Workbook on Autism

This book is intended to offer normally to highly gifted people with autism a concrete visual guide in their daily interactions with people when they try to explain what autism is to those unfamiliar with it. The book is also for family members and caregivers of people with autism, healthcare professionals, and all other interested parties.

Introduction

Core Problem Leading to Maladaptive Behavior and Disrupted Social Interaction

The world and events are unpredictable for individuals with an autism spectrum disorder. They are constantly overwhelmed by information, stimuli, and emotions, seeing a multitude of details coming at them without perceiving the coherence and context-dependent relevance of one detail or another. They 'can't see the forest for the trees.' They have an eye for detail and less for the 'whole,' the coherence between things, between the different details. They are detail thinkers. People with autism have difficulty switching from one line of thought to another. They have difficulty thinking on multiple tracks. They are serial thinkers, which also makes them slow thinkers.

Therefore, people with autism have difficulty anticipating changes and dealing with changes.

Moreover, when something unexpected or unpredicted occurs, people with autism also have less ability to react adequately to it.

As mentioned, they are slow thinkers, but they are also slow communicators: they often communicate very inefficiently. And so, it is difficult to consult with other people, make appointments, or exchange information about how best to react to the changed/changing situation.

'Inefficient' communication has nothing to do with the number of words they use or the speed at which they speak. It primarily has to do with saying the right words to the right person at

the right time and in the right way. And so, it has to do with the speed at which irrelevant information can be distinguished from relevant information.

The person with autism has great difficulty with this. In this, the person is much slower. They are an associative thinker, a detail thinker, a visual thinker who has difficulty with non-visual information such as the spoken word, they are a serial thinker and cannot think on multiple tracks simultaneously.

All of this makes them a slow thinker and inefficient communicator.

Not only does the person with autism thus have difficulty understanding the world around them in its coherence and therefore predicting what the future will bring, how people will behave (seeing the reality 'behind the reality' and being able to estimate the perspective of other people); the person with autism also has reduced capabilities to react adequately when something unexpected and/or undesirable occurs: their communication is disrupted and inefficient, making it difficult to ask for extra information, to make their own concerns and motivations, desires, objectives, and expectations known to others, to make agreements with others about how to react to the changed/changing situation, and so forth.

The difficulties with change (resistance to change) and inefficient communication (reduced skills in communication and social interaction) form the core problem in people with autism in the development of socially maladaptive behavior and in their disrupted interaction with others.

To help people with autism, we must give them means to cope with changes and to be able to talk about them with others. And not necessarily ensure that nothing in their lives changes.

However, this often remains a noble but utopian goal, and it is practically only possible to tackle the problem from both sides: on the one hand, making their lives as predictable as possible and preventing as many 'surprises' as possible; on the other hand, teaching them to communicate more efficiently, teaching them to deal with their panic reactions and feelings, teaching them (social) strategies and techniques, and so forth … so that when an unexpected event does occur, they can (with the help of others) still deal with it and react to it adequately and in a socially adapted manner.

In summary:

Different way of perceiving and experiencing:

- More fragmented, less 'holistic,' everything enters unfiltered
- Seeing details, processing detail by detail, detail is separate from the whole, seeing detail as an isolated fact
- Coherence/whole/(connection with) larger context not self-evident/quick/automatically clear
- Getting lost in details, being overwhelmed by details without hierarchy / without differentiation
- Over- or under-sensitivity to stimuli is common: 'different' sensory perception

- Different way of thinking:
- Slow thinking, unable or difficult to think on multiple tracks simultaneously,
- 'Absolute' thinking, unnuanced, detail-oriented thinking with more difficulty placing something in its context, with more difficulty seeing the bigger picture
- Associative thinking (jumping from one topic to another, from detail to detail, difficulty maintaining an overview and seeing the relationship to the bigger picture)

Different way of emotional experiencing:

- Often more extreme, 'all or nothing,' without a volume knob
- Difficult to regulate or modulate, overwhelming
- Suddenly being overwhelmed by emotions
    - Difficulty understanding coherence
- Different way of meaning-making
- Difficulty with communication
- Difficulty with emotions
- Difficulty with social interaction

Different way of perceiving + different way of thinking => difficulty with predicting / assessing
Different way of perceiving + different way of thinking => difficulty with communicating

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Difficulty with predicting / assessing situations

+ 'Absolute' thinking (independent of context)
+ Slow and associative thinking
+ Being overwhelmed by emotions
+ Problems with communication => Difficulty adapting and interacting with others in an ever-changing environment

What do people with autism need? What does their care demand consist of?

In communication and interaction with people with autism, the following are helpful:

- Concretizing Visualizing
- Creating an overview Making things predictable Counteracting and eliminating ambiguities and misunderstandings
- Giving time Being patient Because people with autism are
    - Slow, serial, associative thinkers
    - Detail thinkers and visual thinkers
    - 'Absolute' thinkers (do not adapt to the context)

Visualizing and Concretizing

People with autism are visual thinkers, but they themselves have difficulty visualizing (especially in 'real time,' during an actual conversation).

It is beneficial to provide them with as much visual material as possible, where they do not have to use their own imagination, but immediately get an image they can (mentally) work with.
A written agenda, step-by-step plan, or glossary is already sufficiently visual for normally to highly gifted individuals, and also offers them something tangible, or 'concrete,' something in physical reality they can refer back to when they lose track and/or their memory fails them.
For people with autism *and* an intellectual disability, it can be even more concrete. Pictures, photos, or even real 3-dimensional objects can help them visualize, remember, and process information.
Concrete visual elements are an important tool in daily life, helping people with autism reduce (compensate for) their disability and enabling them to function better and more normally.

Resistance to Change

The major problem for people with autism is their rigidity and their resistance to change. This is because they are slow thinkers who have difficulty creating a (mental) overview.
We can best address this problem by creating as much clarity and predictability as possible on the one hand, but because that is not always and 100% possible, we should also provide them with as many resources as possible and teach them as many skills as possible to learn to deal with change.
A major problem with changes is the autistic inability to communicate about them easily. Working on their communication skills is working on their rigidity and their resistance to change.
Here too, written or drawn step-by-step plans, agendas, and checklists or other forms of written communication can again be helpful.
But also, adhering to agreements, being predictable and clear (i.e., unambiguous and not vague), are important here to compensate for the disability and the difficulties that people with an autism spectrum disorder, whether gifted or not, have with change.

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Conclusion

Autism is, in fact, an inability to process information in ‘real time.’ That is what it often comes down to. The inability to handle the process of communication and social interaction in real time. The inability to adapt in real time to changes (that go against their expectations).

'absolute' thinkers

Contextblindness ‘cover/back flap’

People with autism do not adapt their meaning-making to the situation/environment/context.

abstract vs. concrete

see: concretizing

a&e 127

It is better to try to convince someone with autism with images than with words: the strange associations they make, the different meanings they assign, sometimes even the delusions they have, are best corrected in the most concrete and visual way possible.

…!? 59-61

Use language that has a concrete picture associated with it: speak in images. Figurative language and proverbs are described as imagery. Now there are two types of imagery. In the first type, a thought or concept is expressed indirectly by means of an image. Indirect because the image is not directly applicable to the concrete situation being discussed but refers to a similar situation. The image of one situation is transferred and applied to another. Such an image is called a metaphor (metaphor is Greek for: figurative, something that is transferred). Our language is full of metaphors:

- a camel is the ship of the desert
- the evening falls
- that woman dryly states that her husband is an ice-cold type
- death comes like a thief in the night Due to their literal way of thinking, people with autism are quickly confused by such language. Since the images are transferred from one reality to another, they should not be understood realistically or literally. A camel is, of course, not really a ship, the mouth with which the woman complains about her husband is just as moist as with other statements, and her husband (we hope for him) probably has a normal body temperature, death is not a person, so not a thief either. Children and young people with autism are misled by such statements because they live in only one reality: *the* reality. They therefore understand hyperrealistically. And so a boy dared not go outside for days after tea time, after he had been urged to put his bicycle inside, because ‘the night was going to fall’. There is also a second type of imagery. In this, images are used that are not transferred from another reality but that relate to the concrete situation itself. Since people with autism think in images (‘Thinking in Pictures’ is even the title of a book by Temple Grandin, about autism), we help them understand our communication if we do precisely that: speak in IMAGES. So we do not say: ‘Now you must work’. Because there is no concrete image that belongs to working. But we say: ‘Now you must read this text in silence’. Because you concretely say what you mean, and also evoke a concrete image of what is expected of the person with autism. This way we limit the chances that the person with autism does not understand what is expected of him/her; or that he/she understands something different from what you mean. You can think of hundreds of images for working: cleaning, writing, digging, hammering,

washing dishes, ironing, making beds, driving a truck, sawing… We do not say: ‘Get ready to leave’. We say: ‘Put on your coat’ (concrete image). We do not say: ‘Tidy up’. We say: ‘Put your Duplo in the box’ (concrete image). We avoid words or expressions that can be filled in in multiple ways. Better one concrete task. Tidying up, getting ready, and working are not connected to a concrete picture but are collective words and abstractions – categorical words – that can be filled in in more than one way. ‘Reading in silence’, ‘putting the Duplo in the box’, and ‘putting on your coat’ are concrete images that you can conjure up in your head. These expressions unequivocally belong to the images and are not abstract. They belong to a concrete image and do not refer to a multitude of many different activities and/or interpretations and corresponding images that can be filled in (if the person with autism is even capable of that). A person with autism has difficulty generating images (visualizing, imagining). Therefore, it is better to immediately place one concrete image in their head (via a sentence/statement that ‘leaves little to the imagination’ and evokes one precise image as concretely and unambiguously as possible).

'acting out' / responding spontaneously, being spontaneous

People with autism have difficulty reacting spontaneously to and interacting with their environment. Their behavior and communication often come across as forced and unnatural.

bldn 49-50

In the pompous or rigidly formalistic type, social problems are very subtle. Individuals belonging to this type are excessively polite or formal. They are aware of others and the importance of appropriate interactions and therefore adhere very strictly to social conventions. As children, they usually had clear problems with social interactions and were mostly classifiable under one of the other social subtypes mentioned above. Due to their good intellectual abilities, they gradually manage to compensate for and camouflage many of these difficulties. In literature, this is often described as 'progress', but it is not genuine progress in social development, rather the learning of various alternative strategies to appear as normal as possible and to survive optimally. For example, it is noticeable that these individuals try to grasp social events intellectually: they memorize certain social rules and 'survive' social activities based on learned or acquired 'scripts' ('scenarios', 'playbooks'). However, they lack the intuition necessary to understand the subtleties of interpersonal interaction. They adhere very strictly to social rules and have difficulty adapting to situations where the expected behavior deviates from the known scenario. Lack of empathy and social naivety are most characteristic of this group. We find this subtype most often in highly gifted adults with autism, and many of them receive a diagnosis of Asperger's Disorder. The social problems of individuals of the pompous/rigidly-formalistic type cannot be identified through a few casual contacts, conversations, or tests, because their intellectual approach allows them to react quite appropriately in those situations. Their social problems only become apparent in more intensive and longer-lasting contacts where spontaneity, empathy, and emotional support are required.

administration

difficulty with

'afterwards'

processing / reacting

a&e 32

A possible explanation for the absence of emotional reactions in people with autism is that they have to put so much mental energy into purely intellectually and cognitively understanding what is happening to them that there is no mental space left for processing the emotional side of the matter. … . We often see that only when understanding of the purely intellectual side has come, the emotions are then also released. People with autism often react emotionally delayed to events. … It seems that feeling and thinking simultaneously is difficult for people with autism. Either they feel (and get overwhelmed by their emotions because they cannot put them into perspective), or they think (and have no room to experience the accompanying feelings).

a&e 97

With gifted people with autism, we can often put events into perspective 'afterwards' and thereby teach them to 'relativize', but there is a high chance that they will still be overwhelmed by their emotion next time.

aggression

a&e 32-34

People with autism seem to experience feelings like sadness, anxiety, fear, or anger more often than we do. This can partly be explained because they find communication difficult and are therefore less inclined to communicate. So they often only communicate out of necessity: when they feel bad. Another reason for their many expressions of negative emotions, however, is that they actually do feel bad more often. Due to their disability, their limited and different understanding of the world, they experience many more frustrations than we do. People with autism are more often under stress. They are more often misunderstood. Too much is expected of them. The environment is not adapted to them. They are laughed at and bullied. They are punished and reprimanded for things they cannot even help… In short: life is not easy for them. It is no coincidence that depression and anxiety are very common in people with autism, especially from adolescence onwards: the years of failures and walking on eggshells eventually take their toll. When it is then still difficult to communicate about it and when one is often 'overwhelmed' and 'caught' by one's own emotions, it is sometimes difficult for the misunderstood person with autism to remain calm. And on top of that, many people with autism have additional peripheral symptoms such as sensory hypersensitivity: many people with autism react very extremely to sounds or other sensory sensations such as touch or light, because these sensations cause them pain. Besides teaching them alternative problem-solving, social, and communicative strategies,

which should prevent the person with autism from resorting to aggression; on the other hand, one should also think about removing as many causes of problems and negative feelings such as pain and stress from their environment as possible, so that they simply feel bad and/or misunderstood or frustrated less often. Understanding their shortcomings and problems and adapted communication on our part can already do wonders. Slight adjustments in their environment and improving their 'equipment', such as having custom-made earplugs made, for example, help even more.

a&e 97 120

Depression can result in an increase in social withdrawal, aggression, or rebelliousness. In extreme cases, depression can also lead to suicidal behavior (suicidal tendencies), although suicidal behavior in people with autism has never been systematically investigated. A relatively new insight is that catatonia can occur as a complication. In catatonia, a person becomes extremely slow and rigid in their movements, resulting in a deterioration or regression in self-care skills. Depression not only has consequences for the person with autism themselves, but also for their environment. The behavioral problems associated with depression, particularly aggression, can have a severe negative impact on family life.

…!? 43

It is also good to know that someone with autism, just like someone without autism, usually uses not one but several forms of communication depending on the situation and/or possibilities. What people with autism also have in common with people without autism is that as stress increases, the form of communication also becomes more concrete and primitive. If, after ten minutes of polite and civilized requests, you still haven't been able to make it clear to the door-to-door salesman of totally useless goods that you are not interested, you will probably also resort to a more primitive and concrete form of communication: slamming the door…

a&e 107-109

Some practical tips

- People with autism already have it difficult enough with their own feelings. Therefore, do not overwhelm them with your own emotional expressions when they are upset or reacting emotionally. Stay calm and composed, however difficult that may be. Acting emotionally yourself only makes it more complicated for them.

'all' or 'nothing'

feelings

'all'

a&e 29

People with autism also often express their feelings in a very extreme way. Or their emotional expressions come across as extreme. At all ages, one can see extreme laughing fits, panic reactions, or tantrums in them. There are often also major mood swings: one

moment they have a severe tantrum, a few moments later they are laughing happily. A young adult with autism told me: "It's like a barrier that flips. One moment I feel happy, the next angry or sad. It can all change so quickly with me." It seems as if there is no brake on the expression of feelings in people with autism. Or is it perhaps that people with autism are hypersensitive and therefore react so extremely? People with autism have difficulty regulating and modulating. Because they can less oversee and understand stimuli in their context, they come across as much more absolute. This applies not only to stimuli coming from outside, but also to what comes from within. People with autism have difficulty distancing themselves from stimuli, processing them from a broader whole, the coherence. This distance is necessary to relativize things: relating is relativizing. People with autism cannot relativize very well. They are 'caught' by the things they experience, including their own feelings. If they are angry, then they are angry. They are overwhelmed, consumed by that feeling. The feeling is absolute. They are, as it were, blinded by the feeling: blind to other elements in their environment that situate what they feel in a broader framework and could therefore relativize it. People with autism generally have difficulty suppressing reactions to an immediate context. As a result, they have much less control over their feelings. An explosive expression is the result of an emotional explosion within.

'nothing'

a&e 32

A possible explanation for the absence of emotional reactions in people with autism is that they have to put so much mental energy into purely intellectually and cognitively understanding what is happening to them that there is no mental space left for processing the emotional side of the matter. … . We often see that only when understanding of the purely intellectual side has come, the emotions are then also released. People with autism often react emotionally delayed to events. … The reason people with autism react so extremely to stimuli (auditory, tactile, visual…) is probably because the stimuli are also experienced very extremely, because the impact of events on people with autism is also much more extreme than for us. Many authors with autism testify to such hypersensitivity. Temple Grandin even speaks of an ‘oversensitive and immature nervous system’. It seems that feeling and thinking simultaneously is difficult for people with autism. Either they feel (and get overwhelmed by their emotions because they cannot put them into perspective), or they think (and have no room to experience the accompanying feelings).

'antisocial'

bldn 49

The active-but-bizarre type very actively initiates social contact. But because individuals of this type, like all other people with ASD, have problems with smoothly and fluently understanding interactions, their manner of contact is naive, strange, inappropriate, and one-sided. They make contact in an egocentric way: for example, they talk endlessly about their own themes or interests, they base their contact solely on themselves, and they have difficulty responding to the feelings, needs, or interests of others in their contact. Individuals of the active-but-bizarre type do initiate interaction with others, for example in a conversation or game, but they do not know how to join the conversation or game and often come across as intrusive and disruptive. A healthy distance seems to be lacking. Individuals in this group

are often missed in diagnostics: they are labeled as behaviorally disturbed or antisocial. Many gifted individuals with ASD belong to this group. As a group, active-but-bizarre individuals generally have average to high intelligence, although there can be large individual differences.

a&e 38

People with autism express their feelings. But they do so in a different way than other people, often extremely and even more often not adapted to the context. They have difficulties communicating their feelings in a way that is understandable to the environment. The previously quoted Van Dalen expresses it as follows: "The feelings of the autistic person themselves are completely comparable to those of the non-autistic person. However, the autistic person does not succeed in conveying these in a way that is understandable to others. Thus, you very quickly come across as angry, while that is not the intention at all. The more an autistic person tries to convey their emotions, the less of it gets across."

anxiety

a&e 121-122

People with autism, just like any of us, can also be scared and have anxiety. Anxiety is even, alongside depression, one of the most common problems in autism. A Dutch study found that among a group of 44 children with an autism spectrum disorder, 84% of them met the criteria for some form of anxiety disorder. Temple Grandin, an American woman with autism, says that during her puberty, anxiety was her primary emotion. Any change in classroom routine, for example, caused intense anxiety for her. In addition to common fears, we often notice so-called illogical fears in them.

'appropriateness' / being appropriate

communication . message

…!? 52

arrogant

pedantic - haughty

asking for something

…!? 51

What we also often see is that communicating is apparently more difficult for them and requires more energy than solving a problem themselves. This even happens with normally gifted people with autism, and they usually have a large vocabulary and abstract language forms at their disposal. During a course for gifted young people with autism, it is striking how some find it easier to get a bottle of water from the kitchen than to ask for one at another

table. Or they go around the table to get the platter of sandwich fillings from the other end instead of asking for it.

…!? 127

We often see that people with autism have little trouble functioning well in familiar situations and especially familiar routines. Because they have difficulty with change, they often compensate by learning routines. However, when an unexpected change occurs, if they are having an off day, if they become unbalanced and confused, they can no longer function at the same (seemingly) high level. They then need extra support and adapted communication. We should never underestimate how much effort communication can cost for people with an autism spectrum disorder. Not even for the so-called 'high-functioning' ones.

associative

memory

…!? 108

…!? 111

thinking

a&e 124

Because of their weak central coherence, people with autism cannot see the forest for the trees. This also applies to their own experiences and perceptions. This problem, known as a typical autistic problem concerning 'episodic memory', means that the classic way of questioning often does not lead to an accurate problem formulation. People with autism find it particularly difficult to distinguish between what is relevant and what is incidental. Telling what exactly happened at a certain moment (the facts of an event), without, for example, getting lost in a lot of unnecessary details, can already be a major challenge. Especially in reporting their feelings, people with autism experience serious difficulties: either nothing comes out, or a confused and associative story emerges.

…!? 108

'attention shifting'

bldn 63

The concept of executive functions also helps explain the attention problems in people with an autistic disorder. Directing and sustaining attention would, according to a number of studies, not immediately pose a major problem for individuals with an autistic disorder, but shifting attention, the so-called 'attention shifting', does. These problems occur when the person with autism is already engaged in a particular activity. It is therefore about difficulties in letting go of a point of attention. The problem with 'attention shifting' would thus fit within a more general deficit in cognitive flexibility, which is an important predictor for social adjustment.

attention

attention disorder

People with autism are very easily distracted, and their attention is diverted by sensory stimuli (sounds, light phenomena, etc.) or by unimportant details (a certain word someone uses, the color of an object someone has, etc.). They have difficulty seeing things in their context, and have difficulty focusing on what is really important. Thus, they find it difficult, for example, to stay on the topic of conversation in a discussion. Ensure the communication gets through. When you speak to someone with autism, the sounds of spoken language are just one aspect of the many details in the environment. People with autism find it difficult to filter the many stimuli they perceive and to pick out the most important ones. A child with autism can be so engrossed by the reflection of light in the teacher's glasses that he does not hear what the teacher is saying. If you want to be understood by someone with autism, you must first ensure that your message is well received. Concretely, this means that all confusing and distracting environmental factors are eliminated as much as possible. So, do not try to convey something to a child from a distance in a noisy room. If necessary, have the child stop what they are doing so their concentration can go to the communication. Ensure that the child can clearly hear you, and especially see you. People with autism focus more on the visual and have more difficulty with the auditory.

bldn 63

'Executive Function' refers to the set of cognitive functions located in the frontal lobe of the brain: the ability to choose, execute, and evaluate the appropriate problem-solving strategy for a particular problem, while suppressing 'prepotent' but incorrect responses. Executive functions play an important role in impulse control, planning behavior, organized searching, and flexibility. The hypothesis that there is an executive dysfunction in people with ASD was formulated following the observation that some people developed autistic behaviors after suffering frontal brain damage. They too showed a tendency to perseverate and had difficulty with flexibility. This is very similar to the cognitive and behavioral rigidity that characterizes autism. In addition, the frontal lobes also appear to play a role in the regulation of social and emotional behavior. Research on people with an autistic disorder using a battery of tests measuring frontal lobe functions was positive. People with an autistic disorder have problems with cognitive flexibility: they do not easily give up a strategy that was previously effective for solving a task or problem if it is no longer effective. They have problems with planning their behavior. Even gifted people with autism and individuals with Asperger's disorder have difficulties with (social) problem-solving, both at a conceptual level and at the level of flexibility. The deficits appeared to be, to some extent, independent of IQ. The concept of executive functions also helps to explain the attention problems in people with an autistic disorder. Directing and sustaining attention would, according to a number of studies, not immediately pose a major problem for individuals with an autistic disorder, but shifting attention, the so-called 'attention shifting', does. These problems occur when the person with autism is already engaged in a particular activity. It is therefore about difficulties in letting go of a focus of attention. The problem with 'attention shifting' would thus fit within a more general deficit of cognitive flexibility, which is an important predictor for social adjustment.

'autistic' logic

autistic preoccupation

enthusiasms / stereotypical or obsessive interests

sexuality

@ 21

Most children, young people, and adults with autism have sexual feelings, desires, and needs. Like other people, they can be very different in this regard. Some individuals never show any sexual interest. The environment even wonders if they are asexual. Others are very preoccupied with sex. For some, sex becomes an autistic preoccupation.

autobiographical memory

a&e 35

a&e 124

Because of their weak central coherence, people with autism cannot see the forest for the trees. This also applies to their own experiences and perceptions. This problem, known as a typical autistic problem concerning 'episodic memory', means that the classic way of questioning often does not lead to an accurate problem formulation. People with autism find it particularly difficult to distinguish between what is relevant and what is incidental. Telling what exactly happened at a certain moment (the facts of an event), without, for example, getting lost in a lot of unnecessary details, can already be a major challenge. Especially in reporting their feelings, people with autism experience serious difficulties: either nothing comes out, or a confused and associative story emerges.

…!? 108

Many gifted people with autism testify that they often find it terribly difficult to find words for the expression of, especially, their personal experiences and feelings. People with autism and normal intelligence have difficulty telling a 'real story' or reporting on their experiences. This is due to their problems understanding events in their context.

@ 23

autonomy

a&e 129

avoiding vague and negative language

…!? 59

To be as clear as possible, we should also avoid any negation in our language. By saying what is not allowed or not possible, a person with autism does not know what is then possible or allowed. For example: Lies takes her brother's toy. The father says: 'Lies, don't do that!' First, Lies must understand what that message refers to: what am I not allowed to do? For people with autism, who have difficulty deriving meanings from context, this is already quite a task. But suppose Lies does understand that father is talking about taking the toy. It is not clear from father's message what Lies *can* or even *should* do. Father would do much better to say: 'Lies, play with your own dolls', then it is clear what Lies can or may do instead. Negative statements such as 'no', 'stop', 'cut it out', 'get rid of that', 'not like that' do not provide clarity for someone with autism. E.g. When we make it clear to a child that it is not allowed to climb on the cupboard, we do not say 'no' but 'come here'. This is in positive speech form. People with autism understand positive speech forms more easily. Our language is also full of vague expressions like maybe, soon, about, later… try to make things as concrete and clear as possible.

being 'caught'

by emotions

a&e 29

People with autism also often express their feelings in a very extreme way. Or their emotional expressions come across as extreme. At all ages, one can see extreme laughing fits, panic reactions, or tantrums in them. There are often also major mood swings: one moment they have a severe tantrum, a few moments later they are laughing happily. A young adult with autism told me: "It's like a barrier that flips. One moment I feel happy, the next angry or sad. It can all change so quickly with me." It seems as if there is no brake on the expression of feelings in people with autism. Or is it perhaps that people with autism are hypersensitive and therefore react so extremely? People with autism have difficulty regulating and modulating. Because they can less oversee and understand stimuli in their context, they come across as much more absolute. This applies not only to stimuli coming from outside, but also to what comes from within. People with autism have difficulty distancing themselves from stimuli, processing them from a broader whole, the coherence. This distance is necessary to relativize things: relating is relativizing. People with autism cannot relativize very well. They are 'caught' by the things they experience, including their own feelings. If they are angry, then they are angry. They are overwhelmed, consumed by that feeling. The feeling is absolute. They are, as it were, blinded by the feeling: blind to

other elements in their environment that situate what they feel in a broader framework and could therefore relativize it. People with autism generally have difficulty suppressing reactions to an immediate context. As a result, they have much less control over their feelings. An explosive expression is the result of an emotional explosion within.

off guard / by surprise (speed)

…!? 110

People with autism lack the flexibility and speed assumed to understand a message. Communication is a process that happens terribly fast. It's strange if our conversation partner only reacts to our message after a few minutes or even hours. We expect an immediate reaction. That speed is sometimes too high for people with autism, and then they don't react, or only much later. Or they camouflage and compensate with an answer that is usually appreciated by the other person: 'Yes'.

bloknootje 2015

People with autism appreciate it when they are given time to tell their story. Telling something requires a lot of effort from them and more time than they usually get. Slowing down communication is what is needed to let them be full-fledged conversation partners.

being demanding / sounding demanding

a&e 29

People with autism have difficulty regulating and modulating. They are 'caught' by the things they experience, also by their own emotions. They have difficulty overseeing stimuli that come in and placing them in their context. The feeling that overcomes them is absolute. They are overwhelmed, consumed. They are, as it were, blinded by the feeling or the many stimuli: they become blind to the context and the coherence and can relativize less easily. The necessary distance is lacking. The explosive, demanding expression is the result of an 'imperative' emotional explosion within. Also, social motivation is much lower for them at such moments, because it disappears due to being 'blinded' by the emotion. Therefore, stimulating social motivation at such moments, by being understanding, attentive, and empathetic, is the best way to react to this.

