



Tools and techniques for participatory research

This document was submitted by Dr Elizabeth Milne and Dr Megan Freeth

At [Sheffield Autism Research Lab \(SHARL\)](#)

At The University of Sheffield

If you have any questions about this document, please get in touch with the authors.

You are welcome to use or adapt this document, provided due acknowledgement to the source is given: Milne, E., & Freeth, M. "Tools and techniques for participatory research". SHARL, The University of Sheffield



Research Tools and Techniques used by Sheffield Autism Research Lab

Collaborative Research

While planning a study we organise specialist PPI (patient and public involvement) groups, these are either organised via clinicians if we are collaborating with the NHS, or local charities / support groups if the project does not involve the NHS. We also have a large network of local autistic people who attend our public lectures and we contact people via this resource in order to facilitate the option of feeding into research planning, either by focus groups we set up at the University, or via e-mail for people who prefer to communicate with us this way. When organised with the NHS or via charities and third-sector organisations, these meetings take place in the usual space where clients come for group sessions, i.e. a space that the attendees are familiar. When we organise this at the University, we hold the meetings in spaces that have been identified by members of the autistic community who attend our public lectures as accessible and sensory tolerable, and wherever possible we ensure that the space is close to public transport links. We are also part of the Sheffield Autism Partnership who feed into our research process in terms of planning research priorities.

Informational Resources

When people are attending research appointments we provide a range of information prior to the session, including a map with instructions about where to park, how to walk from the car park to the testing session / arrange to meet the participant and escort them, photographs of the testing environment and research personnel. Where resources permit, we have also made videos of the testing environment and sent them to participants in advance via e-mail. We also offer the opportunity for participants to have a 'test-run' prior to taking part in the study, i.e. by coming to the lab and meeting relevant people before their scheduled appointment time. When resources permit, we book car parking spaces in a nearby multi-storey car park in advance of the session. However, this is only feasible for funded studies which have the budget to support this.

Environment

When collecting data, we have dedicated lab space in a building which is separate from the main department of Psychology. This building does not support teaching and therefore is much quieter than most of the University campus. The testing space was set-up with autism research in mind, and has multiple lighting options: daylight and halogen lights are preferred by participants (we always ask). The space has neutral decoration (plain carpets, plain walls) and a flexible and easy to rearrange seating configuration. It is located close to both a male and female bathroom. We've had a lot of positive feedback about this testing space from autistic participants with more than one seasoned participant telling us that it is their favourite place to take part in studies. The building is actually quite old and is a converted Victorian villa. In some respects, it doesn't look like a research lab, and this is what participants have reported liking: it doesn't look or feel at all flashy, or clinical, and is actually quite homely.