

# AUTISM & COMMUNICATION



**How does Autism affect communication?**

**Strategies you can use to improve  
communication**

**Ways people can support effective  
communication**

## How does Autism impact communication?

Neurodivergent individuals communicate **differently** to neurotypical individuals. Often autistic people are blamed for the gap in communication. However, it is unfair and unrealistic that autistic people should be expected to use neurotypical methods of communication all the time. This is very tiring and energy-demanding. Communication styles also differ between individuals, with or without autism, but some of the most common differences include:

### 1. Directness

Sometimes, as autistic individuals, we are told we sound rude or even condescending. We don't mean to be! Autistic individuals tend to avoid hints, assumptions and like to speak truthfully. Sometimes this can lead to others feeling offended, rejected or hurt.

### 2. Honesty

Many autistic people like to communicate with **facts**. Neurotypical people can tend to prioritise reassurance or emotional support over frankness. This clash or communication gap can sometimes lead to feelings that the individual is being rude or disrespectful.

### **3. Efficiency**

Directness, honesty and fact-focussed conversation are often the “neurodiverse way” of initiating or participating in conversation. However, neurotypical people may use small talk, which can seem pointless or lacking necessity. On the other hand, an autistic individual may talk a lot about a special interest and not realise when the others are not as interested as them in the topic.

### **4. Non-verbal communication**

Autistic individuals may struggle with non-verbal communication such as using facial expressions, tone of voice and knowing the appropriate level of eye contact. Sometimes an autistic person may stim as a form of regulating emotions but this could be misinterpreted by others.

## Other characteristics of autistic communication

- Very literal
- Difficulty understanding humour
- May struggle with grammar
- Difficulty seeing another person's perspective and ideas
- Difficulty with figures of speech such as metaphors, sarcasm and irony
- Sophisticated language or vocabulary
- Minimal eye contact
- Speaking too fast or too loudly
- May speak for a long time about a favourite topic without allowing participation from the others in the conversation
- May talk aloud to themselves
- May make socially inappropriate comments that are factually correct
- May not know how to initiate or terminate a conversation
- May identify basic emotions rather than more subtle feelings or emotions
- May have difficulty multi-tasking

## **Strategies to improve your communication skills**

- Reflect on conversations and what went well and what could have gone better
- Know your core values (i.e. being honest, fairness) and stick to these
- Ask yourself what the purpose and aim of the conversation is
- Identify boundaries
- Talk to people about autism to break down conflict and to mutually work on the communication gap

## Ways other people can help effective communication

- Allowing time for the individual to ask questions
- Say key information more slowly and repeat this to help with information processing
- Allowing time to process and respond
- Put less emphasis on non-verbal communication
- Be aware of sensory needs - is the environment noisy or crowded?
- Avoid open ended questions as these can be more confusing
- Use visual supports - pictures can help aid understanding
- Be clear and avoid irony, sarcasm, rhetorical questions, exaggeration or figurative language
- Do not get offended if the individual seems to be blunt or direct - this is just a neurodivergent way of communicating!
- Encourage conversation around special interests - this can give the individual with Autism a lot of pleasure to talk about!

**Space for Notes:**

## **This leaflet was created by:**

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“ As an autistic individual myself, I have created this leaflet from a neurodivergent perspective whilst working for the CASA team. I hope you found it useful and informative. If you have any questions or suggestions, please talk to us! ”