…!? 41-43

A person with autism has too few varied communication possibilities to convey the same message in different ways to different people; he is not able to adapt the 'language' of the message to the other person; if he is not understood, he will rather repeat the message several times in the same way than try different ways. It is also good to know that a person with autism, just like a person without autism, usually uses not one but several forms of communication depending on the situation and the possibilities. What people with autism also have in common with people without autism is the fact that as stress increases, the form of communication also becomes more concrete and primitive. If, after ten minutes of polite and civilized requests, you still haven't been able to make it clear to the door-to-door salesman of totally useless goods that you are not interested, you will probably also resort to a more primitive and concrete communication: slamming the door…

being distracted

being quick-witted / ad rem

a&e 74

The flow of human interactions is too swift for the slow processing of social information in people with autism. It's not just a deficit in theory of mind. On the contrary, given the efforts people with autism make to 'reason out' the inner world of others, one could even say they are the only ones who have a 'theory' of mind. People with autism have a deficit in a *hot* theory of mind. They are not quick-witted enough in their perspective-taking.

'behind the message'

…!? 113-115

People with autism react literally to what they hear, not to the question behind the question. Words are, as it were, self-contained data and not a reflection of ideas. People with autism may hear the clock strike, but they almost never know where the clapper hangs. They hear sounds and can name the musical instruments, but they don't hear the melody… Communication is not only about sending and receiving messages. Fluent communication also presupposes that messages are sent and understood as they are intended. Especially the latter is the biggest problem for people with autism and normal intelligence. Tips for communication with gifted people with autism: do not assume too quickly that they understand the message. Gifted people with autism are very easily overestimated, especially in their ability to understand ordinary human colloquial language. Precisely because they are so verbal themselves, we quickly fall into the trap of talking to them 'normally'. Due to their intelligence, they also know how to compensate for and camouflage their deficits in understanding. Gifted people with autism can understand the words, but often miss the unspoken intention behind the words. It is better not to assume that something is self-evident in communication with a gifted person with autism. Avoid asking vague questions. Precisely because they have difficulty with 'open endings' and grasping the intentions behind words, open and vague questions are very difficult for people with autism. Or they misunderstand them. If you ask someone with autism 'Can you help me set the table?', they might answer 'yes', but simply continue doing what they were busy with. If you take the question literally, they are only being asked if they *can* help. And if they can, then the answer at this literal level is also a good answer: 'Yes, I can do that'. The message behind the question is not understood. And that message is not a question (about what someone can do), but an instruction (to help). When communicating with people with autism, it is best to ask the question behind the question immediately. Facial expressions and other social cues often do not work. Most people with autism have problems understanding facial expressions and body language. They pick up too few of the messages contained in them. Frowning, sighing, looking angry, raising one's voice, a smile… the meaning behind this body language often escapes them. Or they misunderstand this language. E.g.: A gifted young adult with autism always thinks that someone who speaks loudly is angry with him, because he associates anger with a loud voice; Simple hints and winks usually do not work; Expressions like: 'Hey!', 'Come on…', 'Well now!', 'Look at that!', 'Well, well, well', actually say nothing…

'behind the meaning'

People with autism are often blind to the deeper meaning of words and statements, and their understanding often remains superficial, even literal (where one is figurative or symbolic, where one uses imagery). Reading between the lines, hearing what is not said, etc.: people with autism have difficulty with this. Often, this deeper meaning is context-bound or requires far-reaching integration of different information sources (e.g., verbal and non-verbal communication) or information from different contexts (people with autism have transfer problems – difficulty transferring information from one context/situation to another). See also: context blindness.

bullying (being bullied)

camouflaging

a&e 61

…!? 110-112

catatonia

a&e 120

Depression in people with autism can result in an increase in problematic behaviors. Social withdrawal may increase, and various 'psychotic' behaviors may occur. A relatively new insight is that catatonia can occur as a complication. Catatonia is traditionally seen as a form of psychosis. In catatonia, a person becomes extremely slow and rigid in their movements, resulting in deterioration or regression in self-care skills.

central coherence

bldn 65

'Central Coherence' is the natural tendency of information processing processes to discover the coherence of different elements from the context (integrative intelligence). A detail of a perception loses, when integrated into a larger whole, its meaning as a separate detail and acquires a completely different meaning. This meaning flows from the context. A disorder in meaning-making as a function of context is seen as the central underlying cognitive deficit in people with autism. Information processing in people with autism does not, or much less, have this tendency towards central coherence (integrative intelligence). They exhibit fragmentary information processing, characterized more by disconnection than by coherence. People with an autistic disorder do not spontaneously connect the different pieces of information with each other, nor with the (broader) context.

chaos

…!? 126

A person with autism gets lost due to their handicap in a chaotic environment full of stimuli that are impossible to make sense of. Autism is not a behavioral disorder; it is a disorder in understanding. It is not the person with autism who is chaotic; the environment is a chaos for someone with autism. Consequence: it is not the person with autism who needs to be 'tackled' or treated, but the environment. If adjustments need to be made anywhere, it is in the environment, and not in the person. To help someone with autism, we must first change the environment, and thus ourselves. Improve the world, start with yourself…

clenching / perseveration (verbal)

See also: need for clenching / perseveration (verbal)

…!? 41

A person with autism has too few varied communication possibilities to convey the same message in different ways to different people; he is not able to adapt the 'language' of the message to the other person; if he is not understood, he will rather repeat the message several times in the same way than try different ways. One of the consequences of this is that often only familiar people, such as parents or classmates, can understand the child.

(kdc)

When someone with autism is difficult to interrupt, it is usually because they have difficulty verbalizing what they want to say. They then drone on, without the listener understanding what they actually want to say. They cannot find the right words.

clumsiness

bldn 56

communication

a different way of

…!? 53

People with autism are often misunderstood because they do not adequately manage to convey their message in a way that makes it clear why that message is being sent. A question does not always sound like a question, and sometimes a question is not a question at all; a sad event is told with the same facial expression as an insignificant fact; a small incident is worded as if it were a world drama; a request for permission sounds like a command… Communication is much more than just a matter of vocabulary and grammar. Communication is a complicated process where many things need to be organized: the roles of sender and receiver, turn-taking; choosing, combining, and flexibly adapting intonation, word choice, and voice volume depending on the context; making the purpose of the

communication clear, taking into account the social aspects of language; making the right facial expression, the right posture, the right gestures; …

…!? 107

Talking 'to' someone is very different from talking 'with' someone. The latter requires more skills than just the linguistic ones needed to communicate. To have a real conversation with other people, you need to be able to organize a lot of things:

- The amount of information: In a conversation, it is important how much information you provide. You should not say too much, but also not too little.
- The quality of that information: What you talk about must also be relevant to the listener and to the topic of conversation. In a conversation about someone's health problems, the latest model of the Ford Focus is not very relevant.
- The clarity of the information: The listener must also be able to understand and place the information provided. Starting a conversation about Jeanne's dishonesty will be very confusing and incomprehensible to someone who does not know who Jeanne is and what relationship she has with the person talking about her.

a&e 124

Because of their weak central coherence, people with autism cannot see the forest for the trees. This also applies to their own experiences and perceptions. This problem, known as a typical autistic problem concerning 'episodic memory', means that the classic way of questioning often does not lead to an accurate problem formulation. People with autism find it particularly difficult to distinguish between what is relevant and what is incidental. Telling what exactly happened at a certain moment (the facts of an event), without, for example, getting lost in a lot of unnecessary details, can already be a major challenge. Especially in reporting their feelings, people with autism experience serious difficulties: either nothing comes out, or a confused and associative story emerges.

concrete and visual

…!? 114

Communicate concretely and explicitly. People with autism have difficulty with words that refer to abstract, vague, and 'open' concepts. Any communication with an 'open end' (where multiple meanings can be filled in) can confuse them or put them on the wrong track. It makes the world very unpredictable if you don't know which concrete meaning to fill into such an open or abstract concept. Even gifted people with autism have difficulty with this. Gifted people with autism can understand the words, but often miss the unspoken intention behind the words. When a teacher told a child with autism who wrote very sloppily to write 'legibly', the boy replied: 'But I am writing legibly!'. And he was literally right, because he meant by legible that he himself could read it... but he did not understand that the intention was that everyone should be able to read his writing and not just himself... It is better not to assume that something is self-evident in communication with a gifted person with autism. When a child with autism was told that he was going swimming, he panicked terribly and started crying. Although he loved swimming, he did not want to go. Afterwards, it turned out why. They had not literally said that he would also return home after swimming... Avoid asking vague questions. Precisely because they have difficulty with 'open endings' and

grasping the intentions behind words, open and vague questions are very difficult for people with autism. Or they misunderstand them. If you ask someone with autism 'Can you help me set the table?', they might answer 'yes', but simply continue doing what they were busy with. If you take the question literally, they are only being asked if they *can* help. And if they can, then the answer at this literal level is also a good answer: 'Yes, I can do that'. The message behind the question is not understood. And that message is not a question (about what someone can do), but an instruction (to help). When communicating with people with autism, it is best to ask the question behind the question immediately. In the example, it is therefore better to give an instruction than to ask a question. If you want a child with autism to tidy up, it is better not to say 'Do you want to tidy up now?', but to clearly give the instruction to tidy up.

…!? 116

Visualize. Normally gifted people with autism also benefit from visual aids that make visible what they cannot see. Experience shows that even with normally gifted individuals, drawings and photos can be very meaningful and useful, if not necessary. If a daily schedule says 'work', what does someone with autism imagine that to be? Working outside? Doing something on the computer? Working alone or with others? A drawing or photo immediately provides the correct and concrete information and prevents them from giving it their own interpretation based on their autistic thinking.

…!? 117

Making the different steps and rules visual gives them a better hold.

@ 41

...

emotionally incorrect

a&e 36

Just as the perception of the world around them is processed differently by the brains of people with autism, so is their inner world. They do not recognize their feelings. Or they feel 'too much'. Or they have a certain feeling but their brains process this information incorrectly, causing their behavior to be completely out of harmony with what they feel and causing them to communicate something different from what they actually feel. The strange communication of feelings in people with autism is a reflection of their peculiar processing of experiences.

exhausting, demanding a lot of energy

…!? 51-53

What we also often see is that communicating is apparently more difficult for them and requires more energy than solving a problem themselves. This even happens with normally gifted people with autism, and they usually have a large vocabulary and abstract language forms at their disposal. During a course for gifted young people with autism, it is striking how some find it easier to get a bottle of water from the kitchen than to ask for one at another

table. Or they go around the table to get the platter of sandwich fillings from the other end instead of asking for it.

…!? 127

We often see that people with autism have little trouble functioning well in familiar situations and especially familiar routines. Because they have difficulty with change, they often compensate by learning routines. However, when an unexpected change occurs, if they are having an off day, if they become unbalanced and confused, they can no longer function at the same (seemingly) high level. They then need extra support and adapted communication. We should never underestimate how much effort communication can cost for people with an autism spectrum disorder. Not even for the so-called 'high-functioning' ones.

a&e 51

a&e 65

@ 47

expression (≠communication)

a&e 37

The fact that people with autism communicate less spontaneously, less often, and differently about their feelings sometimes results in them being left alone with their feelings. That they are not, or incorrectly, understood. For example, I met a young man with autism who had been severely depressed for a long time. Nobody had noticed anything until then. People with autism are very little aware of this themselves. They do not realize that others often cannot see how they feel. Johan, a young man with autism, had the impression that others paid little attention to him. He felt misunderstood. For example, he had often been hungry, but nobody had given him anything to eat. During a conversation with a counselor, it came to light that Johan thought others could see his hunger. It was a real 'Eureka' experience for Johan to hear that others cannot perceive his hunger unless he communicates that feeling. Johan mistakenly thought that others could see his hunger. Johan does express his feelings, but does not communicate them, and certainly not in a way that others can understand.

limitations in high and normally gifted individuals

bldn p 52 :

The own word choice of people with ASD is generally less fluent and flexible: words or phrases can be repeated, and there is difficulty switching to subsequent words. Unusual, literal, and idiosyncratic word use also occurs.

bldn p 51-52 :

Individuals with ASD also have difficulty understanding the changing meanings of words in changing contexts: they often persevere with their first impression and understand language very literally. Referential words, where the meaning varies in time, space, or person (such as 'tomorrow', 'under', and 'I'), are often problematic. Jokes, expressions, and sayings are not spontaneously understood correctly and must therefore be learned. … However, it is mainly

the extralinguistic and pragmatic aspects of communication that are impaired … . People with ASD lack the skills to understand and use language in a social context. There are serious problems with turn-taking and reciprocity in conversations with others. Individuals with ASD find it difficult to flexibly adapt the content and form of their communication to their conversation partner or the context: they can take unexpected and unclear turns in a conversation, and their story is often associative and fragmentary. When children with ASD are invited to tell a story, it is usually very poor (short and simple) and not very coherent for the listener because they mention fewer causal explanations that explain the relationship between the different events. Individuals with ASD can get stuck on themes related to their specific interests, and switching to other conversation topics or partners is often difficult. They have difficulty assessing the information needs of the listener and therefore often provide too little background information to understand their story well. The discourse of gifted individuals with ASD can be very long-winded and elaborate and come across as very pedantic. There are also serious problems with using and understanding non-verbal communication. Even gifted people with ASD seem to be blind to the significance of the non-verbal aspects of communication. They pay too little attention to visual cues and non-verbal indications that play a role in successful communication and social interaction. People with autism have difficulty understanding facial expressions, 'the language of the eyes', and gestures. They primarily have problems with the implicit aspects of communication, less with the explicit: they do not so much have difficulty with what is said, but especially with what is not said.

…!? p 64:

Communication is very demanding for people with autism, and at the same time, they are overwhelmed by a multitude of information from both 'within', from themselves – i.e., from their (sometimes faltering, and always very randomly associating) memory, and from their emotions (which often come across as very intense, and difficult to control, or even just to interpret) – and from 'without' – i.e., the facial expressions, gestures, voice sounds, and other signals from others, the feedback and the reaction of the other to their own verbal and non-verbal signals, etc.

…!? 105

Normally gifted people with autism are usually fluent speakers. The technical aspects of language, such as vocabulary and grammar, are usually normally developed. They have an extensive vocabulary, and their sentence constructions are correct. Unlike people with autism and an intellectual disability, it is not so much their language development that is impaired, but their communication. You need language to communicate, but communication is much more than language. If we judge normally gifted people with autism solely on their language, then nothing seems to be wrong. But that is a gross overestimation. Their communication is indeed impaired. For example, the urge to communicate is often limited. There is insufficient communicative disposition. People with autism, for example, signal too little or do not communicate when necessary, e.g., when there is a problem. It is good to distinguish between the urge to speak and the urge to communicate. They often talk more than they 'communicate'. The distinction between communication and talking is sharpest in the normally gifted. There is a difference between language and language use. We need to distinguish between 'saying something' and 'saying something to someone'. The latter includes a social aspect because real communication is always communication between

people. And that is a craft, rather than a technique. It is mainly the social aspects of communication that pose great difficulties even for normally gifted people with autism. They have more difficulty with the 'art' or 'pragmatics' of communication than with its 'technique'. The pragmatic aspects of communication have to do with the social use of language. The ability to convey a message appropriately and efficiently to others and the ability to understand someone else's message as it is intended. People with autism have difficulty with the changing roles of sender and receiver, with turn-taking in conversations. Thus, it happens that people with autism do not respond to a question or remark. This sometimes gives the impression that they are not interested, but that is not the case.

bldn 124

Despite the positive impression that the language of gifted people with ASD gives – at least at first hearing – there are still a number of specific shortcomings and deviations. For example, the word choice of gifted people with autism is less fluent and flexible: they repeat words or parts of sentences, have difficulty switching to the next word. The conversations of gifted individuals with autism are often superficial, repetitive, and not very concrete in content (they 'theorize' a lot). They take unexpected and unclear turns in a conversation, and due to their associative thinking, there is often little logical line in their story.

…!? 107-111

Gifted people with autism find all these organizational aspects of communication very difficult. The more people involved in a conversation, the more this becomes noticeable. In a conversation with only one conversation partner, some manage quite well, but group conversations are very difficult for most. They find it difficult, for example, to control pauses and interruptions and do not know very well when and how to join a conversation that is already ongoing between people. As a result, people with autism and normal intelligence are sometimes perceived as disruptive by their environment. Parents may feel that their son or daughter disturbs them at the most inconvenient moments with seemingly unimportant information or all sorts of trivialities. This can make them seem egocentric. Others, then, rarely speak. A group conversation, as it were, passes them by. As far as they have images or can fall back on scripts or learned sentences, normally gifted people with autism can express a lot. It becomes more difficult for them if they cannot resort to these things. Many gifted people with autism testify that they often find it terribly difficult to find words for the expression of, especially, their personal experiences and feelings. People with autism and normal intelligence have difficulty telling a 'real story' or reporting on their experiences. This is due to their problems understanding events in their context. Because they often do not see the whole picture, but rather focus on concrete details, they often jump from one thing to another, omit (for us) important parts of their story, or get stuck on what for others is an unimportant detail. It happens that someone with autism starts a sentence, then breaks it off to talk about a related topic, and then restarts the first sentence. Due to their associative thinking, there is often little logical line in their story. Without external guidance, they can continuously associate new details with others in their story and thus get further and further away from the main line of the story. They have difficulty selecting what is more and what is less important and therefore sometimes tell too much, sometimes too little, or the wrong things. Due to their overselectivity, people with autism sometimes focus their attention on something different from what the conversation partner expects or considers important. Switching attention to a new conversation topic or to new conversation partners is also not

so self-evident for them. Example: In a conversation, they can suddenly continue talking about a topic that was closed some time ago. They, as it were, get stuck on the first topic of the conversation and then ask a question about it, or add something, while you are already talking about something completely different. All this is related to the typical problem of overselectivity, which is the result of a lack of central coherence. People with autism have problems overseeing the whole, they lack the skill to choose the important or relevant stimuli from all stimuli and to take context data into account. It also often happens that they get lost in one detail of a conversation. Not only what you say, but especially how. A very important part of the social, pragmatic aspect of communication is the way you communicate. The verbal part of communication conveys the content of the communication, the non-verbal part ensures whether something comes across. The non-verbal aspects of speech support the message (or not). Important elements include: physical proximity, body posture, gestures, facial expression, hand movements, gaze, voice intonation… From their typical way of thinking, normally gifted people with autism are more focused on facts, objective and fixed data, knowledge, enumerations, the pure content. If they focus on anything in communication, it is more on the content than the form, more on what they say than how they say it. They are more concerned, for example, with the completeness of their list of stops during their train journey, than whether their story about their trip to the seaside comes across and whether they are not boring their listener. It is not so much the words that normally gifted people with autism have difficulties with. They are able to store an immense dictionary with their good memory. The difficulty lies in what you can or should do with those words, when you use them. They can tell you a trivial fact and something very emotional in the exact same 'newsreader' tone. But also the other way around: something that for most of us is nothing more than an ordinary daily frustration is told with so much fuss that listeners easily overestimate the event. A question does not always sound like a question, a happy remark not always like a happy remark. The language use of normally gifted people with autism is often very formal and pedantic. It sometimes resembles the stiff language of legal texts or notarial deeds. Children with autism often speak too maturely. The form of the language often comes across as unnatural or strange. Normally gifted people with autism not only have difficulty with the use, but also and especially with the understanding of the non-verbal aspects of communication. And that often says much more than the words themselves. For example, people's eyes often tell much more than what those same people say. Gifted adults with autism barely understand the language of the eyes. Words and sentences do not always have a fixed meaning. To understand them, a dictionary is not enough. Gifted people with autism usually only know the dictionary definitions, but lack the talent to discover changes in meanings based on the way we pronounce words and sentences. It is the subtle signals of those non-verbal aspects of language that intuitively enable people without autism to deal flexibly with meanings. Because gifted people with autism primarily have difficulty with these subtle non-verbal signals, they often miss the nuances in messages. We convey these nuances, for example, through our intonation. Depending on the word on which I place the accent, the following sentence will have a very different meaning: 'I don't want to do that' (I don't want to do that, but my sister does. I don't want to do that, but something else. I don't want to do that, so you should never ask me again…). They lack the flexibility and speed that is assumed to understand a message. Communication is a process that proceeds terribly quickly. It is somewhat strange if our conversation partner only reacts to our message after a few minutes or even hours. We expect an immediate reaction. That speed is sometimes too high for people with autism, and then they do not react, or only much later. Or they camouflage and compensate with an

answer that is usually appreciated by the other: 'Yes'. A mother tells: 'When strangers speak to Jos, he usually doesn't answer or answers with a vague 'yes'. He hears that he is being asked a question, but usually he doesn't know what people are asking. The question comes too unexpectedly for him, and the other person's voice volume and word choice are unfamiliar to him. In the shop, they asked him if he wanted a slice of meat, and he answered 'yes'. When they wanted to give him the slice, he just stood there. He didn't know what to do with it and didn't even want to taste it.' Fluent communication presupposes simultaneously handling, 'monitoring', and controlling all aspects of communication: listener's attention, handling conversation rules, communication form (verbal: word choice; and non-verbal: body language, facial expressions, tone, volume, etc.), timing, content of communication… Due to their overselectivity problem, they focus on only one aspect, usually the – often technical – content. The language use of intelligent people with autism gives the impression that communication for them is more a means of exchanging objective information than a means of shaping and nurturing personal relationships. Normally gifted people with autism have much more difficulty with the non-verbal than with the verbal aspects of language. Knowing what you say. Through language, we gain access to someone's thinking. And we ourselves also use language to express our ideas. The language of normally gifted people with autism is therefore like a mirror of their thinking. Typically for normally gifted people with autism is that they often use words, expressions, sentences, without fully grasping their meaning. Much more than we suspect, their language is echolalic. Their language use then testifies to a good memory and associative thinking (they link certain expressions to certain situations), but it is based too little on a process of meaning-making. Normally gifted people with autism are therefore very easily overestimated in their understanding of spoken language.

Sometimes they also cannot spontaneously organize communication. There are children with autism who can perfectly name all food items on request: What is this? 'Choco' And this here? 'Milk' And that there? 'Sandwiches'. But despite the fact that they know the words, they do not succeed in spontaneously using those words in the function of their need. And so they ask for nothing at the table. As a parent or caregiver, you first have to ask the question yourself: 'And what would you like?' before they make their need or choice known. Even regarding the function 'asking for', which is a very important function because it ensures that others help us meet our needs, we see that people with autism do not use it spontaneously enough. It seems as if some people with autism do not sufficiently discover the power of communication. We must distinguish between the spontaneous use of functions and the use 'on request'. For example, many parents know that their son or daughter with autism will rarely or never spontaneously tell them anything from school, but that they have to ask for that information. What we see is that communicating is apparently more difficult for them and requires more energy than solving a problem themselves. This even happens with normally gifted people with autism, and they usually have a large vocabulary and abstract language forms at their disposal. During a course for gifted young people with autism, it is striking how some find it easier to get a bottle of water from the kitchen than to ask for one at another table. Or they go around the table to get the platter of sandwich fillings from the other end instead of asking for it.

…!? 41

A person with autism has too few varied communication possibilities to convey the same message in different ways to different people; he is not able to adapt the 'language' of the message to the other person; if he is not understood, he will rather repeat the message several times in the same way than try different ways. One of the consequences of this is that often only familiar people, such as parents, can understand the child. It happens that a person with autism who receives a message does not realize that he can or should give a reaction. It is not self-evident that a person with autism will understand and experience communication as communication. For example, you ask a child: 'Where is the ball?' The child looks at the ball but does not point to it. It is clear that we cannot really call this reaction (only looking at the ball) communicative.

pedantic, formal, stiff, wooden, awkward

…!? 106

Gifted people with autism often have a limited range of communication styles. Whether they are talking to a lawyer or the greengrocer, their style is often identical. Some, for example, are very formal, even in informal situations. There are also those who do adapt their style, but it then feels artificial, because it is a literal imitation of the behavior of others. It doesn't come across as genuine, but feels impersonal or even clumsy.

…!? 110

The language use of normally gifted people with autism is often very formal and pedantic. It sometimes resembles the stiff language of legal texts or notarial deeds. Children with autism often speak too maturely. The form of the language often comes across as unnatural or strange.

'straightforward' / clarity / unambiguity / literalness / unequivocalness

…!? 114-115-116

Avoid verbal overload. Be especially clear. Use shorter sentences if you notice that someone with autism misunderstands you incompletely or incorrectly. The misunderstanding stems from the fact that he or she has difficulties understanding the essence of your message and extracting the important information. It is a great help if you then limit your communication to the essentials. Explaining more and more only increases confusion. The person with autism has to filter and process even more information. Good communication for people with autism is primarily: short, clear, concise. But also, above all, friendly and clear. Communicate concretely and explicitly. People with autism have difficulty with words that refer to abstract, vague, and 'open' concepts. Any communication with an 'open end' (where multiple meanings can be filled in) can confuse them or put them on the wrong track. It makes the world very unpredictable if you don't know which concrete meaning to fill into such an open or abstract concept. Even gifted people with autism have difficulty with this. Gifted people with autism can understand the words, but often miss the unspoken intention behind the words. When a teacher told a child with autism who wrote very sloppily to write 'legibly', the boy replied: 'But I am writing legibly!'. And he was literally right, because he meant by legible that he himself could read it... but he did not understand that the intention was that everyone

should be able to read his writing and not just himself... It is better not to assume that something is self-evident in communication with a gifted person with autism. When a child with autism was told that he was going swimming, he panicked terribly and started crying. Although he loved swimming, he did not want to go. Afterwards, it turned out why. They had not literally said that he would also return home after swimming... Avoid asking vague questions. Precisely because they have difficulty with 'open endings' and grasping the intentions behind words, open and vague questions are very difficult for people with autism. Or they misunderstand them. If you ask someone with autism 'Can you help me set the table?', they might answer 'yes', but simply continue doing what they were busy with. If you take the question literally, they are only being asked if they *can* help. And if they can, then the answer at this literal level is also a good answer: 'Yes, I can do that'. The message behind the question is not understood. And that message is not a question (about what someone can do), but an instruction (to help). When communicating with people with autism, it is best to ask the question behind the question immediately. In the example, it is therefore better to give an instruction than to ask a question. If you want a child with autism to tidy up, it is better not to say 'Do you want to tidy up now?', but to clearly give the instruction to tidy up. Also avoid open questions like 'Why did you do that?'. Closed questions are preferred because they immediately indicate what kind of answer you expect. So, do say: 'I saw you throw your book down when I asked you to play a game with your younger brother. Were you angry?'. And then: 'Tell me why you were angry. Did you not feel like stopping reading, or would you rather play alone?'. Using and understanding language literally. Until you are sure that figurative expressions are understood, it is best to avoid:

- Figurative language (e.g., Hurry up! Open your mind. Explode! Get caught...)
- Words with double meanings (e.g., Take the 'leaf'/'sheet')
- Sarcasm (e.g., saying 'beautiful!' after someone made a big mistake)
- Pet names, nicknames, and 'cute' names (e.g., Buddy, know-it-all...) Because figurative language and proverbs are an essential part of daily communication, it is unavoidable that people with autism will be confronted with them. It is therefore necessary to teach children and young people with autism the meaning of expressions; most of them, by the way, find this very enjoyable. Facial expressions and other social cues often do not work. Most people with autism have problems understanding facial expressions and body language. They pick up too few of the messages contained in them. Frowning, sighing, looking angry, raising one's voice, a smile… the meaning behind this body language often escapes them. Or they misunderstand this language. E.g.: A gifted young adult with autism always thinks that someone who speaks loudly is angry with him, because he associates anger with a loud voice; Simple hints and winks usually do not work; Expressions like: 'Hey!', 'Come on…', 'Well now!', 'Look at that!', 'Well, well, well', actually say nothing…

slow

…!? 116

Adjust the speed of communication. It is important to give people with autism sufficient time to process information. Even normally gifted people with autism are 'slow processors'. They process information piece by piece: serially and not in parallel. We should take this style of

information processing into account. Speak slowly, do not give too much information at once, preferably only one piece at a time, use only the necessary and essential words (be sparing with words), and give them enough time to respond.

turn-taking

One of the classic deficits in communication among high and normally gifted individuals is the lack of turn-taking. People with autism have difficulty with perspective-taking (seeing things from another's point of view – and certainly with double or second-order perspective-taking: seeing how the other person imagines your perspective) and therefore it is difficult for people with autism to converse. They often and/or primarily engage in monologues, without listening to the other person or giving the other person a chance to contribute to the conversation. They cannot speak and listen at the same time (or rather: it costs them a lot of effort). This is not a matter of 'not wanting to', but of 'not being able to'. The solution to this problem is mainly to adapt our way of conversing to the person with autism. Communicate more slowly, give the person with autism time, both to listen and to speak; communicate 'differently': allow the person with autism to make long digressions to finish their 'reasoning', but ensure and pay attention to always returning to the main line of the conversation – do not forget the main line: that is an important supportive function for the caregiver: to help the patient repeatedly find the main line of the conversation, even after long digressions by the same patient. Communicate 'differently' (with more convoluted thoughts etcetera, but at the same time paying more attention that the main line of the conversation is not forgotten) and communicate 'slower' (especially with a lot of time to listen and speak, and especially letting the conversation turns, the changes of speaking or listening role, the roles of listening and/or speaking alternate much slower, and as little as possible concurrently: one is either a listener or a speaker, and one gives time to speak each time – even if that takes a long time).

visual

…!? 127

People with autism often have good abilities in visual perception, 'seeing'. And this is in stark contrast to their abilities in other areas (e.g., 'hearing'). Therefore, in our communication with them, we will work with visual elements as much as possible. Daily schedules, task analyses, written agendas, written agreements, plans… Visible things are more concrete and place less demand on the imaginative capacity of the person with autism (one of the main characteristics with which the person with autism has problems). Moreover, tangible, visual things are less fleeting than, for example, spoken words: a spoken word is 'gone' once it is uttered, and you can only retrieve it from your memory. Whereas tangible, visible things are still not gone, and can be consulted again and again, after you have read them the first time. Tangible, concrete, and visual things (texts, diagrams, task analyses, letters, forms, lists, overviews, summaries, agendas…) are the best way to communicate with people with autism.

word-finding difficulties

written

a&e 124

Even gifted people with autism have difficulty communicating verbally. Moreover, they have the greatest difficulty organizing their own thoughts and putting them into perspective. To address both problems somewhat, it is important to communicate with them as visually (or: in writing) as possible. Writing is slower, and you get visual feedback from it, and you don't have to simultaneously pay attention to the reactions of others with whom you are communicating. Experience shows that people with autism communicate better on paper than in a conversation.

communication need

of conversation partner

…!? 106

communication styles

imitating communication style of television programs

…!? 107

limited range of communication styles

…!? 41

A person with autism has too few varied communication possibilities to convey the same message in different ways to different people; he is not able to adapt the 'language' of the message to the other person; if he is not understood, he will rather repeat the message several times in the same way than try different ways. One of the consequences of this is that often only familiar people, such as parents, can understand the child.

