

The purpose of this checklist is for supporters to plan for autistic individuals who are participating in online communities so they can be as safe and prepared as possible. When we say “online,” we mean a broad spectrum of internet activities: visiting websites, texting, instant messaging, chatting, email, video conferencing, watching videos, online gaming, reading blogs, online purchasing, looking for info (e.g., health, news, activities), and social media through the use of smartphones or other internet-enabled devices.

1: Is the individual able to comprehend and interpret social cues and signs online or virtually?

Autistic individuals may have difficulty interpreting non-verbal aspects of behavior and non-literal aspects of speech, such as sarcasm, humor, metaphors, or euphemisms.

Yes**No**

Consider the following when answering this question: understanding and using emojis, understanding when an online conversation is done, understanding warning signs, such as “graphic image,” “Rated X,” “for individuals age 18 or older,” etc.

2: Is the individual able to decipher credible sources that they find online?

Individuals on the spectrum may have challenges with differentiating what is a safe source to engage with. This can be especially problematic as there are often scammers on the internet or in emails, false advertising, clickbait ads, and a lack of credible information being shared.

Yes**No**

Consider the following when answering this question: differentiating opinion versus fact, most used sources of information, does the individual accept all information shared as fact, etc.

3: Is the individual able to control impulsive behaviors?

With instant access to all the information, items/goods, services, images, etc., online, the internet may be challenging for individuals with impulsive thinking or behaviors. This could lead to clicking on something inappropriate or illegal, disclosing personal information, spending excessive amounts of money, etc.

Yes**No**

Consider the following when answering this question: excessive use of the internet (e.g., social media), impulsive buying (e.g., making unplanned purchases), excessive video gaming, often swearing or using offensive language on the site/when commenting, and a lack of control of screen time.

4: Is the individual able to determine who is a trustworthy person online?

Because there is a layer of anonymity online, the person on the other side of the conversation may not be who they say they are and could take advantage of the individual or get them into trouble.

Yes	No
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Consider the following when answering this question: do they do things to please others/avoid confrontation, have they been victimized/taken advantage of, have they received mean or harmful content and if they have do they know what to do, have they received unwanted attention (e.g., request for personal information or photo) and know what to do in that situation, ability to verify friendships online, being aware of and skeptical of information that people can learn online about them, cautiousness of strangers or unknown situations, do they ask questions about who is contacting them, do they have a trusted person they share information with like who they are speaking to online, do they verify contact information before reaching out (ex. texts, calls, emails from bank), etc.

5: Is the individual able to spend/manage money online mostly independently?

The internet can be a problematic place for even those who are mostly independent with managing their money. With quick ways to pay, spending can be one click away. Such ease with paying for items, services, or in-app purchases can quickly add up and become an unexpected costly expense.

Yes	No
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Consider the following when answering this question: level of independence with money management, correctly using credit/debit cards, regularly checking bank statements or credit card balance, ability to save/plan for expenses, ease of spending, unknowingly spending excessive amounts of money online (e.g., for games, fashion, gambling), do they have trouble saying no when someone asks for help, do they have knowledge of what to do if financial information is compromised, etc.

6: Is the individual able to safeguard sensitive information online?

While sensitive information can be securely sent online, not all sites or people who are encountered online are trustworthy. For individuals on the spectrum, deciphering when and when not to share personal information may be more challenging.

Yes	No
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Consider the following when answering this question: awareness of what is private or sensitive information, ability to recognize a secure vs non secured website, knowledge of public vs private Wi-Fi connections, awareness of who can access private information via social media, knowledge of how to safely keep track of login information, know not to share their login information, awareness of how much information to share in public profiles (ex. TMI in dating profiles), does the individual know what to do if private information has already been shared (where to report), etc.

7: Is the individual able follow rules and laws regarding online activity?

It is important to consider how well an individual recognizes what is acceptable and what is problematic, and sometimes illegal, behaviors. With autism, there may be a lack of awareness of what is appropriate and inappropriate behavior online. This can be especially true for individuals with interests that are uncommon for their age group. For instance, an adult who has an interest in a children's show may be accessing websites generally intended for children and may communicate with children, which can be concerning.

Yes	No
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Consider the following when answering this question: understanding of which sites are appropriate for them (e.g., children's website), interest that could lead to inappropriate interactions/websites, right and protection of others' privacy (e.g., personal emails, electronic medical records, etc.), sending or posting mean or harmful content of someone, knowing what to do when someone else is bullied online, in a relationship versus seeking relationships online, interest in same age/appropriate age peers, etc.