the things other people say
- I get into arguments in public because of how I talk or how you come across
- I find that other people often misunderstand me
- I find it hard to start a conversation so avoid other people
- I find it hard to end a conversation so avoid people
- I get angry / frustrated when people misunderstand me
- I avoid answering the phone because autism makes you anxious
- I can only interact with autism specialist professionals as other people make me upset or angry
- My medication makes communication more difficult I slur my words and feel too lethargic to talk

Part 2. Question 17. Appropriateness of behaviour with other people, due to cognitive impairment or mental disorder	
Has, daily, uncontrollable episodes of aggressive or disinhibited behaviour that would be unreasonable in any workplace.	15 Points
Frequently has uncontrollable episodes of aggressive or disinhibited behaviour that would be unreasonable in any workplace.	15 Points
Occasionally has uncontrollable episodes of aggressive or disinhibited behaviour that would be unreasonable in any workplace.	9 Points

*See if any of the following statements apply to you:*

In social /public settings I become agitated and caused offence to others

If I am in public settings for more than an hour I invariably have a meltdown. This means I get overwhelmed by sensory information and social contact. It might be I am too hot or it is too noisy or there are too many competing voices or smells. My meltdowns are often caused by the sheer effort of trying to avoid drawing attention to myself and act 'normal'. This means that any workplace setting would cause me to behave in 'unreasonable' ways.

I occasionally have uncontrollable episodes of aggressive or disinhibited behaviour that would be unreasonable in any workplace

I find that I am too blunt and do not know how to express myself to avoid causing offence to others

I avoid all social contact and keep your head down because of social anxiety due to my autism

Other people tell me that my behaviour is unacceptable

People misinterpret my behaviour as inappropriate and react negatively

I often have meltdowns due to sensory or information overload

Other people often annoy or frustrate me so I end up confronting other people and this causes offence and anxiety in others

I tell other people when they have done something wrong and this gets me into trouble at work or other places-

I have behaviors that people who do not know me fail to tolerate or find unusual such as stimming, flapping or verbal or physical tics. I cannot control these but other people find these difficult to tolerate.

## Outcomes of the Work Capability Assessment

After you have sent back the ESA50 and usually after you have had a face to face assessment (this is supposed to take no more than 13 weeks, but often takes longer than 13 weeks) there will be one of three outcomes:

- ☐ you are said to be fit for work and therefore you should claim Jobseekers Allowance instead.
- ☐ you are entitled to ESA and are put in a work-related activity group.
- ☐ you are entitled to ESA and are put in a support group.

### Face to face assessment

Most people are asked to attend an interview after completing the ESA50 form. If you cannot attend the interview because of severe social anxiety, or other mental health problem you must let the DWP know. Get a covering letter from a medical professional to explain why it would be unreasonable for you to attend an interview.

The face to face assessment is used to gather further evidence of how your disability affects you and to see if there are discrepancies between things written on the ESA50 and what you say in the assessment. So make sure you repeat the things that you wrote on the ESA50 form during the assessment, so the assessor is not left confused about how autism and any other disability affects you.

## Reasons why having a face to face assessment would not be possible or very difficult

If you feel having a face to face assessment would cause you too much anxiety or other problem, then request that you do not have a face to face interview. You must give good reasons why a face to face interview would not be appropriate. Read through the following questions and see if any of these apply to your situation.

- Would you be able to travel to the assessment centre unassisted?
- Are you likely to be able to organise yourself to attend the assessment centre on time for the appointment?
- Would you be able to talk to the assessor to answer their questions?
- Would you need someone with you to help you to understand?
- Would you need assistance to explain yourself to the assessor?
- Do you need extra time to process the questions?
- Do you take things literally and misunderstand things?
- Do you struggle to understand what people mean?
- Do you lack insight or understanding of your condition?
- Do you sometimes say what you think the person wants to hear just so you can get out of the situation as quickly as possible?
- Do you have some difficulties that I am too embarrassed or worried about to talk about with a stranger?
- Do you have any sensory sensitivity issues that might affect you at the assessment?

## Tips for the face to face assessment interview

If you do have a face to face assessment it will be carried out by an appointed person but will not involve a physical examination unless you have told the DWP you have a physical disability.

Make sure you have someone with you who really knows you and can be supportive and can represent you, for example a partner, parent or support worker. It is not usually a good idea to attend a face to face assessment on your own if you have an autism diagnosis. Get advice about this if I am unsure.

Answer any questions as truthfully as you can but also allow your support person to add to your answers or speak on your behalf, if you prefer.

Do not feel pressured into giving any answer or other information unless you completely agree with it or are happy for the appointed person to know.

Ask for more time to answer questions if you need it.

### **Postal address for sending back the ESA50 form**

If you lose the envelope post the ESA50 back to:

St Austell Benefit Centre

Mail handling site A

Wolverhampton

WV98 1QS