…!? 106-107

They adapt their communication style too little to others. Worse still, they often impose a certain 'reception pattern' on others, e.g., they constantly steer the conversation back to their favorite topic or theme. Young children do not adapt their language use to the receiver. For example, they are not polite in a context where that is required. It also happens that they do not know how to adjust their voice volume to the situation and they then speak either too loudly or too softly depending on the context. Just like many younger children, a number of children, young people, and adults with autism continue to formulate their thoughts aloud, even in situations where this can be disruptive, such as in class. They especially have difficulty flexibly adapting their style of communication to the context. People without autism do this intuitively. You talk differently at home than during a job interview. You speak

differently in a pub than in an important meeting. In a conversation with a neighbor, you use a different style than in a conversation with a complete stranger. Gifted people with autism often have a limited range of communication styles. Whether they are talking to a lawyer or the greengrocer, their style is often identical. Some, for example, are very formal, even in informal situations. There are also those who do adapt their style, but it then feels artificial, because it is a literal imitation of the behavior of others. It doesn't come across as genuine, but feels impersonal or even clumsy. Young children often imitate a communication style from television programs. It is not uncommon for a child with autism to speak 'Walt Disney' Dutch, as in cartoons. From communicating to conversing. Talking 'to' someone is very different from talking 'with' someone. The latter requires more skills than just the linguistic ones. To have a real conversation with other people, you also need to know 'how' to say something.

…!? 51-53

Communication in people with autism is primarily different. Sometimes we are misled because someone with autism does not sufficiently shape their communication so that the function is not clear. The intention or function of a particular communication is not immediately clear from the words used, but rather from the way they are communicated. It is mainly so-called paralinguistic aspects of language that make the function of communication clear. Paralinguistic aspects are the non-linguistic or naast-linguistic aspects of language and include, among other things, intonation, sentence melody, voice volume, etc. We recognize a question by the intonation, even without a questioning sentence structure or interrogative pronoun. Take, for example, the following sentence: Tuscany is beautiful. If you read that sentence aloud and at the end, at the word 'beautiful', speak higher than at the beginning, then the function of the sentence changes. You are no longer giving information about Tuscany but asking a question about Tuscany, specifically whether it is beautiful or not. Based on intonation and sentence melody, we can determine whether something is a statement or a question. Written language has no paralinguistic aspects unless we invent special codes and signs to replace them, such as question marks and exclamation marks. These allow us to give one and the same sentence different functions: Tuscany is beautiful. Tuscany is beautiful? Tuscany is beautiful!!!) Not only intonation or sentence melody expresses the intention of the communication, but the entire apparatus of non-verbal language or body language. The words say something about the content of the communication, the body (gestures, eyes, facial expression, voice volume) says much more about the intention of the communication. People with autism have more difficulty with non-technical aspects of language than with technical ones. In gifted, speaking people with autism, we often see that their non-verbal abilities are much less developed than their verbal ones. They have the words, but do not know how to convey them effectively. Precisely because of their problems with the non-verbal aspects of communication, their communication does not always come across as intended, and confusion arises about the functions. An example: a boy with autism said several times every evening: 'It's dark outside, Dad!'. The father confirmed this each time: 'Yes son, it's dark outside'. The boy asked this repeatedly until he was instructed by his father to lower the shutters. After a while, the father understood why his son repeated 'It's dark outside, Dad!' so often. The boy was not making an observation at all, but was asking permission to lower the shutters. However, this was not clear from the way the boy communicated. People with autism are often misunderstood because they do not sufficiently succeed in conveying their message in a way that makes it clear why that message is being sent. A question does not always sound like a question, and

sometimes a question is not a question at all; a sad event is told with the same facial expression as an insignificant fact; a small incident is worded as if it were a world drama; a request for permission sounds like a command… Communication is a complicated process where many things need to be organized: the roles of sender and receiver, choosing, combining, and flexibly adapting the appropriate forms, making the function of communication clear… Communication is therefore much more than just a matter of the right words.

bldn 48-50

compensating

a&e 61

…!? 110-112

…!? 127

We often see that people with autism have little trouble functioning well in familiar situations and especially familiar routines. Because they have difficulty with change, they often compensate by learning routines. However, when an unexpected change occurs, we see that they become unbalanced and confused, and can no longer function at the same (seemingly) high level. They then need extra support and adapted communication.

concentration problems

…!? 62

Difficulty concentrating; easily distracted. When you speak to someone with autism, the sounds of spoken language are just one aspect of the many details in the environment. People with autism find it difficult to filter the many stimuli they perceive and to pick out the most important ones. A child with autism can be so engrossed by the reflection of light in the teacher's glasses that he does not hear what the teacher is saying. If you want to be understood by someone with autism, you must first ensure that your message is well received. Concretely, this means that all confusing and distracting environmental factors are eliminated as much as possible. So, do not try to convey something to a child from a distance in a noisy room. If necessary, have the child stop what they are doing so their concentration can go to the communication. Ensure that the child can clearly hear you, and especially see you. People with autism focus more on the visual and have more difficulty with the auditory.

a&e 130

Finally, a few general tips for conversations with people with autism. People with autism are quickly subject to information and/or stimulus overload. They process (especially verbal) information much slower than we do, see the distinction between main points and side issues much less quickly, and therefore have to process many more details. Much faster than other people, their heads are full and they no longer absorb anything. Conversations with someone with autism should therefore not be too tiring, should not demand too much

concentration for too long. The person must be supported by clarification and elucidation, and it may take longer per topic of conversation before the person with ASD has received sufficient clarification and all their questions have been answered. Ideally, a multitude of topics should not be discussed with the person all at once. Depending on the developmental age and mental capacities of the person with autism, it is better to slow down a bit, discuss the topics one by one at a slower pace, possibly spread over several conversations or with a few breaks in between. For some people with autism, you as a conversation partner are also a source of information overload and confusion. It happens that people with autism cannot concentrate on the content of the conversation because they are distracted or even overwhelmed by the movements you make, your eye contact, the notes you take. A man with autism told me that he cannot have a conversation with people who are wearing a striped shirt or sweater. The stripes literally dance before his eyes, and that stimulus is so intrusive and confusing that he can no longer pay any attention to what is being said. Conversations are easier for some people with autism if you are in a position that is more comfortable for them, a position where you yourself are less of a source of distraction, or a position where your voice is more audible or comes across more clearly to the person with autism. Conversations with people with autism should also proceed in a structured manner. There must be clear guidance and a clear line, preferably indicated by a pre-prepared agenda. Conversations with people with autism are best directive but in a positive atmosphere.

concrete

see: concretizing

vs. abstract

visual

…!? 63

People with autism have problems with what is not directly sensorily perceptible. Therefore, they often have difficulty with words. It is often more difficult for a person with autism to use words than to 'act out' what he/she means. E.g. A child with autism, instead of saying 'I want to go outside', will simply stand at the door and wait there. A child who wants to drink will take the caregiver's hand and pull them towards the refrigerator. A normally gifted person with autism will not say that the TV is too loud, but will start speaking very loudly themselves and disturb others. But even with normally speaking people with autism, it may be necessary to give them the chance to communicate visually. (Theatrical) gestures, written text, drawn diagrams, exaggerated facial expressions or other … they sometimes *need* these to be able to express themselves clearly enough and to convey clearly enough what exactly they want to communicate.

a&e 127

It is better to try to convince someone with autism with images than with words: the strange associations they make, the different meanings they assign, sometimes even the delusions they have, are best corrected in the most concrete and visual way possible.

concretizing

see: abstract, concrete

…!? 59-61

Use language that has a concrete picture associated with it: speak in images. Figurative language and proverbs are described as imagery. Now there are two types of imagery. In the first type, a thought or concept is expressed indirectly by means of an image. Indirect because the image is not directly applicable to the concrete situation being discussed but refers to a similar situation. The image of one situation is transferred and applied to another. Such an image is called a metaphor (metaphor is Greek for: figurative, something that is transferred). Our language is full of metaphors:

- a camel is the ship of the desert
- the evening falls
- that woman dryly states that her husband is an ice-cold type
- death comes like a thief in the night Due to their literal way of thinking, people with autism are quickly confused by such language. Since the images are transferred from one reality to another, they should not be understood realistically or literally. A camel is, of course, not really a ship, the mouth with which the woman complains about her husband is just as moist as with other statements, and her husband (we hope for him) probably has a normal body temperature, death is not a person, so not a thief either. Children and young people with autism are misled by such statements because they live in only one reality: *the* reality. They therefore understand hyperrealistically. And so a boy dared not go outside for days after tea time, after he had been urged to put his bicycle inside, because ‘the night was going to fall’. There is also a second type of imagery. In this, images are used that are not transferred from another reality but that relate to the concrete situation itself. Since people with autism think in images (‘Thinking in Pictures’ is even the title of a book by Temple Grandin, about autism), we help them understand our communication if we do precisely that: speak in IMAGES. So we do not say: ‘Now you must work’. Because there is no concrete image that belongs to working. But we say: ‘Now you must read this text in silence’. Because you concretely say what you mean, and also evoke a concrete image of what is expected of the person with autism. This way we limit the chances that the person with autism does not understand what is expected of him/her; or that he/she understands something different from what you mean. You can think of hundreds of images for working: cleaning, writing, digging, hammering, washing dishes, ironing, making beds, driving a truck, sawing… We do not say: ‘Get ready to leave’. We say: ‘Put on your coat’ (concrete image). We do not say: ‘Tidy up’. We say: ‘Put your Duplo in the box’ (concrete image). We avoid words or expressions that can be filled in in multiple ways. Better one concrete task. Tidying up, getting ready, and working are not connected to a concrete picture but are collective words and abstractions – categorical words – that can be filled in in more than one way. ‘Reading in silence’, ‘putting the Duplo in the box’, and ‘putting on your coat’ are concrete images that you can conjure up in your head. These expressions unequivocally belong to the images and are not abstract. They belong to a concrete image and do not refer to a multitude of many different activities and/or interpretations and corresponding images that can be filled in (if the person with

autism is even capable of that). A person with autism has difficulty generating images (visualizing, imagining). Therefore, it is better to immediately place one concrete image in their head (via a sentence/statement that ‘leaves little to the imagination’ and evokes one precise image as concretely and unambiguously as possible).

…!? 114

Communicate concretely and explicitly. People with autism have difficulty with words that refer to abstract, vague, and 'open' concepts. Any communication with an 'open end' (where multiple meanings can be filled in) can confuse them or put them on the wrong track. It makes the world very unpredictable if you don't know which concrete meaning to fill into such an open or abstract concept. Even gifted people with autism have difficulty with this. Gifted people with autism can understand the words, but often miss the unspoken intention behind the words. When a teacher told a child with autism who wrote very sloppily to write 'legibly', the boy replied: 'But I am writing legibly!'. And he was literally right, because he meant by legible that he himself could read it... but he did not understand that the intention was that everyone should be able to read his writing and not just himself... It is better not to assume that something is self-evident in communication with a gifted person with autism. When a child with autism was told that he was going swimming, he panicked terribly and started crying. Although he loved swimming, he did not want to go. Afterwards, it turned out why. They had not literally said that he would also return home after swimming... Avoid asking vague questions. Precisely because they have difficulty with 'open endings' and grasping the intentions behind words, open and vague questions are very difficult for people with autism. Or they misunderstand them. If you ask someone with autism 'Can you help me set the table?', they might answer 'yes', but simply continue doing what they were busy with. If you take the question literally, they are only being asked if they *can* help. And if they can, then the answer at this literal level is also a good answer: 'Yes, I can do that'. The message behind the question is not understood. And that message is not a question (about what someone can do), but an instruction (to help). When communicating with people with autism, it is best to ask the question behind the question immediately. In the example, it is therefore better to give an instruction than to ask a question. If you want a child with autism to tidy up, it is better not to say 'Do you want to tidy up now?', but to clearly give the instruction to tidy up.

context blindness

context insensitivity

conversations

conducting

…!? 62

Difficulty concentrating; easily distracted. When you speak to someone with autism, the sounds of spoken language are just one aspect of the many details in the environment. People with autism find it difficult to filter the many stimuli they perceive and to pick out the

most important ones. A child with autism can be so engrossed by the reflection of light in the teacher's glasses that he does not hear what the teacher is saying. If you want to be understood by someone with autism, you must first ensure that your message is well received. Concretely, this means that all confusing and distracting environmental factors are eliminated as much as possible. So, do not try to convey something to a child from a distance in a noisy room. If necessary, have the child stop what they are doing so their concentration can go to the communication. Ensure that the child can clearly hear you, and especially see you. People with autism focus more on the visual and have more difficulty with the auditory.

a&e 128

People with autism have difficulties focusing on what is relevant. Therefore, we must show them what is important and essential. Talking with people with autism about their emotions and their consequences is more showing than talking. Clarifying and offering solutions. Talking with someone with autism – also about feelings – is primarily about clarifying and elucidating. People with autism are often in a muddle with their own feelings. For them, it is an inextricable tangle of impressions. Letting them talk freely about it only makes the tangle more inextricable. We can best help by first and foremost listening to the knots they are struggling with. Very targeted and concrete questions can help with this. Once the knot is found, it comes down to bringing clarity, for example by explaining words and concepts clearly.

a&e 130

Finally, a few general tips for conversations with people with autism. People with autism are quickly subject to information and/or stimulus overload. They process (especially verbal) information much slower than we do, see the distinction between main points and side issues much less quickly, and therefore have to process many more details. Much faster than other people, their heads are full and they no longer absorb anything. Conversations with someone with autism should therefore not be too tiring, should not demand too much concentration for too long. The person must be supported by clarification and elucidation, and it may take longer per topic of conversation before the person with ASD has received sufficient clarification and all their questions have been answered. Ideally, a multitude of topics should not be discussed with the person all at once. Depending on the developmental age and mental capacities of the person with autism, it is better to slow down a bit, discuss the topics one by one at a slower pace, possibly spread over several conversations or with a few breaks in between. For some people with autism, you as a conversation partner are also a source of information overload and confusion. It happens that people with autism cannot concentrate on the content of the conversation because they are distracted or even overwhelmed by the movements you make, your eye contact, the notes you take. A man with autism told me that he cannot have a conversation with people who are wearing a striped shirt or sweater. The stripes literally dance before his eyes, and that stimulus is so intrusive and confusing that he can no longer pay any attention to what is being said. Conversations are easier for some people with autism if you are in a position that is more comfortable for them, a position where you yourself are less of a source of distraction, or a position where your voice is more audible or comes across more clearly to the person with autism. Conversations with people with autism should also proceed in a structured manner. There must be clear guidance and a clear line, preferably indicated by a pre-prepared

agenda. Conversations with people with autism are best directive but in a positive atmosphere.

…!? 107-109

From communicating to conversing. Talking 'to' someone is very different from talking 'with' someone. The latter requires more skills than just the linguistic ones needed to communicate. To have a real conversation with other people, you need to be able to organize a lot of things:

- The amount of information: In a conversation, it is important how much information you provide. You should not say too much, but also not too little.
- The quality of that information: What you talk about must also be relevant to the listener and to the topic of conversation. In a conversation about someone's health problems, the latest model of the Ford Focus is not very relevant.
- The clarity of the information: The listener must also be able to understand and place the information provided. Starting a conversation about Jeanne's dishonesty will be very confusing and incomprehensible to someone who does not know who Jeanne is and what relationship she has with the person talking about her. Gifted people with autism find all these organizational aspects of communication very difficult. The more people involved in a conversation, the more this becomes noticeable. In a conversation with only one conversation partner, some manage quite well, but group conversations are very difficult for most. They find it difficult, for example, to control pauses and interruptions and do not know very well when and how to join a conversation that is already ongoing between people. As a result, people with autism and normal intelligence are sometimes perceived as disruptive by their environment. Parents may feel that their son or daughter disturbs them at the most inconvenient moments with seemingly unimportant information or all sorts of trivialities. This can make them seem egocentric. Others, then, rarely speak. A group conversation, as it were, passes them by. As far as they have images or can fall back on scripts or learned sentences, normally gifted people with autism can express a lot. It becomes more difficult for them if they cannot resort to these things. Many gifted people with autism testify that they often find it terribly difficult to find words for the expression of, especially, their personal experiences and feelings. People with autism and normal intelligence have difficulty telling a 'real story' or reporting on their experiences. This is due to their problems understanding events in their context. Because they often do not see the whole picture, but rather focus on concrete details, they often jump from one thing to another, omit (for us) important parts of their story, or get stuck on what for others is an unimportant detail. It happens that someone with autism starts a sentence, then breaks it off to talk about a related topic, and then restarts the first sentence. Due to their associative thinking, there is often little logical line in their story. Without external guidance, they can continuously associate new details with others in their story and thus get further and further away from the main line of the story. They have difficulty selecting what is more and what is less important and therefore sometimes tell too much, sometimes too little, or the wrong things. Due to their overselectivity, people with autism sometimes focus their attention on something different from what the conversation partner expects or considers important. Switching attention to a new conversation topic or to new conversation partners is also not so self-evident for them. Example: In a conversation, they can suddenly

continue talking about a topic that was closed some time ago. They, as it were, get stuck on the first topic of the conversation and then ask a question about it, or add something, while you are already talking about something completely different. All this is related to the typical problem of overselectivity, which is the result of a lack of central coherence. People with autism have problems overseeing the whole, they lack the skill to choose the important or relevant stimuli from all stimuli and to take context data into account. It also often happens that they get lost in one detail of a conversation.

following

…!? 108

'straightforward' / clarity / unambiguity / literalness / unequivocalness

with multiple people

a&e 130

correcting

a&e 127

It is better to try to convince someone with autism with images than with words: the strange associations they make, the different meanings they assign, sometimes even the delusions they have, are best corrected in the most concrete and visual way possible.

dealing with autism as a caregiver / provider / therapist

a&e 107-109

Some practical tips

- People with autism already have it difficult enough with their own feelings. Therefore, do not overwhelm them with your own emotional expressions when they are upset or reacting emotionally. Stay calm and composed, however difficult that may be. Acting emotionally yourself only makes it more complicated for them. Do not expect someone with autism to (spontaneously) take into account other people's feelings. Do not expect too much effect from statements like: "Do this now to please me." Or: "If you do that, then I will be unhappy or sad." People with autism understand too little of the feelings of others to be able to take them into account. They are too little aware of the relationship between their own behavior and the feelings of others.
- Do not project your own experiential and emotional world onto that of someone with autism. You can empathize with others, someone with autism cannot. You understand situations differently than someone with autism, because you can give meaning to those situations and someone with autism little or not at all. People with autism live in a different world.

- Therefore, also be careful with interpreting so-called emotional experiences in people with autism. It is not because you experience a situation in a certain way, that someone with autism feels the same in the same situation. For example, do not expect someone with autism to also be sad in situations where other people are sad. Keep in mind that people with autism can be over- or under-sensitive to certain stimuli and that the emotional meaning of many situations escapes them because they do not understand them. Accept their different experience and certainly do not prescribe feelings.
- Be careful with emotionally charged statements from people with autism. If someone with autism, for example, says they are depressed, that is not necessarily so. People with autism have difficulty adequately verbalizing their feelings. They often imitate statements from others, echolalically, without it being an appropriate representation of their feeling at that moment.
- People with autism do not communicate their feelings so spontaneously. And if they do communicate, they can tune the wavelength too little to the receiver. Thus, someone can be very depressed while that is not perceptible to anyone. If you want someone with autism to feel good, first and foremost ensure an adapted and protected environment, ensure predictability, adjust your demands and do not set impossible demands, use rewards rather than punishments (punishments often do not help anyway). Teach someone with autism functional communication skills (such as asking for something, refusing something), so that frustrations are minimized, rather than teaching them to express their frustrations appropriately. An autism-adapted environment is *the* condition for a good feeling, both for people with autism and for parents and caregivers.
- Protect them from emotionally difficult situations. Avoid teaching skills that get them into trouble. Teaching a boy with autism to make contact with a girl is nice, but this opens the door to all sorts of frustrations. A first, fleeting, and superficial contact will still work, but once the relationship with the girl requires more complex skills (such as empathy), the boy will fail and the girl will disengage. Such experiences will lead to great frustrations for the boy: lovesickness, feeling of failure, fear of new contacts, possibly even depression. Teach them to defend themselves and protect themselves, rather than trying to follow others. Or as Temple Grandin herself expresses it: "When I was younger, I had to discover with discouragement that some people have bad intentions. This is something that all people with autism should learn."
- Teach them rather too strict or too general rules that they can apply everywhere, than to expect them to sense the nuances of the world of feelings. The rule 'sometimes people don't see what you feel' presupposes that the person with autism can deduce someone else's ideas about themselves. That is too difficult for most people with autism. Teach them rather: "Nobody sees what you feel, so you must always say it."
- Teach them all sorts of tricks with which they can compensate for their lack of intuition. A boy with autism was often teased at school with his stereotypical conversation topic (a certain TV program). We could teach him the difference between well-intentioned interest and teasingly questioning, but the other children play this game so subtly that he would still realize too late each time that they were already teasing him. Therefore, it is better to advise him never to talk about his favorite TV program for longer than two minutes and to find another child. In this way, he may miss the well-intentioned interest of other children, but he will also never be teased for longer than two minutes.

- Avoid too abstract conversations about their feelings. Even if they can recognize and verbalize their feelings, people with autism often cannot imagine solutions for socio-emotional problems. Also, do not expect that if someone with autism knows what another person feels, they will also immediately know how best to deal with that feeling. Talk rather in terms of situations and (adapted) reactions in situations. Give them concrete and practical scripts for tackling socio-emotional problems. Make socio-emotional concepts concrete and visual and provide them with concrete solutions.

delayed

emotion

a&e 32

People with autism often react emotionally delayed to events. For example, a child with autism may only react upset at home in the evening because of something that happened at school in the morning. The emotion only comes hours, sometimes even days and weeks later.

processing

…!? 110

They lack the flexibility and speed that is assumed to understand a message. Communication is a process that proceeds terribly quickly. It is somewhat strange if our conversation partner only reacts to our message after a few minutes or even hours. We expect an immediate reaction. That speed is sometimes too high for people with autism, and then they do not react, or only much later. Or they camouflage and compensate with an answer that is usually appreciated by the other.

reaction

demanding being / sounding

depression

a&e 120

Depression in people with autism is rarely expressed through verbalizing depressive feelings. When diagnosing depression, targeted observation often provides more information than verbal questioning or self-reporting. So far, little research has been done on treatment options for depression in people with autism. The scarce studies suggest that various psychosocial and pharmaceutical interventions can be used in treatment. Although psychotherapy, especially psychodynamic psychotherapy, has limited value in approaching people with autism, gifted individuals with autism can particularly benefit from it if the psychotherapy is adapted to autism. Several studies promote the use of structured and

directive forms of psychotherapy, primarily involving cognitive behavioral strategies. However, according to autism expert Patricia Howlin, these strategies rarely succeed when applied in isolation, i.e., when not combined with adapted educational and behavioral interventions. Medication is increasingly being used to control behavioral and mood symptoms in autism. Despite its popularity, research on the use of psychotropic drugs in people with autism is still relatively limited. Psychotropic drugs ideally form part of a total package that also includes other treatments, as described above. The most commonly prescribed medications are antidepressants. Selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors, the so-called SSRIs, are increasingly used in cases of autism to control both depression and aggression.

detail-oriented thinking

…!? 109

…!? 112

diagnosis

bldn 118-119

The fact that isolated symptoms of an ASD also occur in other disorders makes differential diagnosis a difficult task. Autistic symptoms must always be viewed in light of the complete triad. If symptoms are disconnected from it, they can easily lead to confusion or incorrect classifications. The differences between autistic behavioral symptoms and the same symptoms, but within a different classification, are often qualitative and require diagnostics that go beyond a purely behavioral description. Hyperactive behavior, obsessive-compulsive behaviors, unusual and disturbed social interactions, for example, also occur in other disorders, but have a different background there. Finally, comorbidity with other disorders also complicates accurate classification, especially in normally gifted and older individuals. Correct classification of autism largely remains dependent on the clinical experience and intuition of the diagnostician in recognizing a certain qualitative behavioral pattern. Reliable classification of autism also requires a considerable investment. To achieve correct classification, it is necessary to extensively question parents or other involved parties regarding the current and past functioning of the person and to take sufficient time to observe extensively in different contexts and situations. For a reliable differential diagnosis, it is important to look at the complete triad of disorders and not limit oneself to an isolated part of it, such as communication. In addition, a thorough developmental history, especially of social development, makes an indispensable contribution to differential diagnosis. The quality of diagnostics can also be improved through closer collaboration with neurological and neuropsychological research. The diagnosis of autism has been limited for too long to a purely behavioral diagnosis. Recent developments in understanding the specific neurocognitive deficits of people with autism need to be translated into diagnostic tools, so that we can also recognize an autistic pattern at a cognitive level. In many cases, the diagnosis also depends on who sees the subject: a speech therapist or linguist will sooner focus on language and perhaps conclude a semantic pragmatic syndrome, a psychologist with an interest in neuropsychology will sooner see indications for Nonverbal Learning

Disorder (NLD), and a psychiatrist may see more in a diagnosis of schizoid personality disorder. The diagnosis of autism should therefore be multidisciplinary. The mentioned difficulties in diagnosing autism occur at different ages and levels of intelligence, but especially in adolescents and adults with normal intelligence. Diagnostic instruments, such as behavioral questionnaires and observation scales, can increase the reliability of a classification. However, most diagnostic instruments for autism are limited in their sensitivity for certain ages or certain subgroups within the autism spectrum. At the moment, there is primarily a lack of instruments that are usable for more gifted and older individuals with a suspected ASD. Moreover, current diagnostic instruments all assess behavior. However, the behavior of people with ASD can vary greatly depending on the context. Behavioral assessment is highly dependent on the situations in which the behavior is assessed or questioned and on the informant used. The variance in information sources is an additional source of unreliability of classifications.

bldn 296

A remarkable finding concerns the difference in assessment between the participants and the parents. The adult individuals with autism with a late diagnosis in the study assess their own social functioning significantly higher than their parents do, while adults with an early autism diagnosis hardly differ from their parents in their assessment. Most adolescents with autism have a rather unrealistic view of their own functioning and shortcomings. The current research indicates that this is particularly the case for individuals with a late diagnosis. Given the finding that more participants with an early diagnosis receive professional help, we can assume that they are more aware of the support they receive in their social functioning. We suspect that participants with a late diagnosis do not notice the extensive help provided by parents or do not perceive it as help. The finding that individuals with a late diagnosis, in particular, rate their functioning higher than their parents or others in their environment do, has important implications for diagnostic practice. Especially in the case of a late diagnosis in adolescents and (young) adults, self-reporting is largely used to gather information about (social) functioning. When questioning a (young) adult with a suspected ASD, the reliability of self-reporting should be viewed with necessary critical sense, and it is advisable to involve at least the parents in the questioning and assessment of social functioning.

