

Private & Confidential

Mrs Nadia Zahmoul

35 Queens Gate Gardens

London

SW7 5RR

(sent via email with consent: nzahmoul@me.com)

Date: 03/07/2025

To whom it may concern,

RE: Mrs Nadia Zahmoul's Autism Diagnosis and Recommendations for Reasonable Adjustments; NHS No.: 705 199 5111; DoB: 27 Apr 1969

1. Context

I am writing in my capacity and clinical role as Principal Clinical Psychologist and Service Lead at the Central London Adult Autism Service (CLAAS), Central London Community Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust.

This letter aims to summarise Nadia's Autism diagnosis and recommendations for reasonable adjustments. Nadia was seen in our service for an Autism diagnostic assessment, following a referral to us from our colleagues in NHS mental health services.

Please note that this is purely a clinical letter to support understanding of Nadia's autistic needs and recommend reasonable adjustments to enable equitable participation in court proceedings.

This letter does not intend to provide expert evidence or offer an opinion on legal matters or facts of the case. Should such information be required, an independent expert witness should be separately instructed.

2. Confirmation of Autism Diagnosis

Nadia has a formal diagnosis of Autism under the DSM-5 criteria. Autism is internationally recognised as a neurodevelopmental condition. This means that Nadia was born autistic and will be for life. Autism affects social communication, information processing, and sensory experiences. While it is considered a form of neurodivergence rather than a disability, it qualifies as a “disability” due to the significant differences autistic individuals presents in the aforementioned domains, which can lead to significant challenges and poorer functioning when a lack of appropriate support is in place. However, this diagnosis has no implication on a person’s intellectual abilities. In fact, Nadia is intelligent, educated and has had demanding job roles.

Autistic individuals can experience significant difficulties in their wellbeing and in their everyday life. Environments that do not match well with their autistic preferences can pose significant barriers.

Environments, such as being in court, that are unfamiliar, involve significant social communication demands, and require the need to process information quickly and to perform under time pressure can be stressful for autistic individuals. Their autistic needs are likely to be amplified under these circumstances.

Without reasonable adaptations, autistic individuals are at a disadvantage and unable to participate equitably; for instance, they cannot communicate effectively as demanded of or intended for in specific settings (e.g., court proceedings).

This letter outlines how Nadia’s autism affects her communication and processing in the context of legal proceedings and recommends reasonable adjustments to ensure that:

- Nadia is provided with an equitable and fair chance to express and represent herself;
- Nadia can engage meaningfully with and participate effectively in the court proceedings.

3. Other Mental Health Needs

Nadia has significant mental health needs, including a co-occurring diagnosis of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), linked to a series of adverse life events. Nadia’s diagnosis of PTSD means that she continues to experience longstanding symptoms and difficulties. For further details on Nadia’s mental health needs, please refer to the letter from **Dr Leigh Poyser (Consultant Psychiatrist), dated 26 March 2025**. Nadia has shown a high level of insight into how her PTSD and autism interact. Nadia’s autistic needs are amplified and her ability to communicate effectively is significantly reduced during periods of emotional distress.

4. Summary of Autistic Traits Relevant to Legal Proceedings

The following traits and needs were identified during Nadia’s autism assessment and are particularly relevant to her participation in ongoing legal proceedings:

4.1. Communication Style and Expression

- Nadia has a strong preference for direct, honest communication and finds vague, dishonest, or contradictory language distressing.
- Nadia may use more formal, analytical, or metaphorical language than expected. Nadia may repeat specific phrases or concepts, which might impact how others interpret her intended meaning.
- Nadia may speak at length and with intensity about topics that are important to her. This can make it difficult for others to interrupt or redirect the conversation.
- Nadia uses animated gestures and emotive language, especially when emotionally heightened. While this allows her to express herself authentically, it may be misinterpreted in formal settings.
- Nadia has difficulty intuitively reading non-verbal cues or conversational turn-taking.

4.2. Information Processing and Thinking Style

- Nadia has a highly analytical and detail-focused thinking style, with a strong preference for logic, consistency, and rule-based systems.
- Nadia recognises a “rigid” thinking style. She often creates mental “rules” to help her to process information. This can make it difficult to make sense of unclear, ambiguous, or conflicting information.
- Nadia has a strong sense of justice and fairness, which can lead to emotional distress when she perceives “dishonesty” or “manipulation”.
- Nadia has a strong memory and can recall information in detail but may find it effortful to summarise or prioritise key information.

5. Strengths and Capabilities

While this report focuses Nadia’s autistic needs, it is equally important to highlight her many strengths. Nadia’s autistic traits have no direct bearing on her parental capacities. She is articulate, intelligent, and deeply committed to her children. Her strong memory and analytical skills have supported her success in previous professional roles and in managing complex personal challenges.

6. Recommended Reasonable adjustments

In light of Nadia’s communication, processing, and emotional regulation needs, the following adjustments are recommended to ensure Nadia’s equitable access and participation in ongoing legal proceedings. Consistent adjustments across all stages of legal proceedings are essential to support her engagement.

Communication

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow additional time for Nadia to express thoughts, especially on complex or emotional topics. • Use clear, direct, and unambiguous language. • Use shorter sentences. • Avoid vague or contradictory statements (e.g. inference, innuendo). • Ask specific, rather than open-ended, questions. • Provide clear prompts and specific cues to gather relevant information. • Allow time for responses. • Offer clarification or summarise key points regularly during discussions.
Information Processing and Organisation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide clear explanations of legal processes, expectations, and timelines. • Allow extra time to process information and formulate responses, especially if the content is new or unexpected. • Where possible, share documents, questions, or agendas in advance to reduce cognitive load.
Emotional Regulation and Sensory Needs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognise that heightened emotional expression may reflect distress or difficulty communicating, rather than lack of cooperation. • Offer regular breaks during lengthy or emotionally demanding sessions. • Be mindful of environmental stressors (e.g. noise, lighting, crowding), and accommodate sensory needs where feasible.
Other Adjustments
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow for video link participating, if possible • Provide a quiet waiting area prior to a trial • Allow Nadia to appoint an advocate to support her.

Nadia has reported significant distress following the recent withdrawal of previously granted accommodations in court, which has impacted her ability to express herself effectively. We strongly recommend that the above adjustments be implemented consistently throughout the remainder of the proceedings.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. Should you require further information or clarification, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Yours sincerely,

Electronically signed and delivered to avoid delays.

Dr Catherine Cheung
Service Lead & Principal Clinical Psychologist
Central London Adult Autism Service

Sophia Iacovou
Assistant Psychologist

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