

**The  
Advonet  
Group**

Providing Independent Advocacy



**Autism  
AIM**

Strategies and Resources

# **Our Guide to Learning to Drive**

## Autism and Driving

The diagnosis of an autism spectrum disorder (ASD) should not be a barrier to holding a licence. However, when a disabled person applies for a driving licence, they are expected to declare their disability on their application.

You do not need to tell DVLA about your condition unless you think that it may affect your ability to drive safely. Ask your doctor if you're not sure if your condition will affect your driving. More details on this can be found on the [GOV.uk website](#).

### Useful articles:

- [The National Autistic Society on Driving](#)

## Provisional Licence

To start learning to drive, you need to apply for your provisional licence. The normal minimum age for driving is 17 but if you are getting Disability Living Allowance (DLA) higher rate mobility you can learn to drive at 16.

Apply for a [Provisional Driving Licence here](#). It costs £34. You may also apply through the post with a D1 form through your local post office.

You will need:

- An [identity document](#), such as your passport
- Addresses where you've lived for up to the last three years
- You might be asked for additional information, such as your National Insurance number if you know it.

## Theory Test

The driving test in the UK is split into two parts: the theory test (on a computer) and the practical test (in the car).

The theory test will test you on the rules of the road before you take the practical driving test. You will need to pass this test before booking a practical test. The theory test is divided into two parts - multiple choice questions and a hazard perception test.

The test is set by the Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency (DVSA) in England, Wales and Scotland, and by the Driver and Vehicle Agency (DVA) in Northern Ireland. You can take the theory test at any time after you turn 17 (or 16 if you receive the higher rate of the mobility component of Disability Living Allowance). The theory test costs £23.

The best way to prepare is to study - either with dedicated study guides, using apps or by taking a practice test online. The DVSA recommends a minimum of 20 hours revision to fully prepare you for your theory test. You must arrive at least 30 minutes before the start of your test, and you'll need to take your provisional driving licence.

Your theory pass certificate is valid for two years. Don't let it expire though - if you don't pass your practical test during this time, you'll have to retake and pass the theory test again.

### Useful Apps:

Available on Apple and Android, they are paid for apps starting at £5.49 each. These are a useful and easy way to practice your test. The apps include all the questions that could come up on your theory and you are able to go through and re-do questions you didn't get correct.

- Official DVSA Theory Test Kit - [Apple](#) and [Google Play](#)
- Driving Theory Test 4 in 1 App - [Apple](#) and [Google Play](#)

## Theory Test: What Happens?

### **What happens in the multiple-choice test?**

In the multiple choice part, you'll be tested on your knowledge of driving theory and the Highway Code. The test will cater for the type of vehicle you're applying for a licence for. So if you're taking the test for a motorcycle, some of the questions will be specific to motorbikes.

The test is 57 minutes long; you'll get a little over a minute to answer each of the 50 multiple choice questions, so you have time to carefully read each question before choosing your answer.

You'll need a minimum of 43 correct answers to pass.

### **What can I expect from the hazard perception test?**

A short tutorial video will explain this part of the test, which is computer-based. The objective is to test your awareness of potential hazards while driving.

You'll then be shown a series of 14 videos - each roughly a minute long - depicting everyday driving scenarios. You'll have to identify the developing hazard - something that would cause the driver to take action, such as brake or change direction. This could be related to other vehicles, pedestrians or road conditions. One of the videos will have two developing hazards to identify.

The earlier you spot a hazard, the higher you'll score. In both the car and motorcycle test, there are 15 scorable hazards, and you can earn up to 5 points for each. There won't be a chance to review your answers - you just get one shot at each. To pass, you need to score at least 44 of a possible 75.

If you fail either the multiple choice or hazard perception, you'll have to re-book and take both parts of the theory test again.

## Learning to Drive

It's normal to be nervous when you're learning to drive - and you're not expected to master everything straight away. Driving is something you get better at with time and practice. Even drivers who've been on the road for years are still improving. So don't worry about making a mistake - your instructor's seen it all before.

In the (unlikely) case of something going wrong, rest assured that your instructor can control the car. All professional driving schools use dual controlled cars, which means your instructor can step in if you need some help.

On your first driving lesson, don't expect to get behind the wheel straight away, especially if you get picked up somewhere busy. Your driving instructor will probably drive you to a more appropriate location before switching seats with you and teaching you the basics.

You will practice in both urban and rural areas and a variety of road types: single and dual carriageways, country lanes, one-way streets, and the Leeds inner and outer ring roads.

You will then move on to busier junctions, roundabouts, traffic lights, dual carriageways and rural roads at a pace which suits you. Expect to carry out a reverse manoeuvre exercise and possibly an emergency stop as well as following a sat nav.

Some instructors will teach using visual tools such as drawing on a white board, pictures or using model cars to show you how the car should move. Seeing this visually could help you process learning how to manoeuvre the car.

## Learning to Drive Continued

### What do you do in your first driving lesson?

- You'll learn the cockpit drill
- You'll be introduced to the car's controls
- You'll learn about clutch control
- You'll learn how to safely move off and stop

The cockpit drill (often known as the DSSSM routine) consists of checking your car before driving:

- Doors - check all doors are closed and secured before starting your engine
- Seat and steering – adjust your seating so that the controls are within easy reach and you have a clear view of the road. You should also adjust your headrest to prevent whiplash if you're in an accident.
- Seatbelt – make sure you and your passengers are buckled in.
- Mirrors – position your mirrors to minimise your blinds spots.