'different'

learning

@ 21

People with autism learn in a different way. Skills that 'ordinary' young people discover spontaneously must be taught to them in a targeted manner.

different way of

communicating

expressing

interpreting

listening

a&e 63

a&e 110-111

saying something ('how' you say something)

…!? 52-53

Communication in people with autism is primarily different. Sometimes we are misled because someone with autism does not sufficiently shape their communication so that the function is not clear. The intention or function of a particular communication is not immediately clear from the words used, but rather from the way they are communicated. It is mainly so-called paralinguistic aspects of language that make the function of communication clear. Paralinguistic aspects are the non-linguistic or naast-linguistic aspects of language and include, among other things, intonation, sentence melody, voice volume, etc. We recognize a question by the intonation, even without a questioning sentence structure or interrogative pronoun. Take, for example, the following sentence: Tuscany is beautiful. If you read that sentence aloud and at the end, at the word 'beautiful', speak higher than at the beginning, then the function of the sentence changes. You are no longer giving information about Tuscany but asking a question about Tuscany, specifically whether it is beautiful or not. Based on intonation and sentence melody, we can determine whether something is a statement or a question. Written language has no paralinguistic aspects unless we invent special codes and signs to replace them, such as question marks and exclamation marks. These allow us to give one and the same sentence different functions: Tuscany is beautiful. Tuscany is beautiful? Tuscany is beautiful!!!) Not only intonation or sentence melody expresses the intention of the communication, but the entire apparatus of non-verbal language or body language. The words say something about the content of the communication, the body (gestures, eyes, facial expression, voice volume) says much more about the intention of the communication. People with autism have more difficulty with non-technical aspects of language than with technical ones. In gifted, speaking people with autism, we often see that their non-verbal abilities are much less developed than their verbal ones. They have the words, but do not know how to convey them effectively. Precisely because of their problems with the non-verbal aspects of communication, their communication does not always come across as intended, and confusion arises about the functions. An example: a boy with autism said several times every evening: 'It's dark outside, Dad!'. The father confirmed this each time: 'Yes son, it's dark outside'. The boy asked this repeatedly until he was instructed by his father to lower the shutters. After a while, the father

understood why his son repeated 'It's dark outside, Dad!' so often. The boy was not making an observation at all, but was asking permission to lower the shutters. However, this was not clear from the way the boy communicated. People with autism are often misunderstood because they do not sufficiently succeed in conveying their message in a way that makes it clear why that message is being sent. A question does not always sound like a question, and sometimes a question is not a question at all; a sad event is told with the same facial expression as an insignificant fact; a small incident is worded as if it were a world drama; a request for permission sounds like a command… Communication is a complicated process where many things need to be organized: the roles of sender and receiver, choosing, combining, and flexibly adapting the appropriate forms, making the function of communication clear… Communication is therefore much more than just a matter of the right words. So said is not immediately so done…

…!? 109-110

Not only what you say, but especially how. A very important part of the social, pragmatic aspect of communication is the way you communicate. The verbal part of communication conveys the content of the communication, the non-verbal part ensures whether something comes across. The non-verbal aspects of speech support the message (or not). Important elements include: physical proximity, body posture, gestures, facial expression, hand movements, gaze, voice intonation… From their typical way of thinking, normally gifted people with autism are more focused on facts, objective and fixed data, knowledge, enumerations, the pure content. If they focus on anything in communication, it is more on the content than the form, more on what they say than how they say it. They are more concerned, for example, with the completeness of their list of stops during their train journey, than whether their story about their trip to the seaside comes across and whether they are not boring their listener. It is not so much the words that normally gifted people with autism have difficulties with. They are able to store an immense dictionary with their good memory. The difficulty lies in what you can or should do with those words, when you use them. They can tell you a trivial fact and something very emotional in the exact same 'newsreader' tone. But also the other way around: something that for most of us is nothing more than an ordinary daily frustration is told with so much fuss that listeners easily overestimate the event. A question does not always sound like a question, a happy remark not always like a happy remark. The language use of normally gifted people with autism is often very formal and pedantic. It sometimes resembles the stiff language of legal texts or notarial deeds. Children with autism often speak too maturely. The form of the language often comes across as unnatural or strange. Normally gifted people with autism not only have difficulty with the use, but also and especially with the understanding of the non-verbal aspects of communication. And that often says much more than the words themselves. For example, people's eyes often tell much more than what those same people say. Gifted adults with autism barely understand the language of the eyes. Words and sentences do not always have a fixed meaning. To understand them, a dictionary is not enough. Gifted people with autism usually only know the dictionary definitions, but lack the talent to discover changes in meanings based on the way we pronounce words and sentences. It is the subtle signals of those non-verbal aspects of language that intuitively enable people without autism to deal flexibly with meanings. Because gifted people with autism primarily have difficulty with these subtle non-verbal signals, they often miss the nuances in messages. We convey these nuances, for example, through our intonation. Depending on the word on which I place the accent, the following sentence will have a very different meaning: 'I don't want to do that' (I

don't want to do that, but my sister does. I don't want to do that, but something else. I don't want to do that, so you should never ask me again…).

difficulty with communication

'difficult to interrupt' / 'to cut short'

disorganized development profile

bldn 56

Because an autism spectrum disorder is more a specific deficit than a general one, individuals with ASD often exhibit a disharmonious developmental profile, with specific deficits and specific strengths. A remarkably good skill in a specific area occurs in one out of ten individuals. Examples of such 'peak skills' are often found in the areas of drawing, music, memory for dates, mental arithmetic, and early reading ability.

distance

a&e 29

People with autism have difficulty regulating and modulating. They are 'caught' by the things they experience, also by their own emotions. They have difficulty overseeing the incoming stimuli and placing them in their context. The feeling that overcomes them is absolute. They are overwhelmed, consumed. They are, as it were, blinded by the feeling or the many stimuli: they become blind to the context and the coherence and can relativize less easily. The necessary distance is lacking. The explosive, demanding expression is the result of an 'imperative' emotional explosion within. Also, the social motivation is much lower for them at such moments, because it disappears due to being 'blinded' by the emotion. Therefore, stimulating social motivation at such moments, by being understanding, attentive, and empathetic, is the best way to react to this.

distractibility

'double meaning', ambiguous language use

…!? 60

echolalia

…!? 67-69

Echolalia: stimulate or unlearn? Echolalia is the literal repetition of words or sentences from someone else. The repetition can immediately follow the other person's statement, but also minutes, hours, days, sometimes even months later. A common synonym is parroting. Echolalia occurs in more than 85% of all speaking individuals with autism. It is not always

easy to determine this in someone with autism, especially not in more gifted individuals and certainly not if the echolalia is delayed (if it does not follow immediately, but only much later). You also need to know a person with autism quite well to know whether a statement is echolalic or not. Echolalia was long considered an abnormality, something pathological. It was thought that echolalia had no communicative function or intention. Meanwhile, scientific research has shown the opposite. Echolalia is a strategy used to compensate for difficulties in language acquisition. Echolalia therefore has meaning and can have various functions, for example, to confirm communication, to attract attention, even to ask for something. Although echolalia is a rather unusual, unconventional way of speaking, we should not simply try to unlearn it. It is important to see how understandable the echolalia is to others, whether it has a communicative role, whether it even distracts the person with autism from interactions or activities, whether the echolalic statement has a connection with the context or is simply expressed everywhere… Echolalia is in most cases simply a communication pattern that reflects the typical thinking style of people with autism. In many cases, echolalia is part of the process of language development. Depending on the possibilities, a child will continue to communicate in this way or evolve towards more appropriate and communicative forms of echolalia or even towards normal language use with here and there a fossil of echolalia. This means that we should not unlearn echolalia, but rather stimulate it. We also see that children whose echolalia was recognized in its communicative function, learn to speak better afterwards. Especially if an attempt is also made to replace pure echolalia with more flexible and creative language use. To prevent us from having to adjust echolalically acquired words or sentences to more conventional or understandable forms in children with autism later on, we can ensure that they are presented with the correct form from the outset. Suppose a child who uses echolalia points to the milk. You see that and you ask: 'Milk?' or 'Do you want milk?'. The child will repeat that, also in the interrogative form. If the echolalia acquires the function of asking for milk, then the child will spontaneously say 'Milk?' or 'Do you want milk?' later on. Then we have to transform that into 'Milk!' or 'I want milk'. We can avoid that step by offering the child a good model from the beginning. If the child then points to the milk, we say 'I want milk' or 'Milk'. We 'use' the echolalia, as it were, to elicit and encourage correct speech and intonation.

…!? 111

Knowing what you say. Through language, we gain access to someone's thinking. And we ourselves also use language to express our ideas. The language of normally gifted people with autism is therefore like a mirror of their thinking. Typically for normally gifted people with autism is that they often use words, expressions, sentences, without fully grasping their meaning. Much more than we suspect, their language is echolalic. Their language use then testifies to a good memory and associative thinking (they link certain expressions to certain situations), but it is based too little on a process of meaning-making. Normally gifted people with autism are therefore very easily overestimated in their understanding of spoken language. Often they give the impression of understanding language because they react appropriately to an instruction or message. However, it is forgotten that people with autism often derive their information not from language but from other elements. They often make a kind of 'internal script' of events based on past experiences. In other words, they know the routines. A verbal message adds no information to this, and therefore they react based on the routine rather than on the message. Try giving a different message, often you will see them still react well to the situation (but not to your message).

bldn 52

egocentric

a&e 66-69

People with autism often have difficulty seeing the emotion behind the behavior of others. As a result, they often come across as egocentric. True empathy presupposes that you can empathize and sympathize with other people who have experienced, or are experiencing, something that you yourself have not (yet) experienced. Especially normally gifted people with autism sometimes give the impression that they are capable of empathy, but this can be very misleading. It is not true empathy; it is very egocentric. They do not put themselves in the other person's shoes, but recognize a situation or scenario that they themselves have experienced. They fall back on their own experiences instead of empathizing with the other person's experience. As long as the other person feels the same as what they themselves felt in a particular situation, they will react appropriately. Their lack of empathetic abilities only becomes apparent when their own experience does not entirely match how another person experiences or has experienced a particular situation. Then they come across as very egocentric. That said, it can be stated that no one makes as much effort as people with autism to be empathetic. Despite their handicap, they do everything they can to be as empathetic as possible, but in 'their own way'. They calculate and figure out how best to react. They proceed very cognitively to be as empathetic as possible. Unfortunately, empathy often has more to do with intuition and unwritten logic than with real reasoning and classic intelligence. Normally gifted people with autism not only resort to their own experiences, sometimes they seem very empathetic because they fall back on learned scenarios. They have, as it were, a library of situations in their heads, from which they have learned how people then feel. For people with autism, empathy is a matter of working, of 'calculating' and 'deciphering'. They also need more time and 'hints'. People without autism do not have to work at all to be empathetic; it is something instinctive and intuitive. It is precisely this intuition that people with autism lack. In that respect, people with autism deserve much praise and admiration: probably no one makes such heavy efforts to empathize with others as people with autism. Because it is not self-evident for them, they have to make many efforts. Accusing people with autism of not having enough empathy is therefore not fair. You don't blame a visually impaired or blind person for not seeing, do you? On the contrary, we must accommodate people with autism in their handicap and not 'get' them on their shortcomings. We must give them the time and space, and support if necessary, to be able to take a full place in society and live a full life, despite their social limitations.

a&e 75

The empathetic deficits in people with autism regularly lead to the question of whether people with autism are not, in fact, a bit psychopathic. However, there is a fundamental difference between psychopathy and autism. Psychopaths, unlike autistics, can usually take the perspective of others. They understand (cognitively) quite well that they are causing suffering to their victim, but it hardly touches them emotionally. In people with autism, there is no problem with emotional responsiveness, but with understanding. Once they understand that their own behavior elicits negative emotions in another (and this usually only happens after someone has explained it to them), they usually express their regret and also genuinely

'feel' for the person. A psychopath is not ignorant, but insensitive. An autistic person is not insensitive, but primarily ignorant. But also often just clumsy. Autism is, to a large extent, a performance problem. People with autism often have the theoretical knowledge, but are clumsy in applying it in practice. They do look for a solution, a possible reaction, when confronted with a painful situation of someone else, especially if they are encouraged to do so. But their problem-solving has an 'autistic' tinge.

bldn 48-50

The social disorder in people with autism primarily concerns qualitative differences with the social interaction of normal people, especially regarding the reciprocity of social interaction. People with autism, for example, have problems with shared attention. The social disorder can manifest itself in very diverse ways. Four social subtypologies are distinguished (four types of manifestations of the disorder in social interaction): The aloof or inattentive type is the easiest to recognize, and individuals in this group most closely match the classic image of autism. A large number of this group also have an intellectual disability. However, a small number of normally gifted people with autism also belong to this variant within the autism spectrum. People with autism of the aloof type come across as indifferent to other people, especially peers and strangers. They often accept physical approach from familiar and trusted people. They seem to have no interest in other people, and contact is mainly instrumental, such as pulling other people along as a kind of instrument they use to obtain a certain object. Individuals in the aloof group usually become very absorbed in their own, stereotypical activities. As they grow up, some learn to accept the presence of others, but they show little or no interest in others and rarely initiate contact themselves. The passive type presents a somewhat different picture. Individuals in this group rarely initiate an interaction spontaneously, but they passively accept the approach of others. They are, as it were, on the sidelines; they take no initiative themselves but follow at the request of others. This can make them acceptable partners for peers, for example, as playmates: they are willing to do what is asked of them. In some children, the problems only become apparent when we expect more initiative from them. Unlike the aloof group, we regularly see other diagnoses than autism in them: usually atypical autism, but sometimes even Asperger's syndrome. The active-but-bizarre type very actively initiates social contact. But because individuals of this type, like all other people with ASD, have problems with smoothly and fluently understanding interactions, their manner of contact is naive, strange, inappropriate, and one-sided. They make contact in an egocentric way: for example, they talk endlessly about their own themes or interests, they base their contact solely on themselves, and they have difficulty responding to the feelings, needs, or interests of others in their contact. Individuals of the active-but-bizarre type do initiate interaction with others, for example in a conversation or game, but they do not know how to join the conversation or game and often come across as intrusive and disruptive. A healthy distance seems to be lacking. Individuals in this group are often missed in diagnostics: they are labeled as behaviorally disturbed or antisocial. Many gifted individuals with ASD belong to this group. As a group, active-but-bizarre individuals generally have average to high intelligence, although there can be large individual differences. In the pompous or rigidly formalistic type, social problems are very subtle. Individuals belonging to this type are excessively polite or formal. They are aware of others and the importance of appropriate interactions and therefore adhere very strictly to social conventions. As children, they usually had clear problems with social interactions and were mostly classifiable under one of the other social subtypes mentioned above. Due to their good intellectual abilities, they gradually manage to compensate for and

camouflage many of these difficulties. In literature, this is often described as 'progress', but it is not genuine progress in social development, rather the learning of various alternative strategies to appear as normal as possible and to survive optimally. For example, it is noticeable that these individuals try to grasp social events intellectually: they memorize certain social rules and 'survive' social activities based on learned or acquired 'scripts' ('scenarios', 'playbooks'). However, they lack the intuition necessary to understand the subtleties of interpersonal interaction. They adhere very strictly to social rules and have difficulty adapting to situations where the expected behavior deviates from the known scenario. Lack of empathy and social naivety are most characteristic of this group. We find this subtype most often in highly gifted adults with autism, and many of them receive a diagnosis of Asperger's Disorder. The social problems of individuals of the pompous/rigidly-formalistic type cannot be identified through a few casual contacts, conversations, or tests, because their intellectual approach allows them to react quite appropriately in those situations. Their social problems only become apparent in more intensive and longer-lasting contacts where spontaneity, empathy, and emotional support are required. There is a correlation between the subtypes and intelligence. We also see a shift in type according to age: a child who is very clearly active but bizarre in social interaction as a teenager may have been passive or even aloof as a toddler. Also, depending on the context, the same person can exhibit behavior from a different subtype: children, young people, and adults can function differently at home than at work and, for example, actively initiate contact at home but be rather passive at school or work.

'evil' intentions

a&e 156

Due to their lack of empathy, people with autism, however gifted they may be, remain naive and vulnerable. Therefore, people with autism must be able to count on our support. We live in a world where manipulation occurs. People with autism lack the empathy to avoid being manipulated themselves. We can teach them some scenarios, but fundamentally they remain with an inability to timely notice the pitfalls for themselves in the many and rapidly changing interactions between people. People with autism sometimes need to be protected against the less good intentions of others. They too often become victims of others because they do not see through the evil intentions.

a&e 108

Teach them resilience and skills to protect themselves, rather than trying to follow others and thus getting themselves into trouble. Or as Temple Grandin, an American woman with autism, expresses it herself: "When I was younger, I had to discover with discouragement that some people have bad intentions. This is something that all people with autism should learn."

'executive function'

bldn 63

'Executive Function' refers to the set of cognitive functions located in the frontal lobe of the brain: the ability to choose, execute, and evaluate the appropriate problem-solving strategy

for a particular problem, while suppressing 'prepotent' but incorrect responses. Executive functions play an important role in impulse control, planning behavior, organized searching, and flexibility. The hypothesis that there is an executive dysfunction in people with ASD was formulated following the observation that some people developed autistic behaviors after suffering frontal brain damage. They too showed a tendency to perseverate and had difficulty with flexibility. This is very similar to the cognitive and behavioral rigidity that characterizes autism. In addition, the frontal lobes also appear to play a role in the regulation of social and emotional behavior. Research on people with an autistic disorder using a battery of tests measuring frontal lobe functions was positive. People with an autistic disorder have problems with cognitive flexibility: they do not easily give up a strategy that was previously effective for solving a task or problem if it is no longer effective. They have problems with planning their behavior. Even gifted people with autism and individuals with Asperger's disorder have difficulties with (social) problem-solving, both at a conceptual level and at the level of flexibility. The deficits appeared to be, to some extent, independent of IQ. The concept of executive functions also helps to explain the attention problems in people with an autistic disorder. Directing and sustaining attention would, according to a number of studies, not immediately pose a major problem for individuals with an autistic disorder, but shifting attention, the so-called 'attention shifting', does. These problems occur when the person with autism is already engaged in a particular activity. It is therefore about difficulties in letting go of a focus of attention. The problem with 'attention shifting' would thus fit within a more general deficit of cognitive flexibility, which is an important predictor for social adjustment.

exhausting

…!? 51

What we also often see is that communicating is apparently more difficult for them and requires more energy than solving a problem themselves. This even happens with normally gifted people with autism, and they usually have a large vocabulary and abstract language forms at their disposal. During a course for gifted young people with autism, it is striking how some find it easier to get a bottle of water from the kitchen than to ask for one at another table. Or they go around the table to get the platter of sandwich fillings from the other end instead of asking for it.

(on) 256

explicit learning

@ 21

People with autism learn in a different way. Skills that 'ordinary' young people discover spontaneously must be taught to them in a targeted manner. This involves, on the one hand, teaching the skills themselves that are necessary for social development. On the other hand, it also involves how, when, where, and why to apply these skills, depending on and in function of the right context. For example:

@ 43

Many words can have multiple meanings, and for the same meaning, there are often multiple words or expressions. Children and young people without autism learn to deal with all these double and vague meanings without an explicit learning process, because they, unlike people with autism, are not context-blind. They derive the correct meanings from the context. The context makes clear what a particular word or expression refers to, and how to understand it. We can hardly teach this context sensitivity to people with autism, as that is precisely the core of their disorder, but we can help them understand and use language correctly by clarifying and explicitly explaining meanings. Figurative language, in particular, can be a source of confusion for people with autism. A session where various expressions and sayings about a particular topic are collected and concretely explained can be very illuminating. We can pay extensive attention to 'definitions'. This is something that people with autism enjoy, with their preference for systems, theoretical knowledge, and encyclopedic memory work. Following the defining and clarifying of words, it can also be useful to familiarize young people and adults with the many proverbs and sayings, which we can treat per keyword or theme. A fun way to do this, which also meets the need of people with autism to visualize everything, is to depict the literal meaning of each saying or proverb in a drawing. Note: precisely this kind of well-intentioned clarification can cause confusion and stress in people with autism due to their lack of imagination. But especially for more gifted young people with autism, this tension between literal and figurative meaning in a drawing can be a fun 'game' to experiment with. With less gifted young people with autism, one must primarily ensure that the distinction between the literal and the actual (figurative) meaning of the proverb or saying is strongly emphasized, so that the distinction becomes very clear.

explicating

@ 42

explosive

expression

a&e 29

People with autism also often express their feelings in a very extreme way. Or their emotional expressions come across as extreme. At all ages, one can see extreme laughing fits, panic reactions, or tantrums in them. There are often also major mood swings: one moment they have a severe tantrum, a few moments later they are laughing happily. A young adult with autism told me: "It's like a barrier that flips. One moment I feel happy, the next angry or sad. It can all change so quickly with me." It seems as if there is no brake on the expression of feelings in people with autism. Or is it perhaps that people with autism are hypersensitive and therefore react so extremely? People with autism have difficulty regulating and modulating. Because they can less oversee and understand stimuli in their context, they come across as much more absolute. This applies not only to stimuli coming from outside, but also to what comes from within. People with autism have difficulty distancing themselves from stimuli, processing them from a broader whole, the coherence.

This distance is necessary to relativize things: relating is relativizing. People with autism cannot relativize very well. They are 'caught' by the things they experience, including their own feelings. If they are angry, then they are angry. They are overwhelmed, consumed by that feeling. The feeling is absolute. They are, as it were, blinded by the feeling: blind to other elements in their environment that situate what they feel in a broader framework and could therefore relativize it. People with autism generally have difficulty suppressing reactions to an immediate context. As a result, they have much less control over their feelings. An explosive expression is the result of an emotional explosion within.

feelings

a&e 29

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a&e 97

With gifted people with autism, we can often put events into perspective 'afterwards' and thereby teach them to 'relativize', but there is a high chance that they will still be overwhelmed by their emotion next time.

expression

≠communication

externalizing

a&e 34

People with autism experience the world differently. One of the most difficult things for them to understand are their own experiences. Many people with autism have problems processing bodily sensations and how these may or may not relate to their feelings. Sometimes a person with autism knows they feel something, but not what they feel. The brain cannot give meaning to the bodily experience. For people with autism, it is just as difficult to understand their own emotions as to understand those of others. In one study, normally gifted individuals with autism had difficulties identifying and describing their feelings. They also tended to focus on external events rather than their own inner experiences.

extreme

emotion

a&e 29

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emotional expression

a&e 96-97

Verbal people with autism can learn to name feelings. But the question remains whether they can always recognize their own feelings and give them meaning. That is, after all, a prerequisite for expressing them. And on top of that: do they find the right wording for what they feel? When they say they have had a terrible day, was it really terrible, or were just the potatoes cold? Moreover, people with autism have a lot of difficulty modulating and controlling their feelings. Even if they can learn to verbalize their feelings, outbursts will still occur. E.g.: a young man with autism, who often travels by train, still cannot (despite repeated conversations about it) understand that a remark from a conductor about a minor error on his train pass is not a disaster. Every time a conductor makes a remark to him (often because he himself first made a remark, such as: "I think the train windows should be cleaned more often"), he is completely upset and aggressive. If someone corrects him, even in a friendly manner, it is still a "disaster" for him. People with autism simply experience events differently than we do, and so their (emotional) reaction to situations will also differ from ours.

'fairness', sense of justice

e-mail Dr. Lieve Dams, psychiatrist with experience in autism:

"Often people also do not get the chance to tell their story during the CBM (Commission for the Protection of Society) hearing, that usually goes really fast. I can imagine that for someone with ASD, within such a tense situation, it is difficult to convey the message with the right words and attitude. This too, if it is a problem, should then be conveyed in the report. The commission also always attaches great importance to having gone through the crime scenario and confessing that you effectively committed the crime. For ASD individuals who strive for truth, who cannot stand injustice, this is often difficult, as a file in the statements is not always very nuanced." "I myself have fought for years with and for the interned, and you will also know that people with ASD were also interned, with the diagnosis 'psychopath', as this clinically in a short interview, often 'seems' to give the same symptoms. Actually, people with ASD should not be interned, as with clear diagnostics and guidance, the chance of recidivism can really be greatly reduced. But, that is within forensic psychiatry, and certainly towards the Judiciary, still a long way to go."

feelings

'all or nothing'

see: feelings/being overwhelmed

'different'

a&e 98

People with autism react very differently to emotions than people without autism, and we must accept their feelings. We cannot prescribe which feelings they should feel. However,

we can work on their behavior, the way they express their feelings, and clarify and teach them socially appropriate/desirable alternatives.

a&e 151

Contrary to what some dare to claim, people with autism experience all sorts of feelings. Because life does not make it so easy for them, they probably have to deal with unpleasant feelings more often than other people. Because they understand the world differently, they sometimes react emotionally very differently from people without autism. How their emotional life is structured will probably always remain partly a mystery to us. Listening and looking carefully helps us to understand, but the book of their feelings will never fully open. Feeling is always a bit of thinking. Feelings, like all other things, have a lot to do with meaning-making. Feelings arise because we give meaning to an event. People with autism sometimes experience events, also emotionally, fundamentally differently than we do. They perceive reality differently and understand things around and within them differently than we do. Their meaning-making is different from ours. The color red can be a terrifying threat because a child associates it with pain. He once cut himself on a red knife. When father gets angry and starts shouting, it is a feast for Bart, because he loves movement and sound. When someone raises their voice and calls her name because she is a little further away, Evy thinks that person is angry with her, because she associates a loud voice with anger. When a girl is nice to Klaas and listens to him, then she is his girlfriend, and then Klaas thinks he is in love with her. When someone dies, Bavo feels nothing. Feelings are not only the result of meaning-making. They are also the object of meaning-making. Feelings are a change in our bodily state, to which we, with the help of our brains, give a certain meaning. We become aware of a change (accelerated heartbeat, lump in the throat, contraction of the stomach) and give it meaning: "I am afraid". Because of their different way of meaning-making, people with autism probably also experience their own feelings differently than we do. What we would experience as being in love, someone with autism might experience as fear. This leads to a reaction that is incomprehensible to us: the person with autism pushes someone away, whom he nevertheless likes. In addition to their different meaning-making, many people with autism – those with an additional intellectual disability – also have a limitation in understanding. Because of their developmental delay, they react emotionally like a young child, even if they are adults. Because they can place the world, including that of their own feelings, too little in perspective, they react rather immaturely: extremely, erratically, and uncontrolled. Unlike other people, they also lack the ability to take into account what others will think of them and do not adapt their emotional reactions to social circumstances. All this makes it difficult for us to enter their emotional world. What makes it even more difficult is the fact that people with autism have difficulty with our non-autistic communication. They do express their feelings, but do not communicate them in the usual way. There is often also too little spontaneous inclination and focus on sharing feelings with others. It seems as if some do not realize that a sorrow shared is a sorrow halved. If we do not take the first step towards them, people with autism are left alone with their confusing and incomprehensible feelings. We must open the book. And that is not so easy. It requires a great deal of empathy from us. If we want to feel what they feel, we must learn to think as they think… Sensing is also a bit of thinking. Asking them to take the first step in sharing each other's feelings is too much to ask of people with autism. Young children with autism or people with autism and an intellectual disability often do not even recognize the emotional expressions of others: a tear is nothing more than a drop of water, an angry voice nothing more than a disturbing sound, a kiss nothing more than a wet touch.

