

Communication and Relationships

Autistic people usually communicate and interact slightly differently to their non-autistic peers [See 'Language and Communication' tab for more details]. It is important that an authentic autistic communication style is respected. Many autistic individuals learn to camouflage their autistic traits as they try to adapt to the expectations of non-autistic people. This can be conscious or unconscious and for a variety of complex reasons including a desire to protect themselves from judgement and to help them connect with others.

It is thought that all people do this, but that it can be more extreme for autistic people and is often referred to as 'masking'. It is now understood that unfortunately masking can have significant emotional consequences for autistic people, including negatively affecting their mental health and sense of self. [See 'Emotional Wellbeing' tab for further information about masking]

Historically, support for autistic people has tended to focus on forms of 'social skills training'. However, it is now well recognised that this approach is based on an outdated view of autism and can in fact be harmful, by way of not respecting different communication styles, encouraging masking and negatively impacting identity and self-esteem. Support for autistic people should never focus on changing or 'treating' the person's neurology. Instead, there are many ways to foster a more inclusive and supportive environment for autistic people. Key areas to consider include:

Support access to the autistic community. Connecting with autistic peers, who experience the world in a similar way, is likely to enhance self-acceptance, self-esteem and help to develop a positive autistic identity.



Educate everyone about different communication styles and celebrate difference. There is inherent value in diversity. All humans are part of a tapestry of neurodiversity and we are all connected to each other. We need all kinds of people and minds in order to flourish as worldwide societies.

Teach self-advocacy skills. Self-advocacy is being able to communicate our needs and desires. There are many different ways to self-advocate, and this is going to be unique to the individuals' ambitions, goals, strengths and differences.

Websites

The below websites provide further information about communication, friendships and self-advocacy.

The '**Know Yourself**' series for teenagers:

<https://www.autism.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/topics/resources-for-autistic-teenagers>

The Neuroinclusive Education Network (NEN) offer a range of resources including a self-advocacy toolkit (Available at: <https://www.nen.org.uk/resources/self-advocacy-toolkit>)

An invaluable aspect of the toolkit is the inclusion of insights from Autistic Young Experts.

<https://www.nen.org.uk>

Neurodivergent-Affirming Speech and Language Therapist, Emily Price, offers a range of information and resources to support autistic children's speech, language and communication needs through compassionate approaches. Includes advice on using social stories and comic strip conversations.

<https://www.autisticslt.com/nd-affirmingslt>

A **blog** that shares the experiences of an Autistic, ADHD woman and Speech & Language Therapist. This website provides information on a range of resources relevant to neurodivergence including articles, webinars, websites and books. <https://hattalks.uk/>

A small, registered charity working to support, educate, and bring change.

<https://autisticgirlsnetwork.org/>