



Language, communication and social interaction

Language Development

Fluent Language users

Autistic children are likely to have a different communication style to their non-autistic peers. These differences could include a preference for direct and honest communication, efficient use of language and a preference for reduced levels of eye contact. They may also favour more subtle or neutral facial expressions and reduced gestures. These are all characteristic of Autistic interaction style and should be respected as a child/ young person's authentic communication without any expectation to change or 'mask' these differences.

Possible differences between autistic and non-autistic communication styles and how we can help to prevent communication breakdown:

- Autistic people may interpret and use non-verbal communication signals (such as facial expressions, gesture, body posture/language or tone of voice) differently to non-autistic people. Do not assume that your non-verbal communication has been understood and state what you want to communicate in an honest and direct way. Do not make assumptions about how they are feeling based on their non-verbal communication and have awareness that what you see on the outside may not match their feelings on the inside.
- It can be helpful to be explicit in requests and instructions. Avoid the use of ambiguous language, such as inference, sarcasm, irony and indirect requests.
- Clearly label your own emotions. Do not put the responsibility on the autistic individual to interpret these.
- Have awareness that an autistic child/young person may prefer not to use eye contact. This can be misinterpreted as disrespectful/rude when there is no intention of this. It is important to respect this preference and not insist upon using eye contact.
- Many autistic children and young people may find it difficult to talk about their emotions and ask for help. They may need additional support strategies in place to communicate these needs.
- An autistic child/young person may be direct in their verbal communication style. This honesty can be misinterpreted as abrupt/rude when there is no intention of this.
- An autistic child/young person usually has some differences with their theory of mind skills. Theory of mind is the ability to understand that other people have beliefs, knowledge and feelings that may be different from one's own. They allow us to put ourselves in another person's perspective to understand their actions, intentions or emotions. This has an impact on communication style. This is not the same as lacking empathy; in fact many Autistic people are intensely empathic once they have understood the other person's situation. When modelling and presenting others points of views and using strategies to develop theory of mind, Validate the child's own experiences first before presenting other's perspectives.
- An autistic child/young person may not understand the situation when there are friendship or interaction difficulties. They may need support to talk through what happened after the event to understand it. They may be socially vulnerable in their peer group due to their communication differences.
- Encourage your child to explore and express their boundaries and develop assertiveness skills.