If they notice these things at all, they often get no emotional meaning: they see no feelings in others. Some people with autism progress somewhat further in the development of understanding feelings. They learn to recognize and name a number of emotional expressions in others. Usually, this is limited to very clear basic emotions such as happy, scared, angry, sad. However, it often happens that this recognition is linked to certain details. Anger, for example, is only recognized if someone speaks loudly, sadness only if there are tears, happiness only in men with a mustache. They lack the ability to experience coherence through the diversity of details, the variety with which people express their feelings. Anger can be expressed in thousands of different ways. People with autism without an intellectual disability also have problems with this. But they can recognize feelings in other people somewhat better, and their vocabulary concerning feelings is slightly larger than the four basic emotions. But they too are in a way blind to the feelings of others. They can recognize feelings, but do not sufficiently understand where those feelings come from. *Le coeur a ses raisons, que la raison ne comprend pas.* The heart has its reasons, which reason does not know. This proverb applies to each of us, but it is a double truth for people with autism. They do not sufficiently understand what elicits feelings. People with autism can excel in everyday physics, but they have little insight into everyday psychology. A number of people with autism understand that situations and desires elicit emotions, but what remains a mystery even for intelligent people with autism is how thoughts lead to feelings. People with autism, however gifted they may be, have difficulty putting themselves in the world of thoughts, intentions, and beliefs of others. They lack the talent to enter, alongside the naked, concrete reality, into the reality-behind-the-reality: that second reality that we all create in our brains and that influences our behavior and our feelings. Even if you find this book terrible (the reality), if I think that readers find this book brilliant (my reality, my perspective), then I am happy and proud. My pride can only be understood by someone who can imagine my reality. For someone who cannot, my feeling probably seems absurd, silly, or incomprehensible. And that is probably what many people with autism must think: how illogical and absurd are the feelings of non-autistics! Many human feelings, especially the more complex ones, are a product of the reality-behind-the-reality, of the personal and unique worlds that people create on the inside. Gifted people with autism may not have so much difficulty with the external world of feelings, but they do with the invisible world behind the feelings. That world is beyond their imaginative capacity and does not align with their hyper-logical approach to the world. Thinking about others is also always a bit of feeling. In terms of understanding the world of emotions, we are, especially with normally gifted people with autism, sometimes misled. In clear, structured, and simplified situations, such as test situations, they sometimes surprise us with accurate answers. They recognize a certain feeling and also seem to know where it comes from. To survive, normally gifted people with autism develop all sorts of alternative strategies to be able to place the feelings of others: they fall back on their own experiences, they store all sorts of scenarios, learn rules by heart, or start reasoning about the inner states of others. They are also often dependent on the right questions or on an external clarification and interpretation of the right perspective. It seems as if they have particularly sensitive antennae, but that is only an appearance. The idea that people with autism are no stronger than non-autistics in their understanding of the feelings of others is not only incorrect, it also gives rise to too high expectations. True empathy, authentic ability to empathize, is not achieved by looking things up in an encyclopedia or a dictionary of feelings, not by applying learned rules, and not by calculating algorithms. These strategies are not sufficient for real life. That presupposes too much banal and trivial prior knowledge. It goes too fast and has too many distracting stimuli, so that factual knowledge of the

emotional world falls short. Normally and well-gifted people with autism can learn a lot about feelings, but it remains limited to a rather academic knowledge, dominated by formulas, rules, and scenarios. People with autism lack the ability to convert what they learn about feelings into spontaneous and flexible empathy. The ability to quickly and flexibly direct attention to what is truly relevant in an emotional context, the ability to be ad rem, is lacking even in the most highly gifted people with autism. The deficit in empathy in people with autism is much deeper than the deficits in recognizing and naming feelings or a deficit in theory of mind. That is why trainings that try to teach these skills have little or even no effect on social functioning in real life. Social understanding is something completely different from social competence. In social competence, speed and flexibility of reacting to the other are of much more decisive importance than knowledge. What people with autism lack is much more fundamental than some kind of thought operation: they lack feeling.

being overwhelmed

a&e 29

People with autism also often express their feelings in a very extreme way. Or their emotional expressions come across as extreme. At all ages, one can see extreme laughing fits, panic reactions, or tantrums in them. There are often also major mood swings: one moment they have a severe tantrum, a few moments later they are laughing happily. A young adult with autism told me: "It's like a barrier that flips. One moment I feel happy, the next angry or sad. It can all change so quickly with me." It seems as if there is no brake on the expression of feelings in people with autism. Or is it perhaps that people with autism are hypersensitive and therefore react so extremely? People with autism have difficulty regulating and modulating. Because they can less oversee and understand stimuli in their context, they come across as much more absolute. This applies not only to stimuli coming from outside, but also to what comes from within. People with autism have difficulty distancing themselves from stimuli, processing them from a broader whole, the coherence. This distance is necessary to relativize things: relating is relativizing. People with autism cannot relativize very well. They are 'caught' by the things they experience, including their own feelings. If they are angry, then they are angry. They are overwhelmed, consumed by that feeling. The feeling is absolute. They are, as it were, blinded by the feeling: blind to other elements in their environment that situate what they feel in a broader framework and could therefore relativize it. People with autism generally have difficulty suppressing reactions to an immediate context. As a result, they have much less control over their feelings. An explosive expression is the result of an emotional explosion within.

a&e 35

A very common problem in people with ASD is being overwhelmed by a feeling. The physical experience is not put into perspective but dominates everything. As a result, a warning feels like terror, a preference like infatuation, having less energy like depression. With such a flood of emotions, the person with autism does recognize the quality of what they feel, but it is as if the brain has turned the volume knob to maximum. As a result, even pleasant feelings can become unpleasant.

a&e 97

With gifted people with autism, we can often put events into perspective 'afterwards' and thereby teach them to 'relativize', but there is a high chance that they will still be overwhelmed by their emotion next time.

a&e 107

People with autism already have it difficult enough with their own feelings. Therefore, do not overwhelm them with your own emotional expressions when they are upset or reacting emotionally. Stay calm and composed, however difficult that may be. Acting emotionally yourself only makes it more complicated for them.

communication of emotions

a&e 37

People with autism react emotionally and also express their feelings, but they do not really communicate them. It is not because a child with autism cries from sadness that it also communicates its sadness. Communication implies that you express your feeling *to* someone. We only speak of communication when there is a focus on another person. People with autism do express their feelings, but very little directed towards another person. They share their feelings much less. Parents sometimes think their child communicates feelings while there is no communication at all. They see their child crying, laughing, roaring angrily… What they see is only an expression of feelings, not real communication. There is a high chance that if the child has fallen and is in pain, it will be crying, but will not go to someone to make that pain known to a person. And sometimes parents probably see feelings that the child does not even have, because people with autism express their feelings differently. A child with autism who laughs is not necessarily happy. The fact that people with autism communicate less spontaneously, less often, and differently about their feelings sometimes results in them being left alone with their feelings. That they are not, or incorrectly, understood. For example, I met a young man with autism who had been severely depressed for a long time. Nobody had noticed anything until then. People with autism are very little aware of this themselves. They do not realize that others often cannot see how they feel.

a&e 128

People with autism have difficulties focusing on what is relevant. Therefore, we must show them what is important and essential. Talking with people with autism about their emotions and their consequences is more showing than talking.

expressing / verbalizing

a&e 34-38

People with autism experience the world differently. One of the most difficult things for them to understand are precisely their own experiences. Many people with autism have problems processing bodily sensations and how these may or may not relate to their feelings. And something you don't understand clearly yourself, you can also hardly make clear to others.

@ 60

Talking about feelings is one of the hardest things for people with autism. A highly gifted man with autism writes: 'I spent most of my life in some form of psychotherapy with therapists who assumed I knew what the words meant but that I couldn't handle my own processing of them. Their interventions consisted mainly of guiding me in naming things I didn't feel. If I then said that this wasn't what I felt, mainly because I didn't know how to describe how I *did* feel, I was told I was resisting therapy and that I wasn't open to my feelings. During those years when people were concerned about my feelings, no one ever bothered to explain to me what those words meant.' Unless they are made very concrete and explained, feelings are not the most appropriate gateway for psychoeducation or training for people with ASD. Talking about feelings can be delicate. Feelings need to be addressed, but for them, it is a not very concrete and especially not very tangible matter. Experience also shows that talking too long and too much about feelings only leads to derailment. They then get entangled in abstract terms. They get overwhelmed by emotions, because they can make too little distinction between talking about feelings and feeling itself. And sometimes they get lost in all those words. Talking about the feelings themselves can be very 'sensitive'. People with autism need to be protected from themselves to some extent. Peer pressure and lack of assertive communication, or lack of impulse control, mean that someone with autism might still talk about something they would rather not, or prefer not to, talk about. Communication happens very quickly for them, and within that whirlwind of questions and answers, quickly finding an appropriate formulation to indicate that you do not want to answer a question is not always easy for people with autism. Perhaps that is why slow and cautious individual talk therapies are better than dynamic group discussions.

a&e 36

Just as the perception of the world around them is processed differently by the brains of people with autism, so is their inner world. They do not recognize their feelings. Or they feel 'too much'. Or they have a certain feeling but their brains process this information incorrectly, causing their behavior to be completely out of harmony with what they feel and causing them to communicate something different from what they actually feel. The strange communication of feelings in people with autism is a reflection of their peculiar processing of experiences.

a&e 96-97

Verbal people with autism can learn to name feelings. But the question remains whether they can always recognize their own feelings and give them meaning. That is, after all, a prerequisite for expressing them. And on top of that: do they find the right wording for what they feel? When they say they have had a terrible day, was it really terrible, or were just the potatoes cold?

…!? 41 107

@ 29-30

explosive

a&e 29

People with autism also often express their feelings in a very extreme way. Or their emotional expressions come across as extreme. At all ages, one can see extreme laughing fits, panic reactions, or tantrums in them. There are often also major mood swings: one moment they have a severe tantrum, a few moments later they are laughing happily. A young adult with autism told me: "It's like a barrier that flips. One moment I feel happy, the next angry or sad. It can all change so quickly with me." It seems as if there is no brake on the expression of feelings in people with autism. Or is it perhaps that people with autism are hypersensitive and therefore react so extremely? People with autism have difficulty regulating and modulating. Because they can less oversee and understand stimuli in their context, they come across as much more absolute. This applies not only to stimuli coming from outside, but also to what comes from within. People with autism have difficulty distancing themselves from stimuli, processing them from a broader whole, the coherence. This distance is necessary to relativize things: relating is relativizing. People with autism cannot relativize very well. They are 'caught' by the things they experience, including their own feelings. If they are angry, then they are angry. They are overwhelmed, consumed by that feeling. The feeling is absolute. They are, as it were, blinded by the feeling: blind to other elements in their environment that situate what they feel in a broader framework and could therefore relativize it. People with autism generally have difficulty suppressing reactions to an immediate context. As a result, they have much less control over their feelings. An explosive expression is the result of an emotional explosion within.

a&e 35

A very common problem in people with ASD is being overwhelmed by a feeling. The physical experience is not put into perspective but dominates everything. As a result, a warning feels like terror, a preference like infatuation, having less energy like depression. With such a flood of emotions, the person with autism does recognize the quality of what they feel, but it is as if the brain has turned the volume knob to maximum. As a result, even pleasant feelings can become unpleasant.

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cleaned more often"), he is completely upset and aggressive. If someone corrects him, even in a friendly manner, it is still a "disaster" for him. People with autism simply experience events differently than we do, and so their (emotional) reaction to situations will also differ from ours.

experiencing

@ 22

People with autism often find it difficult to recognize, name, and appropriately deal with their own (and others') feelings. They have the right to be supported in dealing with feelings. … . People with autism process emotions differently than non-autistic people and have the right to their own 'autistic' emotions, … .

incorrectly expressing

a&e 29

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a&e 35-37

a&e 36

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people with autism who can speak is somewhat easier to understand. After all, they have language. Nothing could be further from the truth. We often see that even highly gifted and verbally fluent individuals with autism get seriously entangled when it comes to expressing their feelings. They can talk very prosaically and extensively about the lifestyle of dinosaurs or the workings of a computer, but when it comes to their own feelings, they resort to childish, strange, and incomprehensible behavior and language. Not only can they hardly cope with their own feelings, they also find it difficult to express their feelings in an understandable and socially appropriate way.

a&e 96-97

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intense

a&e 29

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modulating and regulating

a&e 29

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negative

a&e 33

People with autism have and express more negative feelings because they have more negative experiences. Due to their disability, their limited and/or different understanding of reality and this world, they experience many more frustrations than we do. People with autism are under more stress.

…!? 43

It is also good to know that someone with autism, just like someone without autism, usually uses not one but several forms of communication depending on the situation and or the possibilities. What people with autism also have in common with people without autism is the fact that as stress increases, the form of communication also becomes more concrete and primitive. If, after ten minutes of polite and civilized requests, you still haven't been able to make it clear to the door-to-door salesman of totally useless goods that you are not interested, you will probably also resort to a more primitive and concrete communication: slamming the door…

no volume knob

see: feelings/being overwhelmed

not being able to 'think and feel' simultaneously

a&e 32

It seems that feeling and thinking simultaneously is difficult for people with autism. Either they feel (and then get overwhelmed by their emotions because they cannot put them into perspective), or they think (and have no room to experience the accompanying feelings).

a&e 73-74

People with autism need relatively much thinking time to empathize with someone else. In real life, that thinking time is not given. Real life is not a videotape that you can pause for a moment to look something up in your encyclopedia of scenarios or your dictionary of facial expressions. The lack of empathy is therefore not reducible to merely a cognitive deficit, a lack of knowledge. Many normally gifted people with autism know many emotional terms and have an extensive collection of scenarios. They do not lack theoretical knowledge. The problems they have with understanding the emotional world are related to difficulties in several areas simultaneously: the integration of communication skills, emotional responsiveness, paying attention to the most relevant information, prioritizing social stimuli, and cognitive skills. The flow of human interactions is too swift for the slow processing of social information in people with autism. It's not just a deficit in theory of mind. On the contrary, given the efforts people with autism make to 'reason out' the inner world of others, one could even say they are the only ones who have a 'theory' of mind. People with autism have a deficit in a *hot* theory of mind. They are not quick-witted enough in their perspective-taking.

a&e 32

A possible explanation for the absence of emotional reactions in people with autism is that they have to put so much mental energy into purely intellectually and cognitively understanding what is happening to them that there is no mental space left for processing the emotional side of the matter. … . We often see that only when understanding of the purely intellectual side has come, the emotions are then also released. People with autism often react emotionally delayed to events. … It seems that feeling and thinking simultaneously is difficult for people with autism. Either they feel (and get overwhelmed by their emotions because they cannot put them into perspective), or they think (and have no room to experience the accompanying feelings).

a&e 97

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of others

a&e 22-23

Shared attention is the foundation of sharing feelings with others. If a child likes a rattle, they look at their mother and back at the rattle to, as it were, make the mother a part of their pleasure: "Look, how nice." The child shares their pleasure in the toy with their mother. Ordinary babies can do this very quickly. When they get a bit older, they not only let others share in their attention via eye contact, but also in other ways: they point to something or they come to show something. Children not only share their attention, they also share the attention of others. If you look somewhere, very young children follow your gaze. And they share your pleasure, your interest. Research shows that children with an autism spectrum disorder show much less shared attention. Not only do they point much less to objects to share their attention, children with autism also do not readily come to show something. Shared attention includes not only cognitive elements, but also emotional ones. Children not only look at the faces of others to obtain information, but also to share feelings.

a&e 98-99

Dealing with the feelings of others involves various factors: * recognizing and naming the feelings of others * understanding where the feelings of others come from * reacting appropriately to the feelings of others People with autism have difficulties with all three of these levels of dealing with the feelings of others. Recognizing the feelings of others is called affective perspective-taking. However, the greatest deficits are at the level of conceptual perspective-taking: being able to deduce someone's intentions, beliefs, expectations, and intentions. People with autism hardly know what others think and with what intentions they do the things they do. Reacting appropriately to someone's intentions and feelings is therefore not self-evident for a person with autism.

a&e 79

People with autism seem to have too little awareness of the influence they can exert on the thinking and feeling of others. Due to this lack of awareness, they also have little insight into what emotions their own behavior causes in others. Their behavior lacks public reference.

They hardly, if at all, spontaneously wonder how the other person will feel when they do or say certain things.

a&e 76

Some recent studies, however, have revealed that devising socially acceptable solutions and assessing the appropriateness of reactions to the emotions of others is very difficult for, even highly gifted, people with autism.

a&e 71-73

It seems that people with autism do not always spontaneously focus their perception on details that are relevant from a socio-emotional point of view. People with autism are insufficiently spontaneously focused on emotional information.

a&e 107

People with autism already have it difficult enough with their own feelings. Therefore, do not overwhelm them with your own emotional expressions when they are upset or reacting emotionally. Stay calm and composed, however difficult that may be. Acting emotionally yourself only makes it more complicated for them. Do not expect someone with autism to (spontaneously) take into account other people's feelings. Do not expect too much effect from statements like: "Do this now to please me" or "If you do that, then I will be unhappy or sad." People with autism understand too little of the feelings of others to be able to take them into account. This is slow, costs them a lot of processing time and effort. It costs them a lot of effort to analyze the relationship between their own behavior and the feelings of others.

own emotions

recognizing

@ 22

People with autism often find it difficult to recognize, name, and appropriately deal with their own (and others') feelings. They have the right to be supported in dealing with feelings. … . People with autism process emotions differently than non-autistic people and have the right to their own 'autistic' emotions, … .

a&e 34

People with autism experience the world differently. One of the most difficult things for them to understand are their own experiences. Many people with autism have problems processing bodily sensations and how these may or may not relate to their feelings. Sometimes a person with autism knows they feel something, but not what they feel. The brain cannot give meaning to the bodily experience. For people with autism, it is just as difficult to understand their own emotions as to understand those of others. In one study, normally gifted individuals with autism had difficulties identifying and describing their feelings. Typically, gifted people with autism need a long and painful learning process to achieve some form of self-awareness.

a&e 96-97

Verbal people with autism can learn to name feelings. But the question remains whether they can always recognize their own feelings and give them meaning. That is, after all, a prerequisite for expressing them. And on top of that: do they find the right wording for what they feel? When they say they have had a terrible day, was it really terrible, or were just the potatoes cold? Moreover, people with autism have a lot of difficulty modulating and controlling their feelings. Even if they can learn to verbalize their feelings, outbursts will still occur. E.g.: a young man with autism, who often travels by train, still cannot (despite repeated conversations about it) understand that a remark from a conductor about a minor error on his train pass is not a disaster. Every time a conductor makes a remark to him (often because he himself first made a remark, such as: "I think the train windows should be cleaned more often"), he is completely upset and aggressive. If someone corrects him, even in a friendly manner, it is still a "disaster" for him. People with autism simply experience events differently than we do, and so their (emotional) reaction to situations will also differ from ours.

regulating

see: feelings/modulating and regulating

talking about

a&e 128

People with autism have difficulties focusing on what is relevant. Therefore, we must show them what is important and essential. Talking with people with autism about their emotions and their consequences is more showing than talking.

unadjusted

figurative language

People with autism (especially young people with autism) can sometimes have considerable difficulty with figurative or metaphorical language. Because they sometimes take things quite literally, and do not see the imagery, and this in turn because they lack the imagination to picture it. Often people do understand what is (literally) said, but they lack the imagination to also understand what is not said, what is implied or unstated. Older people with autism may have learned over time from their experience or through psychoeducation, and have improved somewhat in this. The more aware they are of their handicap, the more they will (have been able to) remedy this.

flexibility

bldn 63

'Executive Function' refers to the set of cognitive functions located in the frontal lobe of the brain: the ability to choose, execute, and evaluate the appropriate problem-solving strategy for a particular problem, while suppressing 'prepotente' but incorrect responses. Executive

functions play an important role in impulse control, planning behavior, organized searching, and flexibility. The hypothesis that there is an executive dysfunction in people with ASD was formulated following the observation that some people developed autistic behaviors after suffering frontal brain damage. They too showed a tendency to perseverate and had difficulty with flexibility. This is very similar to the cognitive and behavioral rigidity that characterizes autism. In addition, the frontal lobes also appear to play a role in the regulation of social and emotional behavior. Research on people with an autistic disorder using a battery of tests measuring frontal lobe functions was positive. People with an autistic disorder have problems with cognitive flexibility: they do not easily give up a strategy that was previously effective for solving a task or problem if it is no longer effective. They have problems with planning their behavior. Even gifted people with autism and individuals with Asperger's disorder have difficulties with (social) problem-solving, both at a conceptual level and at the level of flexibility. The deficits appeared to be, to some extent, independent of IQ. The concept of executive functions also helps to explain the attention problems in people with an autistic disorder. Directing and sustaining attention would, according to a number of studies, not immediately pose a major problem for individuals with an autistic disorder, but shifting attention, the so-called 'attention shifting', does. These problems occur when the person with autism is already engaged in a particular activity. It is therefore about difficulties in letting go of a focus of attention. The problem with 'attention shifting' would thus fit within a more general deficit of cognitive flexibility, which is an important predictor for social adjustment.

forgetfulness

See: transfer problems

fragmentary / fragmented

communicating

a&e 130

Some general tips for conversations with people with autism. People with autism are quickly prone to information overload. They process (especially spoken) information much slower than we do, see the essence of a message less, but have to process more details. Much faster than other people, their heads are full and they no longer absorb anything. In conversations with someone with autism, we should therefore not go too fast and also not change subjects too quickly. Conversely, it is very difficult for people with autism to adequately adapt the messages and information they want to tell us to our information needs: they often go too fast and jump too quickly from subject to subject. It is therefore important, to have a good and productive conversation, to pay attention to our own pace and information density, as well as to help the person with autism to clearly shape their message, not to be too fast, and not to jump too quickly from subject to subject. Conversations with people with autism are asymmetrical: they demand more from us than from them. Preferably, a conversation with people with autism is slow, clear but not commanding, in a positive atmosphere, and it is best not to discuss too many subjects, or not to change subjects too quickly to another subject. Give a person time to process everything well, time to shape and list their messages properly, and to check whether there are no misunderstandings or

whether misunderstandings remain after sufficient clarification. Be directive, but not commanding. Give someone with autism enough space… but not too much. Not too much… but enough. For a person with autism, everything is divided into fragments. A person can get lost in a fragment (a part of the context) and lose sight of the bigger picture. Therefore, conversations with autism should be structured as much as possible. There must be clear guidance and a clear line – preferably indicated by a pre-prepared agenda. Provide visual support as much as possible: a written agenda, a diagram, a schedule… Be patient and avoid as much as possible sensory stimuli that can cause distraction (conspicuous clothing, disturbing background noise, too strong smells,…). You also best ask that the person with autism prepares the conversation in writing themselves (if possible). Furthermore, the person with autism also has problems with timing, reciprocity, and para-lingual (non-verbal) communication aspects such as intonation, facial expression, etc. These all remain fragmentary aspects for people with autism over which they lose overview and find difficult to integrate into a whole. Here too: be patient, stay calm and keep calm, (slightly) steer and guide in the right direction, support and offer (verbal/communicative) help… but do not manipulate. Help them to say what they want to say – do not put words in their mouth that they do not want to say.

experiencing - information processing

bldn 65

'Central Coherence' is the natural tendency of information processing processes to discover the coherence of different elements from the context (integrative intelligence). A detail of a perception loses, when integrated into a larger whole, its meaning as a separate detail and acquires a completely different meaning. This meaning flows from the context. A disorder in meaning-making as a function of context is seen as the central underlying cognitive deficit in people with autism. Information processing in people with autism does not, or much less, have this tendency towards central coherence (integrative intelligence). They exhibit fragmentary information processing, characterized more by disconnection than by coherence. People with an autistic disorder do not spontaneously connect the different pieces of information with each other, nor with the (broader) context.

a&e 29

There are often also major mood swings: one moment they have a severe tantrum, a few moments later they are laughing happily. A young adult with autism told me: "It's like a barrier that flips. One moment I feel happy, the next angry or sad. It can all change so quickly with me."

information processing

bldn 65

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have this tendency towards central coherence (integrative intelligence). They exhibit fragmentary information processing, characterized more by disconnection than by coherence. People with an autistic disorder do not spontaneously connect the different pieces of information with each other, nor with the (broader) context.

memory

a&e 124

Because of their weak central coherence, people with autism cannot see the forest for the trees. This also applies to their own experiences and perceptions. This problem, known as a typical autistic problem concerning 'episodic memory', means that the classic way of questioning often does not lead to an accurate problem formulation. People with autism find it particularly difficult to distinguish between what is relevant and what is incidental. Telling what exactly happened at a certain moment (the facts of an event), without, for example, getting lost in a lot of unnecessary details, can already be a major challenge. Especially in reporting their feelings, people with autism experience serious difficulties: either nothing comes out, or a confused and associative story emerges.

perceiving

freedom

making own choices

a&e 129

Because (socio-emotional) problem-solving is very difficult for people with autism, we cannot always expect people with autism to spontaneously come up with the right solutions for their (social, emotional) problems. Anyone who wants to help them with this is therefore best advised to offer a concrete range of solutions. Ideally, we let them choose from several solutions that we or they propose. Clarity is paramount in conversations with people with autism. Talking about (socio-emotional) problems is therefore a fairly directive process for people with autism. However, this by no means implies that we impose (our) solutions. Especially with gifted people with autism, it is rather advisable to let them choose solutions themselves.

'getting the bigger picture'

People with autism quickly lose sight of the 'bigger picture'; they focus on, or become 'absorbed' by, details. They can't see the forest for the trees: they see too many details and become blind to the context, the larger whole.

good atmosphere

good feeling

good relationship

a&e 117

We can increase the self-esteem of people with autism by adapting our expectations and the environment to the limitations of people with autism. By giving space to their talents, instead of fixating on what they cannot do.