### Useful blog posts:

- [The driving test syllabus](#)
- [Young drivers guide - What to expect from your first driving lesson](#)
- [First driving lesson advice](#)

## Finding an Instructor

It can be a daunting task to find an Instructor, so we have created a guide to make the process a little easier.

Driving instructors can hold a CPD which means they are committed to the voluntary Continuing Professional Development (CPD) scheme.

ADI CoP - These Instructors can hold something named ADI CoP, which have agreed to abide by the ADI Code of Practice.

We have created some tips for looking for an instructor:

1. Finding an instructor that you feel safe with, and the instructor feels safe with you is key. It's important that you both feel safe. In the unlikely case that your instructor is unable to work with you for whatever reason, ask for a recommendation of another instructor who would be more suitable for you. It's ok to change instructors if that's best for you.
2. Big companies with cheaper deals may not be equipped to support someone with high anxiety – it's best to find a private company who works with locals and a range of people.
3. Everyone learns differently so if someone with a similar learning style has recently passed, ask them for a recommendation on who they learnt with. Did the instructor make them feel comfortable and confident, were they patient and understanding?

## Finding an Instructor Continued

4. Look at reviews to narrow down your search. Try searching for 'driving instructors leads anxiety' and this will bring reviews up that mention that the learning was anxious but the instructor made them feel less anxious.

Alternatively, you could try words like 'patient' and this will bring up searches for people who have reviews that include the word 'patient'. Here is a list of key words to look for within reviews:

- Confidence
- Patience
- Understanding
- Professional
- Recommend
- Supportive
- Brilliant/Amazing/Fantastic
- Flexible
- Visual learning
- Prepared
- Safe
- Relaxed
- Anxiety

It is also good to look at reviews which give details on how their instructor helped them overcome issues.

## Finding an Instructor Continued

5. [The AA website](#) is easy to use, it allows you to see driving instructor calendars so you can book with ease and without speaking on the phone to someone. Also, you can skip the queue of waiting for an instructor by seeing this availability.

### Useful links:

- [GOV.UK website](#) - find certified instructors through the Government website
- [MJ Driving School](#) - Driving instructor featured on BBC's the one show. Experienced with working with people who [have phobias of driving and who are nervous](#).
- [Learn Driving UK](#) - Experienced at teaching pupils on the autistic spectrum to drive. At LDUK, they start you off in "nursery areas" on quiet housing estates close to where you live. They move on to busier junctions, roundabouts, traffic lights, dual carriageways and rural roads at a pace which suits you. Expect to carry out a reverse manoeuvre exercise and possibly an emergency stop (1 in 3 tests only) on the test, which lasts around 35-40 minutes. Their Leeds-based driving instructors are achieving a much higher pass rate due to their knowledge of the area, professionalism, and experience of judging when their pupils are ready to take their driving test. All driving instructors have a DBS.

## Manual and Automatic

For many people, automatic driving lessons are a better option for the following reasons:

- There are two less controls to worry about
- There is no clutch pedal so controlling the car when moving off is much easier – no biting point!
- No gear changes means one less thing to think about when approaching junctions and when speeding up and slowing down. The car does all that for you.

No gear changes also means you can keep both hands on the steering wheel. Which helps with more accurate steering and positioning of your car.

In a manual car, you need to press in the clutch pedal and choose the right gear for the car's speed, giving you full control over its performance.

An automatic gearbox selects the right gear for the car's speed and the road conditions, meaning drivers only need to focus on stopping, starting and turning.

This is a complete personal choice but if you do learn on automatic this means you can only drive in automatic cars. Check out [Bill Plant's guide](#) for more information on manual or automatic driving.

## Driving Test Centres

In Leeds, Bradford and Craven, there are a few test centres. Some of the test centres in Leeds have routes incorporating Leeds City Centre. However, both are close to very busy and complex dual carriageways, which you must feel confident on prior to taking the driving test.

Horsforth Test Centre: Woodside House, 261 Low Lane, Horsforth, Leeds LS18 5NY

Leeds (Fearnville) - Fearnville Leisure Centre, Oakwood Lane, Fearnville Leeds LS8 3LF

Leeds (Colton Mill) - Part Ground Floor, Unit 1, Colton Mill Office Park, Bullerthorpe Lane, Leeds LS15 9JN

Walton LGV - Wighill Lane, Walton, Wetherby LS23 7DU

Bradford (Heaton), 15 Farfield Street, Heaton, Bradford BD9 5AS

Bradford (Thornbury), The Courtyard, Midpoint, Thornbury, Bradford BD3 7AY

Steeton, Station Road, Steeton, Keighley BD20 6RW

To find your local driving test centre, there is a [search option on the GOV.uk website](#) where you can type in your postcode.

You can learn to drive or book your test outside of Leeds or Bradford if you wish to. If you feel you would be better driving in an area you know less, this can be accommodated.

However, it is recommended for beginners that you learn where you will be driving often to become familiar with your area's roads.

# Contact Us



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This guide was produced by the Autism AIM team, part of The Advonet Group. We are a free service co-led by and run for autistic adults (aged 18+) in the West Yorkshire area.