# Autism and Video Calls

Video calls have become part of life for many people. The phrase "Zoom Fatigue" has even found its way into our vocabulary!

Given that sound quality is unfiltered and meetings take place in real-time, video calls require participants to work much harder in order to process non-verbal cues like tone of voice and body language. This explains why we can enjoy a half-hour podcast but feel exhausted after a half-hour meeting, even if we've only listened and not spoken. Video calls require energy!

Most participants, whatever their neurology, will benefit from some simple adjustments to how video calls are conducted. When such adjustments are implemented, those of us who process sensory information differently may find we are more able to participate.

- Having a named Chair or Facilitator for the meeting and following other protocols used in face-to-face meetings reduces unpredictability and so may make the meeting more accessible for participants. A requirement to raise your hand if you wish to speak can help to ensure that people who take longer to process information are able to take part more easily.

- Waiting for meetings to start can be stressful. This anticipatory stress may raise already high levels of anxiety even higher. Having a set agenda and ensuring good time-keeping are just as important online as in person.

- Supporting participants to use video platforms to their full potential may increase accessibility: speaker or gallery view; hiding self-view; and virtual backgrounds may reduce visual processing demands. Visual processing is made easier when participants use plain-coloured backgrounds, remain in-frame and move around as little as possible.

- Incongruent or unexpected sounds like background noise or the sound of someone typing on their keyboard can distract our attention away from the meeting. On a video call, the lack of spatial cues and difficulty recognising where sounds are coming from make it harder for us to filter out extraneous sounds. This may be especially the case for a participant who experiences natural sensory differences owing to Autism or ADHD. Asking all participants to mute themselves when not speaking can reduce extraneous sounds during the meeting.

- Network delays and screen-freeze can cause speech, gestures and meta-communication (all those "mmm", "uh-huh" and nods of agreement) to go out of synch. For Autistic people, this may exacerbate any processing differences they naturally experience, with the result that their capacity to follow the conversation, join in and respond may be considerably reduced. The option of joining a meeting with camera off or screen off and the option to contribute comments via the chat-box rather than via speech may benefit these participants.