'grown-up' girls

a&e 128

Peter, although a tall man himself, is afraid of tall, heavily built men. He has the delusion that only in Ghent are girls taller than men. Every time he goes to his mentor by train, he has to pass Ghent, and the girls who get on there are all tall. Trying to explain to Peter with words that this thought is nonsensical does not work, because you cannot show it to him, and in Ghent he sees that the girls are tall. The mentor, who is herself much shorter than Peter, asks him to stand up and stands opposite him. Peter now sees that she is shorter than him. Then the mentor recreates a train compartment with some chairs and asks Peter to sit down. Then she pretends to get on the train, stands next to Peter, and asks him if she is tall or short. Only now does the 'penny drop' for Peter because he can see it: all the girls in Ghent seem tall because he is sitting down on the train and they are standing or walking upright.

'jumping from one thing to another' / 'topic to topic'

…!? 108

As long as they can fall back on learned phrases or scenarios, people with autism can talk very well. It becomes more difficult for them when they cannot resort to these things. Many gifted people with autism testify that they often find it terribly difficult to find words for the expression of, especially, their personal experiences and feelings. People with autism and normal intelligence have difficulty telling a 'real story' or reporting on their experiences. This is due to their problems understanding events in their context. Because they often do not see the whole picture, but rather focus on concrete details, they often jump from one thing to another, omit – for us – important parts of their story, or get stuck on what for others is an unimportant detail. It happens that someone with autism starts a sentence, then breaks it off to talk about a related topic, and then restarts the first sentence. Due to their associative thinking, there is often little logical line in their story. Without external guidance, they can continuously associate new details with others in their story and thus get further and further away from the main line of the story. They have difficulty selecting what is more and what is less important and therefore sometimes tell too much, sometimes too little, or the wrong things.

haughty

arrogant - pedantic

hearing

'how' you say something

…!? 52-53

Communication in people with autism is primarily different. Sometimes we are misled because someone with autism does not sufficiently shape their communication so that the function is not clear. The intention or function of a particular communication is not immediately clear from the words used, but rather from the way they are communicated. It is mainly so-called paralinguistic aspects of language that make the function of communication clear. Paralinguistic aspects are the non-linguistic or naast-linguistic aspects of language and include, among other things, intonation, sentence melody, voice volume, etc. We recognize a question by the intonation, even without a questioning sentence structure or interrogative pronoun. Take, for example, the following sentence: Tuscany is beautiful. If you read that sentence aloud and at the end, at the word 'beautiful', speak higher than at the beginning, then the function of the sentence changes. You are no longer giving information about Tuscany but asking a question about Tuscany, specifically whether it is beautiful or not. Based on intonation and sentence melody, we can determine whether something is a statement or a question. Written language has no paralinguistic aspects unless we invent special codes and signs to replace them, such as question marks and exclamation marks. These allow us to give one and the same sentence different functions: Tuscany is beautiful. Tuscany is beautiful? Tuscany is beautiful!!!) Not only intonation or sentence melody expresses the intention of the communication, but the entire apparatus of non-verbal language or body language. The words say something about the content of the communication, the body (gestures, eyes, facial expression, voice volume) says much more about the intention of the communication. People with autism have more difficulty with non-technical aspects of language than with technical ones. In gifted, speaking people with autism, we often see that their non-verbal abilities are much less developed than their verbal ones. They have the words, but do not know how to convey them effectively. Precisely because of their problems with the non-verbal aspects of communication, their communication does not always come across as intended, and confusion arises about the functions. An example: a boy with autism said several times every evening: 'It's dark outside, Dad!'. The father confirmed this each time: 'Yes son, it's dark outside'. The boy asked this repeatedly until he was instructed by his father to lower the shutters. After a while, the father understood why his son repeated 'It's dark outside, Dad!' so often. The boy was not making an observation at all, but was asking permission to lower the shutters. However, this was not clear from the way the boy communicated. People with autism are often misunderstood because they do not sufficiently succeed in conveying their message in a way that makes it clear why that message is being sent. A question does not always sound like a question, and sometimes a question is not a question at all; a sad event is told with the same facial expression as an insignificant fact; a small incident is worded as if it were a world drama; a request for permission sounds like a command… Communication is a complicated process

where many things need to be organized: the roles of sender and receiver, choosing, combining, and flexibly adapting the appropriate forms, making the function of communication clear… Communication is therefore much more than just a matter of the right words. So said is not immediately so done…

…!? 109-110

Not only what you say, but especially how. A very important part of the social, pragmatic aspect of communication is the way you communicate. The verbal part of communication conveys the content of the communication, the non-verbal part ensures whether something comes across. The non-verbal aspects of speech support the message (or not). Important elements include: physical proximity, body posture, gestures, facial expression, hand movements, gaze, voice intonation… From their typical way of thinking, normally gifted people with autism are more focused on facts, objective and fixed data, knowledge, enumerations, the pure content. If they focus on anything in communication, it is more on the content than the form, more on what they say than how they say it. They are more concerned, for example, with the completeness of their list of stops during their train journey, than whether their story about their trip to the seaside comes across and whether they are not boring their listener. It is not so much the words that normally gifted people with autism have difficulties with. They are able to store an immense dictionary with their good memory. The difficulty lies in what you can or should do with those words, when you use them. They can tell you a trivial fact and something very emotional in the exact same 'newsreader' tone. But also the other way around: something that for most of us is nothing more than an ordinary daily frustration is told with so much fuss that listeners easily overestimate the event. A question does not always sound like a question, a happy remark not always like a happy remark. The language use of normally gifted people with autism is often very formal and pedantic. It sometimes resembles the stiff language of legal texts or notarial deeds. Children with autism often speak too maturely. The form of the language often comes across as unnatural or strange. Normally gifted people with autism not only have difficulty with the use, but also and especially with the understanding of the non-verbal aspects of communication. And that often says much more than the words themselves. For example, people's eyes often tell much more than what those same people say. Gifted adults with autism barely understand the language of the eyes. Words and sentences do not always have a fixed meaning. To understand them, a dictionary is not enough. Gifted people with autism usually only know the dictionary definitions, but lack the talent to discover changes in meanings based on the way we pronounce words and sentences. It is the subtle signals of those non-verbal aspects of language that intuitively enable people without autism to deal flexibly with meanings. Because gifted people with autism primarily have difficulty with these subtle non-verbal signals, they often miss the nuances in messages. We convey these nuances, for example, through our intonation. Depending on the word on which I place the accent, the following sentence will have a very different meaning: 'I don't want to do that' (I don't want to do that, but my sister does. I don't want to do that, but something else. I don't want to do that, so you should never ask me again…).

humor

a&e 59

Because they are, as it were, blind to the why of behaviors, people with autism easily get confused by the behavior of others. And even if they learn that people, for example, laugh when they hear a joke, it remains difficult for them to understand someone's laughter. One of the most difficult things, for example, is the difference between well-intentioned, innocent laughter about something and the somewhat less philanthropic laughing *at* someone. I know a young man with autism with an IQ that far exceeds that of the average Fleming. Every time I laugh when he tells something or every time I playfully tease him by laughingly saying something about one of his little quirks, he looks at me with a questioning gaze. If I then say to him: "Just kidding, Willem!", he breathes a sigh of relief and also starts to laugh. If I don't say that to him, he remains in doubt. Although he has known me for more than five years, unlike any other person who after that time would clearly know that our relationship is such that he can be sure that I only make well-intentioned humorous remarks, my laughter still remains a source of confusion and uncertainty for the young man. He still cannot make the distinction between a well-intentioned tease or a joke on the one hand, and sarcastic and hurtful laughing *at* on the other, even with someone he has known for a long time.

bldn 33

Individuals with an NLD profile are strong in verbal abilities such as memory, auditory perception, vocabulary, and production, but there is poor pragmatics and speech prosody. As a result, they cannot grasp subtle, important nuances in communication and have difficulty understanding incongruities and humor.

hypochondria

In the context of 'illogical fears' and 'autistic logic', some degree of hypochondria can occur in people with autism.

hyperrealism

…!? 60

hypersensitivity

bldn 55-57

a&e 32

The reason people with autism react so extremely to stimuli (auditory, tactile, visual…) is probably because the stimuli are also experienced very extremely, because the impact of events on people with autism is also much more extreme than for us. Many authors with autism testify to such hypersensitivity. Temple Grandin even speaks of an ‘oversensitive and immature nervous system’. It seems that feeling and thinking simultaneously is difficult for people with autism. Either they feel (and get overwhelmed by their emotions because they

cannot put them into perspective), or they think (and have no room to experience the accompanying feelings).

a&e 31

It is not an uncommon phenomenon for someone with autism to have abnormal tolerance thresholds for various sensory perceptions. For example, it is known that certain people with autism cover their ears or react very extremely when there is (certain) noise. It is suspected that they do this because the noise causes them pain. From autobiographies and personal accounts of people with autism, we have since learned that a striking number of individuals with autism have sensory problems: they are hyposensitive or (and this occurs much more frequently) hypersensitive to certain sensory sensations.

Brein 67-68

More than we expect, gifted people with autism, just like those with an additional intellectual disability, suffer from certain stimuli, especially sounds and tactile stimuli, but also sometimes from certain colors and light. This problem is severely underestimated in normally gifted people with autism, despite the many testimonies from people with autism themselves. "My mother, my teachers, and my governess all did good things for me, only they were not aware of my sensory problems. If they had known this, I would have had fewer tantrums and other behavioral problems." Certain sounds, tactile stimuli can be truly painful for people with autism and – that is only human – they therefore anxiously avoid situations and things associated with these unpleasant sensations. For example, a child can suddenly have a tantrum or rather a panic attack if the car turns in a certain direction, because the last time in that street there were roadworks where a jackhammer was used. Especially the unpredictability of these sounds is very tiring and unbearable for people with autism. You would develop resistance to change for less if every new situation involves a risk of unpleasant and painful sensations.

I-other differentiation

a&e 21

According to Delfos, autism is the result of a delayed development of the socioschema. That socioschema is the knowledge and experience of the 'I' placed in the world. The socioschema contains in a physical sense the body schema (the awareness of one's own body) and in a psychological sense something Delfos calls 'I-other differentiation': the distinction between the 'I' and 'the other'. The separation of the 'I' from 'the other' would proceed delayed and/or defectively in children with autism. "An underdeveloped socioschema leads to a low awareness of the environment and a limited focus on people. Based on a limited and non-automated focus on people, problems arise in the development of emotions, in the development of emotional contact, in the development of empathy, and in learning to assess social interaction," writes Delfos. Delfos's model leans more towards cognitive theories than Hobson's theory (a schema is, after all, something cognitive, a kind of deep-rooted, even unconscious knowledge), but it also starts from a disorder in the relationship with others.

a&e 34-35

People with autism experience the world differently. One of the most difficult things for them to understand are their own experiences. Many people with autism have problems processing bodily sensations and how these may or may not relate to their feelings. Sometimes a person with autism knows they feel something, but not what they feel. The brain cannot give meaning to the bodily experience. For people with autism, it is just as difficult to understand their own emotions as to understand those of others. In one study, normally gifted individuals with autism had difficulties identifying and describing their feelings. Typically, gifted people with autism need a long and painful learning process to achieve some form of self-awareness.

a&e 49

Despite the foregoing, many people with autism, especially those with normal intelligence, are able to recognize and name emotional expressions of other people, at least if their attention is drawn to them. But it remains a superficial contact. Superficial because it only concerns the outside, the surface of the other person. If I see someone crying and I say: "Hey, you're sad," have I then really understood what that means for that person? Do I then also know what that sadness means for that person? Do I even know what sadness is? It is not because I can correctly name the outside that I also know what is on the inside. Yet the inside is the most important. If I want to be understood in my sadness by the other, then it is not enough for me that the other names my feeling. I want my inside to be recognized and understood. The problem with emotion recognition in people with autism essentially lies in the difficulties they have with the inside of feelings. J.G.T. van Dalen, someone with autism, expresses it as follows: "Normally I experience people on the outside. The person, as far as the inside is concerned, remains 'hollow' for me." People with autism do distinguish between themselves and others, but then mainly on the outside, too much in an objective and too little in a subjective way. From this it follows that people with autism will make mistakes when the outside is the same, but the inside is different. Thus, children with autism appear to have difficulties recognizing surprise on someone's face. Surprise (open eyes, an open mouth) outwardly resembles yawning. The difference with a yawning open mouth lies in the inside of the person: something happens that that person did not expect. In a recent study, in which children were shown not only photos of simple feelings (such as happy and angry) but also photos of feelings related to what someone expects, it turned out that children with autism had particular difficulty with the latter type of photos. They strikingly often confused photos of surprised facial expressions with yawning, being hungry. There too you have an open mouth… The problem that people with autism have with emotion recognition is therefore much more than just a problem of recognizing facial expressions. It is much more than just a communication problem. The problems they have understanding the feelings of others and dealing with them are related to a problem in the area of meaning-making and imagination. An open mouth can mean both surprise and yawning. The meaning is not contained in the open mouth. The meaning has to do with the invisible feeling hidden behind the open mouth. That feeling, or by extension the inside of people, their experience, you have to be able to imagine. Michèle, a gifted woman with autism, tells it as follows in the video *Autimatisch*: "Giving meaning is very difficult, for example, facial expressions. I do see the changes in people's faces, but I don't know what that means. I can't read it, I can't give meaning to what it entails." People with autism are sometimes surprisingly observant of the outside (the behavior and facial expression) of others, they are sometimes the first to notice a subtle

change in body language, but they often do not get beyond that observation. The inside of people, the experience behind the behavior or facial expression, remains a mystery to them. It is that inside that makes the difference between outwardly identical expressions, the difference between surprise and yawning, the difference between crying and crying.…

!? 106

They lack the skills to choose the appropriate information, adapted to what the receiver already knows or does not know. Thus, they can give too much information and tell something they told you shortly before or something about what you experienced together. More often, they give too little information to understand their message properly, and it sometimes takes a long time before you can understand what they are talking about. On the other hand, it can also happen that children with autism at home spontaneously tell nothing about what they experience at school or at camp. They think their parents already know everything.

…!? 108

idiosyncratic

…!? 76

Each person with autism gives their own meanings to what he or she sees or hears. Different people with autism therefore also give different meanings to the same words and symbols.

communication

a&e 125

Due to their different (language) understanding, people with autism can sometimes give a very personal meaning to certain words. Even more than in guiding people without autism, we therefore need to test what they say. We must check their images, ideas, and words to ensure that we understand them correctly, and vice versa. Normally gifted people with autism are sometimes overestimated in their language comprehension and their ability to correctly communicate and express their ideas.

language use

a&e 25

People with autism exhibit a very specific and individual way of expressing themselves. Their word and language use is often idiosyncratic (: they assign specific, personal meanings to words or expressions, deviating from the generally accepted meanings thereof). This is most evident in children with autism. Only if you know the child very well can you understand what the child means. But adults with autism also, due to their specific autistic associations, sometimes tend to express themselves strangely and deviating from the norm. Sometimes this is not noticeable at all; which leads to misconceptions and misunderstandings because the meaning of the speaker and the listener do not correspond with each other.

bloknootje 2015

E.g.: A child with autism fell off a small step at a young age and hurt herself. Her father had replied "she fell off the step" when the mother asked what was wrong when she heard her child crying. Since then, the child always used the expression "She fell off the step" to indicate when she had hurt herself.

a&e 28

E.g.: A babysitter had gone to great lengths to make spaghetti because the child kept repeating 'spaghetti'. But he didn't want to eat the spaghetti. The mother knew immediately what had gone wrong: her son didn't want spaghetti at all, but always used the word 'spaghetti' to indicate that he was very hungry. But that didn't mean he actually wanted to eat spaghetti; often he craved something completely different.

…!? 116

Normally gifted people with autism also benefit from visual aids that make visible what they cannot see. Experience shows that even with normally gifted individuals, drawings and photos can be very meaningful and useful, if not necessary. If a daily schedule says 'work', what does someone with autism imagine that to be? Working outside? Doing something on the computer? Working alone or with others? A drawing or photo immediately provides the correct and concrete information and prevents them from giving it their own interpretation based on their autistic thinking.

a&e 125

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imagination

social

bldn 124

Gifted people with autism primarily lack social imagination: the ability to predict events based on past experiences. Many diagnosticians, however, do not immediately think of social imagination when considering the diagnostic criterion of absent or impaired imagination. A lack of this is also difficult to ascertain in a conversation or test.

imposing reception pattern

…!? 106

See: intrusive

impulse control

'inappropriateness' / being inappropriate

communication

a&e 36

Just as the perception of the world around them is processed differently by the brains of people with autism, so is their inner world. They do not recognize their feelings. Or they feel 'too much'. Or they have a certain feeling but their brains process this information incorrectly, causing their behavior to be completely out of harmony with what they feel and causing them to communicate something different from what they actually feel. The strange communication of feelings in people with autism is a reflection of their peculiar processing of experiences.

…!? 41-43

…!? 53

…!? 63

…!? 106-107

…!? 110-111

emotion

a&e 96-97

Verbal people with autism can learn to name feelings. But the question remains whether they can always recognize their own feelings and give them meaning. That is, after all, a prerequisite for expressing them. And on top of that: do they find the right wording for what they feel? When they say they have had a terrible day, was it really terrible, or were just the potatoes cold? Moreover, people with autism have a lot of difficulty modulating and controlling their feelings. Even if they can learn to verbalize their feelings, outbursts will still occur. E.g.: a young man with autism, who often travels by train, still cannot (despite repeated conversations about it) understand that a remark from a conductor about a minor error on his train pass is not a disaster. Every time a conductor makes a remark to him (often because he himself first made a remark, such as: "I think the train windows should be cleaned more often"), he is completely upset and aggressive. If someone corrects him, even in a friendly manner, it is still a "disaster" for him. People with autism simply experience events differently than we do, and so their (emotional) reaction to situations will also differ from ours.

a&e 119

although people with autism sometimes react emotionally inappropriately (for example, not reacting sadly to the loss of someone),

Contrary to what some dare to claim, people with autism experience all sorts of feelings. Because life does not make it so easy for them, they probably have to deal with unpleasant feelings more often than other people. Because they understand the world differently, they sometimes react emotionally very differently from people without autism. How their emotional life is structured will probably always remain partly a mystery to us. Listening and looking carefully helps us to understand, but the book of their feelings will never fully open. Feeling is always a bit of thinking. Feelings, like all other things, have a lot to do with meaning-making. Feelings arise because we give meaning to an event. People with autism sometimes experience events, also emotionally, fundamentally differently than we do. They perceive reality differently and understand things around and within them differently than we do. Their meaning-making is different from ours. The color red can be a terrifying threat because a child associates it with pain. He once cut himself on a red knife. When father gets angry and starts shouting, it is a feast for Bart, because he loves movement and sound. When someone raises their voice and calls her name because she is a little further away, Evy thinks that person is angry with her, because she associates a loud voice with anger. When a girl is nice to Klaas and listens to him, then she is his girlfriend, and then Klaas thinks he is in love with her. When someone dies, Bavo feels nothing. Feelings are not only the result of meaning-making. They are also the object of meaning-making. Feelings are a change in our bodily state, to which we, with the help of our brains, give a certain meaning. We become aware of a change (accelerated heartbeat, lump in the throat, contraction of the stomach) and give it meaning: "I am afraid". Because of their different way of meaning-making, people with autism probably also experience their own feelings differently than we do. What we would experience as being in love, someone with autism might experience as fear. This leads to a reaction that is incomprehensible to us: the person with autism pushes someone away, whom he nevertheless likes. In addition to their different meaning-making, many people with autism – those with an additional intellectual disability – also have a limitation in understanding. Because of their developmental delay, they react emotionally like a young child, even if they are adults. Because they can place the world, including that of their own feelings, too little in perspective, they react rather immaturely: extremely, erratically, and uncontrolled. Unlike other people, they also lack the ability to take into account what others will think of them and do not adapt their emotional reactions to social circumstances. All this makes it difficult for us to enter their emotional world. What makes it even more difficult is the fact that people with autism have difficulty with our non-autistic communication. They do express their feelings, but do not communicate them in the usual way. There is often also too little spontaneous inclination and focus on sharing feelings with others. It seems as if some do not realize that a sorrow shared is a sorrow halved. If we do not take the first step towards them, people with autism are left alone with their confusing and incomprehensible feelings. We must open the book. And that is not so easy. It requires a great deal of empathy from us. If we want to feel what they feel, we must learn to think as they think… Sensing is also a bit of thinking. Asking them to take the first step in sharing each other's feelings is too much to ask of people with autism. Young children with autism or people with autism and an intellectual disability often do not even recognize the emotional expressions of others: a tear is nothing more than a drop of water, an angry voice nothing more than a disturbing sound, a kiss nothing more than a wet touch. If they notice these things at all, they often get no emotional meaning: they see no feelings in others. Some people with autism progress somewhat further in the development of

understanding feelings. They learn to recognize and name a number of emotional expressions in others. Usually, this is limited to very clear basic emotions such as happy, scared, angry, sad. However, it often happens that this recognition is linked to certain details. Anger, for example, is only recognized if someone speaks loudly, sadness only if there are tears, happiness only in men with a mustache. They lack the ability to experience coherence through the diversity of details, the variety with which people express their feelings. Anger can be expressed in thousands of different ways. People with autism without an intellectual disability also have problems with this. But they can recognize feelings in other people somewhat better, and their vocabulary concerning feelings is slightly larger than the four basic emotions. But they too are in a way blind to the feelings of others. They can recognize feelings, but do not sufficiently understand where those feelings come from. *Le coeur a ses raisons, que la raison ne comprend pas.* The heart has its reasons, which reason does not know. This proverb applies to each of us, but it is a double truth for people with autism. They do not sufficiently understand what elicits feelings. People with autism can excel in everyday physics, but they have little insight into everyday psychology. A number of people with autism understand that situations and desires elicit emotions, but what remains a mystery even for intelligent people with autism is how thoughts lead to feelings. People with autism, however gifted they may be, have difficulty putting themselves in the world of thoughts, intentions, and beliefs of others. They lack the talent to enter, alongside the naked, concrete reality, into the reality-behind-the-reality: that second reality that we all create in our brains and that influences our behavior and our feelings. Even if you find this book terrible (the reality), if I think that readers find this book brilliant (my reality, my perspective), then I am happy and proud. My pride can only be understood by someone who can imagine my reality. For someone who cannot, my feeling probably seems absurd, silly, or incomprehensible. And that is probably what many people with autism must think: how illogical and absurd are the feelings of non-autistics! Many human feelings, especially the more complex ones, are a product of the reality-behind-the-reality, of the personal and unique worlds that people create on the inside. Gifted people with autism may not have so much difficulty with the external world of feelings, but they do with the invisible world behind the feelings. That world is beyond their imaginative capacity and does not align with their hyper-logical approach to the world. Thinking about others is also always a bit of feeling. In terms of understanding the world of emotions, we are, especially with normally gifted people with autism, sometimes misled. In clear, structured, and simplified situations, such as test situations, they sometimes surprise us with accurate answers. They recognize a certain feeling and also seem to know where it comes from. To survive, normally gifted people with autism develop all sorts of alternative strategies to be able to place the feelings of others: they fall back on their own experiences, they store all sorts of scenarios, learn rules by heart, or start reasoning about the inner states of others. They are also often dependent on the right questions or on an external clarification and interpretation of the right perspective. It seems as if they have particularly sensitive antennae, but that is only an appearance. The idea that people with autism are no stronger than non-autistics in their understanding of the feelings of others is not only incorrect, it also gives rise to too high expectations. True empathy, authentic ability to empathize, is not achieved by looking things up in an encyclopedia or a dictionary of feelings, not by applying learned rules, and not by calculating algorithms. These strategies are not sufficient for real life. That presupposes too much banal and trivial prior knowledge. It goes too fast and has too many distracting stimuli, so that factual knowledge of the emotional world falls short. Normally and well-gifted people with autism can learn a lot about feelings, but it remains limited to a rather academic knowledge, dominated by formulas,

rules, and scenarios. People with autism lack the ability to convert what they learn about feelings into spontaneous and flexible empathy. The ability to quickly and flexibly direct attention to what is truly relevant in an emotional context, the ability to be ad rem, is lacking even in the most highly gifted people with autism. The deficit in empathy in people with autism is much deeper than the deficits in recognizing and naming feelings or a deficit in theory of mind. That is why trainings that try to teach these skills have little or even no effect on social functioning in real life. Social understanding is something completely different from social competence. In social competence, speed and flexibility of reacting to the other are of much more decisive importance than knowledge. What people with autism lack is much more fundamental than some kind of thought operation: they lack feeling.

expression

a&e 152

a&e 36

Just as the perception of the world around them is processed differently by the brains of people with autism, so is their inner world. They do not recognize their feelings. Or they feel 'too much'. Or they have a certain feeling but their brains process this information incorrectly, causing their behavior to be completely out of harmony with what they feel and causing them to communicate something different from what they actually feel. The strange communication of feelings in people with autism is a reflection of their peculiar processing of experiences.

a&e 96-97

Verbal people with autism can learn to name feelings. But the question remains whether they can always recognize their own feelings and give them meaning. That is, after all, a prerequisite for expressing them. And on top of that: do they find the right wording for what they feel? When they say they have had a terrible day, was it really terrible, or were just the potatoes cold?

behavior

a&e 36

Just as the perception of the world around them is processed differently by the brains of people with autism, so is their inner world. They do not recognize their feelings. Or they feel 'too much'. Or they have a certain feeling but their brains process this information incorrectly, causing their behavior to be completely out of harmony with what they feel and causing them to communicate something different from what they actually feel.

reaction

a&e 36

Just as the perception of the world around them is processed differently by the brains of people with autism, so is their inner world. They do not recognize their feelings. Or they feel 'too much'. Or they have a certain feeling but their brains process this information incorrectly,

causing their behavior to be completely out of harmony with what they feel and causing them to communicate something different from what they actually feel. The strange communication of feelings in people with autism is a reflection of their peculiar processing of experiences.

a&e 56-57

a&e 152

'independence' / 'standing on own feet'

See: self-reliance

individual guidance

@ 32

People with autism often do not apply what they have learned in one situation to another. It is important to pay close attention to these transfer problems. This is done through repetition, using different methods and approaches to the problem, and frequently checking whether the information has been correctly absorbed. The confidant or mentor plays an important role in helping the person apply new knowledge and skills in everyday situations.

information overload

a&e 128

People with autism have difficulties focusing on what is relevant. Therefore, we must show them what is important and essential. Talking with people with autism about their emotions and their consequences is more showing than talking.

information processing

organizational aspects of

People with autism find it difficult to organize information processing in their minds. They are usually much slower than people without autism, especially when it comes to information processing that does not follow a predictable pattern: every unexpected event is an enormous challenge for people with autism, and information that was not expected is much harder for them to analyze and process. When everything runs exactly as expected, or in a structured environment where there are no unexpected questions or events, but everything follows a fixed pattern, a fixed script, a fixed procedure, and there are only a limited number of possibilities for what the information can be … then it may be that people with autism are actually extremely fast in processing the (precisely defined in advance and therefore expected, predictable set of) information. People with autism have great difficulty with unpredictability.

information needs

of conversation partner

…!? 108

initiating contact / taking initiative

bldn 48-50

integrative intelligence

see ‘central coherence’

interrogations

a&e 124

Traditional open-ended questions, such as "What happened?" or "What's wrong?" are not immediately the best approach. Because of their weak central coherence, people with autism cannot see the forest for the trees, also not regarding their own experiences and perceptions. This problem, known as a typical autistic problem concerning 'episodic memory', leads to the classic way of questioning often not resulting in an accurate problem formulation. People with autism find it particularly difficult to distinguish between what is relevant and what is incidental. Telling what exactly happened at a certain moment (the facts of an event), without, for example, getting lost in a lot of unnecessary details, can already be a major challenge. Especially in reporting their feelings, people with autism experience serious difficulties: either nothing comes out, or a confused and associative story emerges. A more structured and directive (but not manipulative…!) way of questioning is indicated, and questioning techniques that are visual and less emotional, such as Likert scales or sorting and checking systems, are more effective. Traditional open questions, such as "What happened?" or "What is the matter?" are not immediately the best starting point.

police interrogations etc.

a&e 124

Traditional open-ended questions, such as "What is going on?", "Tell me about your problems?" are not immediately the best approach. Because of their weak central coherence, people with autism cannot see the forest for the trees, also not regarding their own experiences and perceptions. This problem, known as a typical autistic problem concerning 'episodic memory', leads to the classic way of questioning often not resulting in an accurate problem formulation. People with autism find it particularly difficult to distinguish between what is relevant and what is incidental. Telling what exactly happened at a certain moment (the facts of an event), without, for example, getting lost in a lot of unnecessary details, can already be a major challenge. Especially in reporting their feelings, people with autism experience serious difficulties: either nothing comes out, or a confused and

associative story emerges. A more structured and directive (but not manipulative…!) way of questioning is indicated, and questioning techniques that are visual and less emotional, such as Likert scales or sorting and checking systems, are more effective. Even normally gifted people with autism have difficulty communicating verbally. Moreover, they have the greatest difficulty organizing their own thoughts and putting them into perspective. To address both problems somewhat, it is important to have them write as much as possible. Writing is much slower than talking. You get visual feedback from it, and you don't have to simultaneously pay attention to the reactions of the person you are communicating with. Experience shows that gifted people with autism can express their thoughts and feelings much better on paper than in a conversation. When assessing the experience of people with autism, projection is the biggest pitfall for anyone who wants to guide people with autism psychologically, therapeutically, or otherwise. Assessing people with autism is particularly difficult, not only because of their autism, but also because of our own normal thinking. The challenge for the assessor lies mainly in setting aside their own 'neurotypical projections' and trying to project a 'normal' non-autistic interpretation onto a person with autism, who perceives and experiences events fundamentally differently. Even more than when questioning people without autism, we must therefore check whether we are correctly interpreting what they say. In doing so, we must check not only the images and concepts, but even the literal words: due to their different language comprehension, people with autism can sometimes give a very personal meaning to certain words or expressions (idiosyncratic communication).

