



Communication tips

These quick tips, from the National Autistic Society (UK), may help you to communicate more effectively with autistic people, whether they be your child, pupil, colleague or friend.

Getting and keeping their attention

- Always use their name at the beginning so that they know you are talking to them.
- Make sure they are paying attention before you ask a question or give an instruction. The signs that someone is paying attention will be different for different people.
- Use their hobbies and interests, or the activity they are currently doing, to engage them.

Processing information

An autistic person can find it difficult to filter out the less important information. If there is too much information, it can lead to 'overload', where no further information can be processed. To help:

- say less and say it slowly
- use specific key words, repeating and stressing them
- pause between words and phrases to give the person time to process what you've said, and to give them a chance to think of a response
- don't use too many questions
- use less non-verbal communication (e.g., eye contact, facial expressions, gestures, body language)
- use visual supports (e.g., symbols, timetables, social stories) if appropriate
- be aware of the environment (noisy/crowded) that you are in. Sensory differences may be affecting how much someone can process.

Avoiding open-ended questions

- Keep questions short.
- Ask only the most necessary questions.
- Structure your questions, e.g., you could offer options or choices.
- Be specific, e.g., ask "Did you enjoy your lunch?" and "Did you enjoy maths?" rather than "How was your day?"

Ways to ask for help

- If appropriate, give autistic people a visual help card to use to ask for help.

Being clear

- Avoid using irony, sarcasm, figurative language, rhetorical questions, idioms or exaggeration as autistic people can take these literally. If you do use these, explain what you have said and be clear about what you really mean to say.

Developed from resources created by the National Autistic Society (UK) found at www.autism.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/topics/communication/tips.