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## Managing Money

Becoming financially independent and developing skills in managing finances effectively, can be a challenge for any young adult. However for autistic adults there may be different challenges to managing money.

Recently the National Autistic Society (NAS) received funds to create an online module on managing money which could support autistic people to develop skills in managing money. This presented an initial challenge: what is it exactly that many autistic people want and need to know about managing their finances?

We quickly set up focus groups with autistic adults to find out what they struggle with, what they excel at, and what content they would want in the module. There were a range of experiences expressed, the key findings of which are set out here.

Many of our groups said they struggle with trusting other people. This is understandable, as facial expressions, misunderstanding sarcasm and being a literal thinker can leave some people confused by those around them. This left many saying they would avoid speaking with someone from the bank, and as a result leave family members to deal with their finances.

When considering banking, we found that setting up a bank account can be difficult for some people who feel confused by the different options banks offer. As a result of this, they may either trust someone else to open an account for them or keep their savings at home, in a vulnerable place with no insurances.

Other individuals reported feeling compelled to give to charities in the street, signing up to cold caller schemes, and giving money to friends and family. This left them feeling vulnerable - and for some - in debt.

Knowing who to trust with personal details such as bank account number or PIN code were also challenges for some. Many kept their PIN written down in their purse or wallet, or stored in their mobile phone, and some told trusted family members to remember it for them.

We realised we needed to cover trust issues and safety measures in the online module, so we covered a variety of topics including:

- safety at ATMs
- concealing PIN and account details
- how to avoid signing up to all requests for donations.

Others in our groups were experts at managing their money. We met with one person who works in a finance department: he understands the finer details of banking and excels in saving and spending wisely.

In comparison, some individuals were allowing a trusted family member to manage their money: often their parents. However, they had not realised the importance of the legal process that needs to be followed when allowing someone else to manage their finances, ensuring they could continue to be supported in the event of a bereavement.

We made sure to utilise the knowledge of the finance expert and ensured his advice and tips were represented throughout the module. We also provided clear guidance to information regarding legal processes covering financial powers.

One aspect that needs to change is how involved autistic people are in decisions made over their expenditure. From the experiences shared, special interests are the first to be removed or reduced in any form of budget discussions. However for some people, other cuts such as making one less trip to a café or reducing the food budget may be more reasonable.

As professionals, educators, or support workers we need to remember that we all have different priorities and these will be reflected in our financial decisions. Control of the money is with the individual and their choice should not be considered wrong; it should be considered as their choice, and providing their finances are manageable and not getting them into debt then they should be allowed to make it.

Information about managing money is available all over the internet, however knowing what and who to trust may limit those on the autism spectrum seeking advice. We have brought together useful information in one place on how to:

- set budgets
- plan expenses
- get out of debt and what to do if you can't.

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Date of publication: 14 July 2016

The module signposts to trustworthy sources for personalised advice if needed. As with any autism support tools, this module will not be relevant to all autistic people. However, we hope it will prove useful to those seeking guidance and information on managing their finances. We have had a lot of positive feedback from those who have reviewed our module, including autistic adults in employment, those in services, those who have an autistic child and non-autistic adults.

The module is freely available at [www.autism.org.uk/onlinemanagingmoney](http://www.autism.org.uk/onlinemanagingmoney)