Personal

I have personal experience that in contacts with assessors, psychiatrists, police officers, courts, etc., people usually 'catch' me on my disturbed communication and do not give me the chance to tell my story and present my defense. They usually 'entangle' me in my communication problems, without seeking the underlying truth and reality. So the truth often does not come out. My communication is also misinterpreted, and wrong conclusions are drawn, because my handicap is not recognized and there is no understanding of how to conduct a conversation with me, a person with autism (if they want to give me a fair chance). They fixate on the communication problems and base their conclusions on them, instead of bypassing the communication problems and going directly to the truth. For example, they think that my communication problems indicate that I am not telling the truth. Or they draw conclusions from it about my behavior, my (guilt) feelings, or my intentions, my motives, my chances of recidivism. Whereas disturbed communication in people with autism does not immediately indicate that they also effectively have more chances of recidivism or are trying to hide bad intentions or have no feelings of guilt, and so on. They only have difficulties communicating about it 'normally', like others. It is very difficult for a person with autism to come across as 'convincing' and 'sincere' and 'credible', as disturbed communication is part of the essence of autism spectrum disorders.

e-mail Dr. Lieve Dams, psychiatrist with experience in autism:

"Often people also do not get the chance to tell their story during the CBM (Commission for the Protection of Society) hearing, that usually goes really fast. I can imagine that for someone with ASD, within such a tense situation, it is difficult to convey the message with the right words and attitude. This too, if it is a problem, should then be conveyed in the report. The commission also always attaches great importance to having gone through the crime scenario and confessing that you effectively committed the crime. For ASD individuals

who strive for truth, who cannot stand injustice, this is often difficult, as a file in the statements is not always very nuanced." "I myself have fought for years with and for the interned, and you will also know that people with ASD were also interned, with the diagnosis 'psychopath', as this clinically in a short interview, often 'seems' to give the same symptoms. Actually, people with ASD should not be interned, as with clear diagnostics and guidance, the chance of recidivism can really be greatly reduced. But, that is within forensic psychiatry, and certainly towards the Judiciary, still a long way to go."

intrusive

…!? 106

They adapt their communication style too little to others. Worse still, they often impose a certain 'reception pattern' on others, e.g., they constantly steer the conversation back to their favorite topic or theme. Young children do not adapt their language use to the receiver. For example, they are not polite in a context where that is required. It also happens that they do not know how to adjust their voice volume to the situation and they then speak either too loudly or too softly depending on the context. Just like many younger children, a number of children, young people, and adults with autism continue to formulate their thoughts aloud, even in situations where this can be disruptive, such as in class. They especially have difficulty flexibly adapting their style of communication to the context. People without autism do this intuitively. You talk differently at home than during a job interview. You speak differently in a pub than in an important meeting. In a conversation with a neighbor, you use a different style than in a conversation with a complete stranger. Gifted people with autism often have a limited range of communication styles. Whether they are talking to a lawyer or the greengrocer, their style is often identical. Some, for example, are very formal, even in informal situations. There are also those who do adapt their style, but it then feels artificial, because it is a literal imitation of the behavior of others. It doesn't come across as genuine, but feels impersonal or even clumsy. Young children often imitate a communication style from television programs. It is not uncommon for a child with autism to speak 'Walt Disney' Dutch, as in cartoons.

inversion of personal pronouns

Bldn 15

When speech did develop, it was rarely communicative and showed striking abnormalities such as echolalia, inversion of personal pronouns, and literal and idiosyncratic language use.

illogical fears

a&e 121-122

People with autism, just like any of us, can also be scared and have anxiety. Anxiety is even, alongside depression, one of the most common problems in autism. A Dutch study found that among a group of 44 children with an autism spectrum disorder, 84% of them met the criteria for some form of anxiety disorder. Temple Grandin, an American woman with autism,

says that during her puberty, anxiety was her primary emotion. Any change in classroom routine, for example, caused intense anxiety for her. In addition to common fears, we often notice so-called illogical fears in them. Children with autism, for example, can be afraid of a certain color, and even adults with autism can show fear because of something that others consider completely harmless. We call these fears illogical, but that only applies from a non-autistic point of view. They are only seemingly illogical. From the point of view of the person with autism, these fears are just as logical as the fears that people without autism have. When understanding and treating illogical fears in people with autism, it is primarily important to try to discover the 'autistic logic' behind the fear. Once we grasp that, the so-called illogical fears become very understandable. Illogical fears are therefore not addressed through feeling, but through thinking. Loes, a four-year-old girl with autism, did not want to use the potty at the daycare center. This not only complicated the toilet training that had been set up for her, but her behavior also caused the childcare workers headaches. As soon as they brought Loesje towards the potty, she started screaming, threw herself on the floor, and pulled herself free from the caregiver's hands. At first, it was thought that Loes simply did not want to and was therefore showing resistance to change. But when Loes's mother saw the potty, she immediately knew what was wrong. Loes was not resistant but afraid! The potty was red, and Loes had a panic fear of the color red. She had once cut herself on a knife with a red handle, and her autistic brain had not linked the pain to the entire action of cutting, nor to the entire knife, but to one detail, namely the red color of the knife. Since then, Loes was afraid of everything red and, for example, no longer wore her (previously) favorite red sweater. As soon as the caregivers heard the mother's story, Loesje's fear was no longer illogical. Loes's example shows that, entirely in line with what is known about the expression of emotions, fear in people with autism does not always manifest as fear. Illogical fears can sometimes lead to panic reactions but also to behavior that rather suggests resistance, stubbornness, or anger. In young children and in people with severe limitations, it is often not easy, sometimes even impossible, to discover the autistic connection or logic behind the seemingly illogical fear because they cannot talk about it. For more gifted people with autism, talking about the feeling does not help either. For illogical fears of more gifted people with autism, there is only one remedy: to discover the autistic logic and correct it through explanation and clarification. In this way, the 'autistic logic' can make way for a more realistic logic.

hypochondria

In the context of their 'autistic' logic, their 'autistic' illogical fears, hypochondria can sometimes occur more frequently in people with autism.

'jumping from topic to topic'

lack

of communication

a&e 37-38

Johan, a young man with autism, had the impression that others paid little attention to him. He also felt misunderstood. For example, he had often been hungry, but nobody had given him anything to eat. During a conversation with a counselor, it came to light that Johan thought others could see his hunger. It was a real 'Eureka' experience for Johan to hear that others cannot perceive his hunger unless he communicates that feeling. Johan mistakenly thought that others could see his hunger. Johan does express his feelings, but does not communicate them, and certainly not in a way that others can understand. People with autism express their feelings. But they do so in a different way than other people, often extremely and even more often not adapted to the context. They have difficulties communicating their feelings in a way that is understandable to the environment. A person with autism expresses it as follows: "The feelings of the autistic person themselves are often completely comparable to those of the non-autistic person. However, the autistic person does not succeed in conveying these in a way that is understandable to others. Thus, you very quickly come across as angry, while that is not the intention at all. The more an autistic person tries to convey their emotions, the less of it gets across." Time and again it is guesswork to find out what someone with autism feels. The question from the person with autism "do you see what I feel?" must often be answered negatively by us, because people with autism do not share in the universal emotional language and because the environment does not or insufficiently knows their specific way of expressing themselves. Yet they, just like us, have the need to be understood. Their book of feelings is not really closed, but the language in which they write it is sometimes unreadable and very often cryptic for non-autistics. If we want to understand them better in their feelings, then we must observe very well and learn to read their language.

of coherence

…!? 108

learning

a different way of learning

@ 21

People with autism learn in a different way. Skills that 'ordinary' young people discover spontaneously must be taught to them in a targeted manner. This involves, on the one hand, teaching the skills themselves that are necessary for social development. On the other hand, it also involves how, when, where, and why to apply these skills, depending on and in function of the right context.

'learning' or 'unlearning'

@ 21

People with autism learn in a different way. Skills that 'ordinary' young people discover spontaneously must be taught to them in a targeted manner.

@ 24

Caregivers and parents believe that undesirable behavior should be 'unlearned'. From our perspective on autism, however, it should rather be a matter of 'learning' behavior than 'unlearning' it.

- We assess whether and to what extent the environment poses an obstacle for the person with autism.
- We clarify, explicate, and concretize how the person with autism can behave in a more 'efficient' and socially acceptable manner. We teach behavioral strategies and techniques.
- We provide clarity and concretize time and place for activities, conversations, asking questions, carrying out activities, and completing tasks.
- Enabling and clarifying where, when, and how pursuing personal goals should be possible must lead, for the person with autism, to a greater awareness of what is socially acceptable and to more socially acceptable behavior. It is important that both the needs of the person with autism and the norms and possibilities of the environment and society are taken into account.

@ 22

The difficulties people with autism have in terms of social integration and their sometimes 'autistic' way of reacting should not be an alibi for denying them participation in social life, but should be the starting point for supporting them in their self-development in social interaction. However, some people with autism cross the line of social acceptability due to a lack of social insight and weak perspective-taking. They sometimes need help in this area and have the right to be supported in finding a socially acceptable solution.

@ 23

Young people and adults with autism rely on the creativity of their support network to offer them alternatives to meet their need for social life.

@ 30-32

Explicating values and norms. The maladaptive behavior of people with autism is viewed with suspicion by society. There is little tolerance for 'deviant' behavior. Sometimes people with a developmental disorder seem to have no values or norms. People with autism have problems with perspective-taking and empathy, causing them to insufficiently take others into account, even if this happens unconsciously. Sometimes they impulsively give in to their desires. Sensing social rules is not their strong suit. Yet, individuals with a developmental disorder do have values and norms, which are formed at home and at school. Many people with autism are even very rigid regarding rules. How someone behaves is shaped from different angles: * What is legally permitted or not. * What is socially or societally acceptable. This depends on the context/group/situation you are in. * One's own freedom. One's own

choices. How do you want to shape your own life? What are the goals you pursue? What is the purpose of your behavior: what and how do you want to achieve it? People with autism have particular difficulty with the second and third aspects. They sometimes behave inappropriately. You can try to put an end to this behavior through agreements, rules, behavior-modifying techniques, and, in extreme necessity, even medication. Sometimes this is successful. But if the environment only focuses on stopping the inappropriate behavior, a solution often does not emerge. Much more important is to ask oneself why someone exhibits this behavior. The behavior is then the tip of the iceberg. Many factors can play a role beneath the surface: insufficient knowledge and/or experience, a lack of performance skills (the performance deficit), weak communicative skills, deficient social skills, lack of social insight, insufficient impulse control, lack of ability to deal with one's own emotions, lack of ability to recognize and deal with the emotions of others, vulnerability to peer pressure, manipulation, and other external influences, vulnerability and defenselessness against internal influences, impulses, and (biological) feelings, et cetera. Often it is not a matter of 'not wanting' to behave better, but of 'not being able to'. In learning positive, beneficial, and socially acceptable behavior, people with autism need our help and support (and that of others). Teaching skills. People with autism have difficulty with 'spontaneous' learning, due to their problems with imagination (visualization), social interaction, and communication. Everything must be explicated (expressed) and visualized and concretized for them. Moreover, people with autism often have difficulties applying what they have learned (the theory) in daily practice. This transfer problem requires much attention: * by extensively and clearly (and comprehensibly for them) answering their many sometimes 'strange' or extremely naive and 'silly' questions; * by 'unnecessarily' (extremely) repeating a lot; * by being attentive to their sometimes illogical fears, reasonings, or 'thought twists' that hinder the correct application of what they have learned in practice; * by preventing or resolving misunderstandings: by extensively and 'unnecessarily' clarifying a lot and checking (verifying) whether what you told them has 'sunk in' and whether they understood you correctly, as you intended. The confidant or mentor plays an important role in helping the person apply new knowledge and skills in daily situations.

…!? 59

To be as clear as possible, we should also avoid any negation in our language. By saying what is not allowed or not possible, a person with autism does not know what is then possible or allowed. For example: Lies takes her brother's toy. The father says: 'Lies, don't do that!' First, Lies must understand what that message refers to: what am I not allowed to do? For people with autism, who have difficulty deriving meanings from context, this is already quite a task. But suppose Lies does understand that father is talking about taking the toy. It is not clear from father's message what Lies *can* or even *should* do. Father would do much better to say: 'Lies, play with your own dolls', then it is clear what Lies can or may do instead. Negative statements such as 'no', 'stop', 'cut it out', 'get rid of that', 'not like that' do not provide clarity for someone with autism. E.g. When we make it clear to a child that it is not allowed to climb on the cupboard, we do not say 'no' but 'come here'. This is in positive speech form. People with autism understand positive speech forms more easily. Our language is also full of vague expressions like maybe, soon, about, later… try to make things as concrete and clear as possible.

a&e 98

People with autism react very differently to emotions than people without autism, and we must accept their feelings. We cannot prescribe what feelings they should feel. However, we can work on their behavior, the way they express their feelings, and clarify and teach them socially appropriate/desirable alternatives.

listening

a different way of listening to understand people with autism

…!? 63-65, 110-111

To avoid communication disorders as much as possible, we must not only adapt our 'speaking' but also the way we 'listen' to people with autism. Because communication is a demanding task for people with autism, they will not always communicate spontaneously. Even with normally gifted people with autism, we see that they prefer to make enormous efforts to solve a problem themselves rather than asking for help. It is therefore important to pay attention to the communicative signals they give in and through their behavior, and if necessary, to initiate communication ourselves. Furthermore, a person with autism, even a highly gifted one, has difficulty correctly shaping a communication and conveying it so that the listener also understands what is meant: * Communication from a person with autism can be misleading. Perhaps they cannot find the right words and say it differently than intended, or their communication is echolalic or idiosyncratic. * Emotions can also be confused and/or communicated incorrectly. Facial expressions and body language may not match the real content of a message. * The communication style can be confusing and/or inappropriate. It is therefore very important to be redundant, and to make sure that the message sent by the person with autism is also correctly understood by us, if necessary by repeating and asking whether the message you understood is indeed the message the person with autism intended. Giving people time and space and supporting them in their communication (helping them find words and being patient) is therefore essential.

lists

a&e 126

Show more than talk. One of the most important doing activities in conversations about socio-emotional themes is visualizing: via drawings, photos, diagrams, charts… The rule of visualizing also applies to conversations about feelings. Make abstract meanings as concrete as possible by making them visible. A simple drawing can already clarify a lot. All sorts of lists are also a handy tool. People with autism love to classify, label, and categorize things into boxes and lists. Only then does the world become manageable. Therefore, all sorts of lists can be drawn up together. A list of what they are good at and what they are not good at, a list of situations that provoke anxiety and situations in which they feel safe, a list of problems and solutions…

literal understanding

logic

autistic logic

'making transitions' / 'switching'

…!? 80

Making transitions is difficult for all people with autism. They have difficulty with the concept of 'stop'. They can sometimes find it difficult to stop something and then switch to something else. Especially if they are engaged in their favorite or stereotypical activities, or if they are doing something they consider very important.

manipulation

by others

a&e 155

Due to their lack of empathy, people with autism, however gifted they may be, remain naive and vulnerable. Therefore, people with autism must be able to count on our support. We live in a world where manipulation occurs. People with autism lack the empathy to avoid being manipulated themselves. We can teach them some scenarios, but fundamentally they remain with an inability to timely notice the pitfalls for themselves in the many and rapidly changing interactions between people. People with autism sometimes need to be protected against the less good intentions of others. They too often become victims of others because they do not see through the evil intentions.

meaning assignment

errors in

memory

'poor memory'

See also: transfer problems E.g.: I can read a hundred times what soup we are having today, and still forget it. And I am also very bad at remembering names.

autobiographical

episodic

fragmentary

a&e 124

Because of their weak central coherence, people with autism cannot see the forest for the trees. This also applies to their own experiences and perceptions. This problem, known as a typical autistic problem concerning 'episodic memory', means that the classic way of questioning often does not lead to an accurate problem formulation. People with autism find it particularly difficult to distinguish between what is relevant and what is incidental. Telling what exactly happened at a certain moment (the facts of an event), without, for example, getting lost in a lot of unnecessary details, can already be a major challenge. Especially in reporting their feelings, people with autism experience serious difficulties: either nothing comes out, or a confused and associative story emerges.

mental rituals

bldn 125-126

Resistance to change in gifted individuals with ASD manifests at a different, less concrete level and in small, barely noticeable details. Their resistance is primarily a 'mental' resistance. Things and events are supposed to be as they imagine them, in accordance with their ideas and expectations. They try to find a foothold in the world by collecting or creating rules and scripts themselves. Due to their intelligence, these can even be very complex. As long as nothing happens that contradicts these rules, an outsider notices nothing of this rigidity. It only becomes apparent when the rule is violated or not fully followed. Ritualistic behaviors also occur in normally gifted individuals with ASD. These are most intense during childhood but decrease from adolescence onwards and are often no longer easily recognizable in adulthood. In adults, we sometimes notice 'mental' rituals, sometimes even quite complex ones: for example, they must complete a certain line of thought or a mental collection before they can start something new. Mental rituals are, however, by definition unobservable.

mental resistance

bldn 125-126

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metavision

A person with autism lacks imagination and an overview of all the information and stimuli they have to process. As a result, they are unable to critically analyze whether their own way of seeing things is correct and corresponds to reality. Because the person with autism cannot create an overview, they also have no insight into their own perspective, no insight into their own view. They find it difficult to critically reflect on, or to 'see' how they themselves see things.

miscommunication

misdiagnosis

bldn 81-84

Accurate diagnosis is very important. It helps in understanding the cause of a person's problems, choosing the right approach and treatment, and formulating adapted future expectations. In that respect, a correct diagnosis can 'save lives'. Individuals with ASD often remain without a classification or are misclassified. In this chapter, we describe what complicates classifying diagnostics: * autism is a 'subjective' diagnosis * the qualitative deficits typical of autism are not easily translated into a quantitative diagnostic toolkit * there is great phenotypic variability in the expression of autism, and symptoms vary with age and developmental level * differentiating autism from other disorders is complicated by diagnostic overlap of isolated symptoms and the occurrence of comorbidity. For example, some diagnosticians are aware of the essential characteristics of autism, but in the concrete practice of classification, they seem to interpret these characteristics – especially in normally gifted individuals – quite narrowly, leading to autism. Autism is a developmental disorder. The diagnostician must therefore possess the necessary developmental psychological knowledge to correctly translate the DSM-IV criteria, e.g.: "inability to form relationships with peers appropriate to the developmental level". The criteria of DSM-IV and ICD-10 are useful because they list the relevant symptoms, but they are insufficient.

bldn 124

Gifted people with autism primarily lack social imagination: the ability to predict events based on past experiences. Many diagnosticians, however, do not immediately think of social imagination when considering the diagnostic criterion of absent or impaired imagination. A lack of this is also difficult to ascertain in a conversation or test.

bldn 89

The great phenotypic variability also causes many problems. Autism spectrum disorders not only manifest differently between individuals but also within the same person. The autism picture manifests differently depending on the environment and especially the age.

bldn 49-50

In the pompous or rigidly formalistic type, social problems are very subtle. Individuals belonging to this type are excessively polite or formal. They are aware of others and the importance of appropriate interactions and therefore adhere very strictly to social conventions. As children, they usually had clear problems with social interactions and were mostly classifiable under one of the other social subtypes mentioned above. Due to their good intellectual abilities, they gradually manage to compensate for and camouflage many of these difficulties. In literature, this is often described as 'progress', but it is not genuine progress in social development, rather the learning of various alternative strategies to appear as normal as possible and to survive optimally. For example, it is noticeable that these individuals try to grasp social events intellectually: they memorize certain social rules and 'survive' social activities based on learned or acquired 'scripts' ('scenarios', 'playbooks'). However, they lack the intuition necessary to understand the subtleties of interpersonal interaction. They adhere very strictly to social rules and have difficulty adapting to situations where the expected behavior deviates from the known scenario. Lack of empathy and social naivety are most characteristic of this group. We find this subtype most often in highly gifted adults with autism, and many of them receive a diagnosis of Asperger's Disorder. The social problems of individuals of the pompous/rigidly-formalistic type cannot be identified through a few casual contacts, conversations, or tests, because their intellectual approach allows them to react quite appropriately in those situations. Their social problems only become apparent in more intensive and longer-lasting contacts where spontaneity, empathy, and emotional support are required. There is a correlation between the subtypes and intelligence. We also see a shift in type according to age: a child who is very clearly active but bizarre in social interaction as a teenager may have been passive or even aloof as a toddler. Also, depending on the context, the same person can exhibit behavior from a different subtype: children, young people, and adults can function differently at home than at work and, for example, actively initiate contact at home but be rather passive at school or work.

misinterpreting

misunderstandings

…!? 112-114

Do not assume too quickly that the message is understood by people with autism, even highly gifted ones. People with autism especially have difficulty with meanings that change according to the context. People with autism often miss the 'message behind the message', the 'question behind the question', and get stuck in the literal meanings of words or expressions, or in meanings that are only applicable in the context in which they learned the word. People with autism often do not understand the intention behind the question or behind the words. This is because they do not see the 'reality behind the reality': they miss the 'bigger picture'. Because they do not perceive the connection between your words and

the broader context. People find it very difficult to 'see' the context and the connection with what is happening around them and the broader context. They find it difficult to distinguish the important from the unimportant. They find it difficult to distinguish main issues from side issues. They also cannot absorb much information at once. You have to give them time to process information. And they are very quickly distracted (by sounds, or by conspicuous visual elements), or let their attention be caught by unimportant details in the story, the message, or the question. Also, their understanding of words is often idiosyncratic. This means that they give it a meaning that only they give it, and that does not correspond to the normal meaning of the word or expression. So be redundant and make sure (several times) that they have understood what you wanted to say, that they have understood the message correctly, that they have understood what the essence of it was, that they have been able to distinguish between what was relevant and what was not relevant. Often, people with autism are aware of their limitation and will themselves (ask to) repeat the message or information several times. Then be patient and repeat with them. Make sure that they have certainly understood what the intention of your message was. (Even highly gifted) people with autism have great difficulty with pragmatics. * Visualize and concretize. Make a text, a list of main points, or a diagram. Talk about concrete situations, say literally what you mean. * Make the information clear and unambiguous. Create an overview. Be patient. * Be redundant; repeat a lot and repeat where necessary. Frequently check back with the person with autism to see if he/she has understood everything and in the right way.

…!? 63-65, 110-111

To avoid communication disorders as much as possible, we must not only adapt our 'speaking' but also the way we 'listen' to people with autism. Because communication is a demanding task for people with autism, they will not always communicate spontaneously. Even with normally gifted people with autism, we see that they prefer to make enormous efforts to solve a problem themselves rather than asking for help. It is therefore important to pay attention to the communicative signals they give in and through their behavior, and if necessary, to initiate communication ourselves. Furthermore, a person with autism, even a highly gifted one, has difficulty correctly shaping a communication and conveying it so that the listener also understands what is meant: * Communication from a person with autism can be misleading. Perhaps they cannot find the right words and say it differently than intended, or their communication is echolalic or idiosyncratic. * Emotions can also be confused and/or communicated incorrectly. Facial expressions and body language may not match the real content of a message. * The communication style can be confusing and/or inappropriate. It is therefore very important to be redundant, and to make sure that the message sent by the person with autism is also correctly understood by us, if necessary by repeating and asking whether the message you understood is indeed the message the person with autism intended. Giving people time and space and supporting them in their communication (helping them find words and being patient) is therefore essential.

narcissism

a&e 66-69

People with autism often have difficulty seeing the emotion behind the behavior of others. As a result, they often come across as egocentric. True empathy presupposes that you can empathize and sympathize with other people who have experienced, or are experiencing,

something that you yourself have not (yet) experienced. People with autism have difficulty with this. They do not sufficiently put themselves in the other person's shoes, but recognize a situation or scenario that they themselves have experienced. They fall back on their own experiences instead of empathizing with the other person's experience. As long as the other person feels the same as what they themselves felt in a particular situation, they will react appropriately. Their lack of empathetic abilities only becomes apparent when their own experience does not entirely match how another person experiences or has experienced a particular situation. Then they come across as very egocentric. That said, it can be stated that no one makes as much effort as people with autism to be empathetic. Despite their handicap, they do everything they can to be as empathetic as possible, but in 'their own way'. They calculate and figure out how best to react. They proceed very cognitively to be as empathetic as possible. Unfortunately, empathy often has more to do with intuition and unwritten logic than with real reasoning and classic intelligence. Normally gifted people with autism not only resort to their own experiences, sometimes they seem very empathetic because they fall back on learned scenarios. They have, as it were, a library of situations in their heads, from which they have learned how people then feel. For people with autism, empathy is a matter of working, of 'calculating' and 'deciphering'. They also need more time and 'hints'. People without autism do not have to work at all to be empathetic; it is something instinctive and intuitive. It is precisely this intuition that people with autism lack. In that respect, people with autism deserve much praise and admiration: probably no one makes such heavy efforts to empathize with others as people with autism. Because it is not self-evident for them, they have to make many efforts. Accusing people with autism of not having enough empathy is therefore not fair. You don't blame a visually impaired or blind person for not seeing, do you? On the contrary, we must accommodate people with autism in their handicap and not 'get' them on their shortcomings. We must give them the time and space, and support if necessary, to be able to take a full place in society and live a full life, despite their social limitations.

a&e 75

The empathetic deficits in people with autism regularly lead to the question of whether people with autism are not, in fact, a bit psychopathic. However, there is a fundamental difference between psychopathy and autism. Psychopaths, unlike autistics, can usually take the perspective of others. They understand (cognitively) quite well that they are causing suffering to their victim, but it hardly touches them emotionally. In people with autism, there is no problem with emotional responsiveness, but with understanding. Once they understand that their own behavior elicits negative emotions in another (and this usually only happens after someone has explained it to them), they usually express their regret and also genuinely 'feel' for the person. A psychopath is not ignorant, but insensitive. An autistic person is not insensitive, but primarily ignorant. But also often just clumsy. Autism is, to a large extent, a performance problem. People with autism often have the theoretical knowledge, but are clumsy in applying it in practice. They do look for a solution, a possible reaction, when confronted with a painful situation of someone else, especially if they are encouraged to do so. But their problem-solving has an 'autistic' tinge.

bldn 48-50

The social disorder in people with autism primarily concerns qualitative differences with the social interaction of normal people, especially regarding the reciprocity of social interaction.

People with autism, for example, have problems with shared attention. The social disorder can manifest itself in very diverse ways. Four social subtypologies are distinguished (four types of manifestations of the disorder in social interaction): The aloof or inattentive type is the easiest to recognize, and individuals in this group most closely match the classic image of autism. A large number of this group also have an intellectual disability. However, a small number of normally gifted people with autism also belong to this variant within the autism spectrum. People with autism of the aloof type come across as indifferent to other people, especially peers and strangers. They often accept physical approach from familiar and trusted people. They seem to have no interest in other people, and contact is mainly instrumental, such as pulling other people along as a kind of instrument they use to obtain a certain object. Individuals in the aloof group usually become very absorbed in their own, stereotypical activities. As they grow up, some learn to accept the presence of others, but they show little or no interest in others and rarely initiate contact themselves. The passive type presents a somewhat different picture. Individuals in this group rarely initiate an interaction spontaneously, but they passively accept the approach of others. They are, as it were, on the sidelines; they take no initiative themselves but follow at the request of others. This can make them acceptable partners for peers, for example, as playmates: they are willing to do what is asked of them. In some children, the problems only become apparent when we expect more initiative from them. Unlike the aloof group, we regularly see other diagnoses than autism in them: usually atypical autism, but sometimes even Asperger's syndrome. The active-but-bizarre type very actively initiates social contact. But because individuals of this type, like all other people with ASD, have problems with smoothly and fluently understanding interactions, their manner of contact is naive, strange, inappropriate, and one-sided. They make contact in an egocentric way: for example, they talk endlessly about their own themes or interests, they base their contact solely on themselves, and they have difficulty responding to the feelings, needs, or interests of others in their contact. Individuals of the active-but-bizarre type do initiate interaction with others, for example in a conversation or game, but they do not know how to join the conversation or game and often come across as intrusive and disruptive. A healthy distance seems to be lacking. Individuals in this group are often missed in diagnostics: they are labeled as behaviorally disturbed or antisocial. Many gifted individuals with ASD belong to this group. As a group, active-but-bizarre individuals generally have average to high intelligence, although there can be large individual differences. In the pompous or rigidly formalistic type, social problems are very subtle. Individuals belonging to this type are excessively polite or formal. They are aware of others and the importance of appropriate interactions and therefore adhere very strictly to social conventions. As children, they usually had clear problems with social interactions and were mostly classifiable under one of the other social subtypes mentioned above. Due to their good intellectual abilities, they gradually manage to compensate for and camouflage many of these difficulties. In literature, this is often described as 'progress', but it is not genuine progress in social development, rather the learning of various alternative strategies to appear as normal as possible and to survive optimally. For example, it is noticeable that these individuals try to grasp social events intellectually: they memorize certain social rules and 'survive' social activities based on learned or acquired 'scripts' ('scenarios', 'playbooks'). However, they lack the intuition necessary to understand the subtleties of interpersonal interaction. They adhere very strictly to social rules and have difficulty adapting to situations where the expected behavior deviates from the known scenario. Lack of empathy and social naivety are most characteristic of this group. We find this subtype most often in highly gifted adults with autism, and many of them receive a

diagnosis of Asperger's Disorder. The social problems of individuals of the pompous/rigidly-formalistic type cannot be identified through a few casual contacts, conversations, or tests, because their intellectual approach allows them to react quite appropriately in those situations. Their social problems only become apparent in more intensive and longer-lasting contacts where spontaneity, empathy, and emotional support are required. There is a correlation between the subtypes and intelligence. We also see a shift in type according to age: a child who is very clearly active but bizarre in social interaction as a teenager may have been passive or even aloof as a toddler. Also, depending on the context, the same person can exhibit behavior from a different subtype: children, young people, and adults can function differently at home than at work and, for example, actively initiate contact at home but be rather passive at school or work.

self-overestimation

bldn 248-249

Despite being aware of their difficulties, adolescents with autism rate their general social skills significantly more positively than parents and teachers. Parents rate social functioning lower than the participants do for themselves. In assessing the social functioning of gifted adults with autism, questions about the quality of execution and the degree of support in carrying out daily activities are probably more important than the question of whether or not they carry out these activities. The qualitative analysis shows that the majority of the individuals with autism studied need to be helped by their parents for the execution of most activities.

bldn 253

A detailed inquiry into the quality of execution of societal tasks with parents or other individuals in the environment provides a more realistic view of the capabilities and limitations of adults with ASD than self-reporting on whether or not these tasks are performed. All participants are supported and guided in their functioning, either by parents (or partner) or by healthcare providers.

bldn 254

The assessment of social functioning in adulthood is more favorable for normally to highly gifted individuals with ASD than for the entire spectrum, but relatively unfavorable compared to non-disabled peers. Only a small minority manage to live independently, hold a regular job, or maintain a partner relationship. These individuals perform many household and societal tasks, such as preparing meals, cleaning, managing finances, leisure activities, and going out, but they do so only thanks to the support of parents and healthcare providers. The specific limitations of gifted individuals with ASD only become apparent through an intensive (detailed) inquiry into the way they perform societal tasks.

bldn 296

A remarkable finding concerns the difference in assessment between the participants and the parents. The adult individuals with autism with a late diagnosis in the study assess their own social functioning significantly higher than their parents do, while adults with an early autism diagnosis hardly differ from their parents in their assessment. Most adolescents with autism have a rather unrealistic view of their own functioning and shortcomings. The current

research indicates that this is particularly the case for individuals with a late diagnosis. Given the finding that more participants with an early diagnosis receive professional help, we can assume that they are more aware of the support they receive in their social functioning. We suspect that participants with a late diagnosis do not notice the extensive help provided by parents or do not perceive it as help. The finding that individuals with a late diagnosis, in particular, rate their functioning higher than their parents or others in their environment do, has important implications for diagnostic practice. Especially in the case of a late diagnosis in adolescents and (young) adults, self-reporting is largely used to gather information about (social) functioning. When questioning a (young) adult with a suspected ASD, the reliability of self-reporting should be viewed with necessary critical sense, and it is advisable to involve at least the parents in the questioning and assessment of social functioning.

bldn 297

The reliability of self-reporting on (social) functioning in individuals with a late diagnosis is lower than in those with an early diagnosis. It is possible that the self-image of those with late diagnoses is more unrealistic because their parents do a lot for them or support them behind the scenes, and they therefore also have less insight into their shortcomings and difficulties.

naivety

a&e 156

Due to their lack of empathy, people with autism, however gifted they may be, remain naive and vulnerable. Therefore, people with autism must be able to count on our support. We live in a world where manipulation occurs. People with autism lack the empathy to avoid being manipulated themselves. We can teach them some scenarios, but fundamentally they remain with an inability to timely notice the pitfalls for themselves in the many and rapidly changing interactions between people. People with autism sometimes need to be protected against the less good intentions of others. They too often become victims of others because they do not see through the evil intentions.

a&e 108

Teach them resilience and skills to protect themselves, rather than trying to follow others and thus getting themselves into trouble. Or as Temple Grandin, an American woman with autism, expresses it herself: "When I was younger, I had to discover with discouragement that some people have bad intentions. This is something that all people with autism should learn."

'need to be cut short' / 'to interrupt'

negative feelings

a&e 33

People with autism have more negative feelings because they have more negative experiences. Due to their disability, their limited and/or different understanding of this world

and reality, they experience many more frustrations than we do. People with autism are under more stress.

neologism

bldn 280

network

building and maintaining a social network

neurotypical projections

a&e 107

Do not project your own experiential and emotional world onto that of someone with autism. You can empathize with others, someone with autism cannot. You understand situations differently than someone with autism, because you can give meaning to those situations and someone with autism little or not at all. People with autism live in a different world. Therefore, also be careful with interpreting so-called emotional experiences in people with autism. It is not because you experience a situation in a certain way, that someone with autism feels the same in the same situation. For example, do not expect someone with autism to also be sad in situations where other people are sad. Keep in mind that people with autism can be over- or under-sensitive to certain stimuli and that the emotional meaning of many situations escapes them because they do not understand them. Accept their different experience and certainly do not prescribe feelings.

a&e 124

When assessing the experience of people with autism, projection is the biggest pitfall for anyone who wants to guide people with autism psychologically or psychotherapeutically. If this guidance is particularly difficult for people with autism, it is not only because of the autism. Not autistic thinking but our thinking is the main obstacle… The challenge for the therapist lies mainly in setting aside their own 'neurotypical projections': avoiding problems in order to project a 'normal', non-autistic experience onto a person who perceives and experiences fundamentally differently. Because of their different perception and thinking, people with autism sometimes experience situations very differently than people without autism. We should not conclude too quickly that we accurately know the experience of people with autism. Psychological guidance is the interface where the 'theory of mind' of the client and that of the therapist meet or do not.

NLD (Nonverbal Learning Disorder)

@ 21

People with autism learn in a different way. Skills that 'ordinary' young people discover spontaneously must be taught to them in a targeted manner.

bldn 119

Diagnosis in many cases depends on who makes the diagnosis: a pedagogue might quickly diagnose autism, a speech therapist will focus more on language and might conclude a semantic-pragmatic syndrome, a psychologist with an interest in neuropsychology will sooner see indications for NLD, and a psychiatrist might rather see a schizoid personality disorder. The diagnosis of autism should therefore be multidisciplinary.

bldn 33-34

Characteristic are the deficits in tactile and visual perception, psychomotor coordination, visuospatial organization, nonverbal problem-solving, and memory for more complex and new material. There are also deficits regarding strategic skills and establishing cause-effect relationships. Individuals with an NLD profile are strong in verbal abilities such as memory, auditory perception, vocabulary, and production, but there is poor pragmatics and speech prosody. As a result, they cannot grasp subtle, important nuances in communication and have difficulty understanding incongruities and humor. They have problems with adapting to new situations and with social perception and adaptation. There are difficulties with recognizing facial expressions and understanding non-verbal communication. They often lack social insight. There is little physical exploration of the environment: exploration happens more by asking many questions than by looking and manipulating. Rourke and his colleagues assume that deficits in central processing processes in the right hemisphere are at the origin of these problems. Many of these clinical characteristics have previously been described in literature under terms such as right hemisphere deficit syndrome (Voeller, 1986) and socio-emotional learning disorder (Denckla, 1983). NLD is a neuropsychological working hypothesis and not a psychiatric diagnosis and is therefore not included in the DSM-IV, but the concept finds wide application in clinical practice. Especially the clinical consequences of NLD with regard to psychosocial and communicative functioning show a striking resemblance to the picture we see in gifted people with a pervasive developmental disorder. Where it was originally thought that their language abnormalities were mainly verbal, it is noticeable that in normally gifted individuals, it is mainly the non-verbal and social aspects of communication that are impaired. This creates great confusion with NLD. According to Volkmar and Klin (1998), there is an overlap between Asperger's Disorder and NLD, but not between 'High Functioning Autism' and NLD. In a study where they compared the neuropsychological profile in Asperger's Disorder with the profile in gifted individuals with Autistic Disorder, Klin, Volkmar, Sparrow, Cicchetti, and Rourke (1995) found a high degree of correspondence between Rourke's NLD profile and the neuropsychological profile in Asperger's Disorder: 18 out of 21 subjects with Asperger's Disorder showed the NLD profile (operationalized in Rourke's 22 NLD items, 1989), and only one of the 19 subjects with 'high-functioning autism' (HFA). Based on these and other studies (including Lincoln, Courchesne, Kilman, Elmasian & Allen, 1988), it seems that the neuropsychological profile of people with Asperger's Disorder shows a great similarity with the NLD profile. Recently, Rourke himself stated that individuals with Asperger's Disorder 'exhibit virtually all the characteristics of NLD' (Rourke & Tsatsanis, 2000, p. 248). Asperger's Disorder and NLD are both descriptions of the same phenomenon but from a different perspective, respectively psychiatric (behavioral) and neuropsychological diagnostics. Verté et al. (2001) compared children with NLD, children with Asperger's Disorder, and children with high-functioning autism (HFA) on a number of neuropsychological tests that assess specific skills and deficits from the NLD profile, and found significant differences between the three groups on only 5

out of 23 variables. They conclude that the NLD profile not only aligns with the neuropsychological profile of children with Asperger's Disorder but also with that of children with HFA. The NLD profile also occurs in other disorders, such as ADHD. It is assumed that approximately 10% of all children with learning and behavioral disorders exhibit an NLD profile (Hellingman-Fernhout, 2000). The diagnosis of NLD has hitherto been insufficiently validated, and the relationship with a number of child psychiatric syndromes, including those in the Pervasive Developmental Disorders section, needs further investigation.

'no, saying'

a&e 96

Verbalizing their intentions, feelings, and expectations is not always easy for people with autism. Conveying their intentions to the other person so that the message also arrives in the right way is therefore not self-evident. This also means: it is difficult for the person with autism to (verbally) stand up for themselves. Teaching vocabulary, expressions, scripts, and scenarios to express themselves in this area can help. But for the person with autism, it is also not self-evident to transfer skills learned in one situation and apply them in another situation. Something learned in a learning situation is not automatically applied in daily life. People with autism therefore sometimes find it difficult to say 'no'. E.g.: During a course for young adults with autism, we had a structured learning moment. Tom learned in a role-play how he could say that he did not feel like having busy visitors in his room. After the practice situations, he could perfectly indicate how he could stand up for himself by verbalizing his feelings. That same evening, he was resting on his bed when another participant busily entered his room and asked him to go to the bar with him. Tom went to the bar with him, against his will, as he later told his counselor. What he had learned in the role-play he apparently could not apply in the totally different context of his room.

'not being able to' vs. 'not wanting to'

…!? 39

Communication, social skills, smooth cooperation with others; adaptation to changes and unexpected events,… all this can sometimes go wrong with people with autism. It is often wrongly stated that 'children with autism do not want to communicate' or 'do not want to listen' or 'do not want to cooperate'… Nothing could be further from the truth. With them, it is rather a matter of 'not being able to' than 'not wanting to'. Everyone needs to be able to make themselves understood by others and to understand others; people with autism too. Perhaps you will communicate less or avoid social contacts if you: * repeatedly experience the powerlessness of not being able to communicate * often experience that your communication does not come across as you intend * hardly understand the other person * cannot follow the speed at which others think or speak * are not given the time to find your words * are not given the time to adapt to (unexpected) changes People with autism do not think or communicate 'less' than other people, but primarily 'differently'. Especially slower and associatively, on one track, and visually instead of auditorily. They cannot do two things at once, but can be very good at one particular thing. They have difficulty adapting and communicating and have difficulty seeing 'the bigger picture'. But they are observant of (sometimes very small) details. They think differently than other people, they have difficulty

saying the right thing at the right time to the right people, they have difficulty selecting information, they are slower than other people, they think on one track and have difficulty thinking or following conversations on more than one track at a time. They have difficulty processing information. Even though it sometimes seems, due to their enormous vocabulary and enormous flood of words, that they can express themselves just as well as anyone else – sometimes they just talk past the point for hours and fail to convey their message, also because they often do not even succeed in simply and correctly verbalizing the message they want to convey for themselves. People with autism also think 'associatively' and let themselves be carried away and/or sidetracked by details: they jump from detail to detail, make those exuberantly long and excessively lengthy and complex 'spaghetti' reasonings that are no longer followable, 'where a cat can no longer find its kittens', in which the essence and the main line are completely lost for the listener. It is difficult for the autistic person to limit themselves to the essence and to concentrate on the essence, because of their 'associative' ("jumping from one thing to another") thinking.

'not being understood, feeling'

a&e 37

The fact that people with autism communicate less spontaneously, less often, and differently about their feelings sometimes results in them being left alone with their feelings. That they are not, or incorrectly, understood. For example, I met a young man with autism who had been severely depressed for a long time. Nobody had noticed anything until then. People with autism are very little aware of this themselves. They do not realize that others often cannot see how they feel. Johan, a young man with autism, had the impression that others paid little attention to him. He felt misunderstood. For example, he had often been hungry, but nobody had given him anything to eat. During a conversation with a counselor, it came to light that Johan thought others could see his hunger. It was a real 'Eureka' experience for Johan to hear that others cannot perceive his hunger unless he communicates that feeling. Johan mistakenly thought that others could see his hunger. Johan does express his feelings, but does not communicate them, and certainly not in a way that others can understand.

'not being able to do two things at once'

…!? 111

'not being able to think and feel at the same time'

a&e 32

It seems that feeling and thinking simultaneously is difficult for people with autism. Either they feel (and then get overwhelmed by their emotions because they cannot put them into perspective), or they think (and have no room to experience the accompanying feelings).

a&e 73-74

People with autism need relatively much thinking time to empathize with someone else. In real life, that thinking time is not given. Real life is not a videotape that you can pause for a

moment to look something up in your encyclopedia of scenarios or your dictionary of facial expressions. The lack of empathy is therefore not reducible to merely a cognitive deficit, a lack of knowledge. Many normally gifted people with autism know many emotional terms and have an extensive collection of scenarios. They do not lack theoretical knowledge. The problems they have with understanding the emotional world are related to difficulties in several areas simultaneously: the integration of communication skills, emotional responsiveness, paying attention to the most relevant information, prioritizing social stimuli, and cognitive skills. The flow of human interactions is too swift for the slow processing of social information in people with autism. It's not just a deficit in theory of mind. On the contrary, given the efforts people with autism make to 'reason out' the inner world of others, one could even say they are the only ones who have a 'theory' of mind. People with autism have a deficit in a *hot* theory of mind. They are not quick-witted enough in their perspective-taking.

a&e 32

A possible explanation for the absence of emotional reactions in people with autism is that they have to put so much mental energy into purely intellectually and cognitively understanding what is happening to them that there is no mental space left for processing the emotional side of the matter. … . We often see that only when understanding of the purely intellectual side has come, the emotions are then also released. People with autism often react emotionally delayed to events. … It seems that feeling and thinking simultaneously is difficult for people with autism. Either they feel (and get overwhelmed by their emotions because they cannot put them into perspective), or they think (and have no room to experience the accompanying feelings).

a&e 97

With gifted people with autism, we can often put events into perspective 'afterwards' and thereby teach them to 'relativize', but there is a high chance that they will still be overwhelmed by their emotion next time.

nuance

a&e 128-129

Clarification and unambiguity are paramount in conversations with people with autism. Reality is never black and white, but people with autism have difficulty with nuances. Sometimes it is better to offer a limited but clear (=concrete) answer to a question from someone with autism than a comprehensive but vague answer. Sometimes a white lie can even achieve much more positive effect than an honest but confusing answer. With highly gifted people, we often notice that there is still a need to be able to 'grasp' the nuance in the message of others, although they have more difficulty understanding and discerning and deciphering nuances in the communication of others. Therefore, they will then ask longer and more questions, until they 'get' the nuance in the message of others. Often, gifted people with autism are well aware that there is a nuance but that they cannot quite grasp it. It is important then to slow down the communication, give them time, and answer their questions as well as possible, until they grasp the nuance. However, people often find this disturbing and annoying or even uncomfortable. Precisely because nuances are nuances for a reason; one sometimes wants to introduce subtle nuances into a message that is

sometimes sensitive or annoying in the context of the situation or in the presence of certain conversation partners. To avoid problems, one then introduces 'nuances' into the message. And the problem with people with autism is then that they have just as much difficulty 'grasping' and 'deciphering' these nuances. Which can lead to uncomfortable situations. Therefore: be as clear and as lucid as possible (and as understandable as possible for the person with autism) in your communication with people with autism.

…!? 110

Words and sentences do not always have a fixed meaning. To understand them, a dictionary is not enough. Gifted people with autism usually only know the dictionary definitions, but lack the talent to discover changes in meanings based on the way we pronounce words and sentences. It is the subtle signals of those non-verbal aspects of language that intuitively enable people without autism to deal flexibly with meanings. Because gifted people with autism primarily have difficulty with these subtle non-verbal signals, they often miss the nuances in messages. We convey these nuances, for example, through our intonation.

own comment

The nuance that gifted people with autism miss is often not in the verbal communication (language use), but rather in the communication style (the non-verbal aspects of communication). While they often possess a sufficiently nuanced vocabulary verbally, they have difficulty adapting their communication style to the circumstances or context, sufficiently nuancing their communication style so that it is appropriate for the context and that it is also clear to the conversation partner what (and with what purpose) the person with autism is trying to communicate. Often, a (gifted) person with autism can, for example, come across as 'angry', while he/she is not angry at all (but rather, for example, 'anxious' or 'worried' or 'happy' or 'insecure' or 'enthusiastic').

obsessive interests

a&e 114

People with autism often develop 'stereotypical interests' or 'autistic preoccupations'. They then focus entirely on these and can hardly dose them anymore.

sexuality

@ 21

Most children, young people, and adults with autism have sexual feelings, desires, and needs. Like other people, they can be very different in this regard. Some individuals never show any sexual interest. The environment even wonders if they are asexual. Others are very preoccupied with sex. For some, sex becomes an autistic preoccupation.

order

…!? 108

…!? 121

ordering

thoughts

a&e 124

Because of their weak central coherence, people with autism cannot see the forest for the trees. This also applies to their own experiences and perceptions. This problem, known as a typical autistic problem concerning 'episodic memory', means that the classic way of questioning often does not lead to an accurate problem formulation. People with autism find it particularly difficult to distinguish between what is relevant and what is incidental. Telling what exactly happened at a certain moment (the facts of an event), without, for example, getting lost in a lot of unnecessary details, can already be a major challenge. Especially in reporting their feelings, people with autism experience serious difficulties: either nothing comes out, or a confused and associative story emerges.

…!? 108

organizing

People with autism have difficulty maintaining an overview and organizing themselves. Visual aids in information processing and communication can help with this, for normally gifted individuals, e.g.: diagrams, lists of agenda items and agendas, a notebook, a noticeboard or whiteboard, a desktop or tablet, to-do lists, shopping lists, scribbled notes, reminders … but photos or drawings can also do wonders. Or even video or audio recordings (as a memory aid or communication tool).

organizational aspects of

communication

…!? 51

Sometimes they also cannot spontaneously organize communication. There are children with autism who can perfectly name all food items on request:

- What is this? 'Choco'
- And this here? 'Milk'
- And that there? 'Sandwiches' But despite the fact that they know the words, they do not succeed in spontaneously using those words in the function of a question. And so they ask for nothing at the table. As a parent or caregiver, you first have to ask the question yourself: 'And what would you like?' before they make their need or choice

known. Even regarding the function 'asking for', which is a very important function because it ensures that others help us meet our needs, we see that people with autism do not use it spontaneously enough. It seems as if some people with autism do not sufficiently discover the power of communication. We must distinguish between the spontaneous use of functions and the use 'on request'. For example, many parents know that their son or daughter with autism will rarely or never spontaneously tell them anything from school, but that they have to ask for that information. What we also often see is that communicating is apparently more difficult for them and requires more energy than solving a problem themselves. This even happens with normally gifted people with autism, and they usually have a large vocabulary and abstract language forms at their disposal. During a course for gifted young people with autism, it is striking how some find it easier to get a bottle of water from the kitchen than to ask for one at another table. Or they go around the table to get the platter of sandwich fillings from the other end instead of asking for it.

information processing

People with autism find it difficult to organize information processing in their minds. They are usually much slower than people without autism, especially when it comes to information processing that does not follow a predictable pattern: every unexpected event is an enormous challenge for people with autism, and information that was not expected is much harder for them to analyze and process. When everything runs exactly as expected, or in a structured environment where there are no unexpected questions or events, but everything follows a fixed pattern, a fixed script, a fixed procedure, and there are only a limited number of possibilities for what the information can be … then it may be that people with autism are actually extremely fast in processing the (precisely defined in advance and therefore expected, predictable set of) information. People with autism have great difficulty with unpredictability.

'our' adaptation

how?

a&e 147

Since the deficits in emotional intelligence are a consequence of the core problem of autism, they are not easy and only to a limited extent to overcome. Rather than forcing people with autism, we advocate a certain degree of acceptance of these deficits. If we want people with autism to take our feelings and intentions into account, we must first change *our* communication and make things clear, predictable, and manageable for them.

…!? 124

Traditional open-ended questions like 'What's wrong?', 'Tell me about it?' are not so easy for people with autism. Even normally gifted people with autism have difficulty communicating verbally. They have the greatest difficulty organizing their own thoughts. They have difficulty distinguishing what is relevant in a conversation and what is incidental. It is better to be somewhat directive, without imposing our will. It is best to give them time and space to process our words and to find the words they themselves want to transmit. Sometimes it can

help to communicate as much as possible in writing. Writing and reading is a much slower communication process. You also have a visual anchor. And you don't have to simultaneously pay attention to speaking *and* listening.

some practical tips

a&e 107-109

- People with autism already have it difficult enough with their own feelings. Therefore, do not overwhelm them with your own emotional expressions when they are upset or reacting emotionally. Stay calm and composed, however difficult that may be. Acting emotionally yourself only makes it more complicated for them. Do not expect someone with autism to (spontaneously) take into account other people's feelings. Do not expect too much effect from statements like: "Do this now to please me." Or: "If you do that, then I will be unhappy or sad." People with autism understand too little of the feelings of others to be able to take them into account. They are too little aware of the relationship between their own behavior and the feelings of others.
- Do not project your own experiential and emotional world onto that of someone with autism. You can empathize with others, someone with autism cannot. You understand situations differently than someone with autism, because you can give meaning to those situations and someone with autism little or not at all. People with autism live in a different world.
- Therefore, also be careful with interpreting so-called emotional experiences in people with autism. It is not because you experience a situation in a certain way, that someone with autism feels the same in the same situation. For example, do not expect someone with autism to also be sad in situations where other people are sad. Keep in mind that people with autism can be over- or under-sensitive to certain stimuli and that the emotional meaning of many situations escapes them because they do not understand them. Accept their different experience and certainly do not prescribe feelings.
- Be careful with emotionally charged statements from people with autism. If someone with autism, for example, says they are depressed, that is not necessarily so. People with autism have difficulty adequately verbalizing their feelings. They often imitate statements from others, echolalically, without it being an appropriate representation of their feeling at that moment.
- People with autism do not communicate their feelings so spontaneously. And if they do communicate, they can tune the wavelength too little to the receiver. Thus, someone can be very depressed while that is not perceptible to anyone. If you want someone with autism to feel good, first and foremost ensure an adapted and protected environment, ensure predictability, adjust your demands and do not set impossible demands, use rewards rather than punishments (punishments often do not help anyway). Teach someone with autism functional communication skills (such as asking for something, refusing something), so that frustrations are minimized, rather than teaching them to express their frustrations appropriately. An autism-adapted environment is *the* condition for a good feeling, both for people with autism and for parents and caregivers.
- Protect them from emotionally difficult situations. Avoid teaching skills that get them into trouble. Teaching a boy with autism to make contact with a girl is nice, but this

opens the door to all sorts of frustrations. A first, fleeting, and superficial contact will still work, but once the relationship with the girl requires more complex skills (such as empathy), the boy will fail and the girl will disengage. Such experiences will lead to great frustrations for the boy: lovesickness, feeling of failure, fear of new contacts, possibly even depression. Teach them to defend themselves and protect themselves, rather than trying to follow others. Or as Temple Grandin herself expresses it: "When I was younger, I had to discover with discouragement that some people have bad intentions. This is something that all people with autism should learn."

- Teach them rather too strict or too general rules that they can apply everywhere, than to expect them to sense the nuances of the world of feelings. The rule 'sometimes people don't see what you feel' presupposes that the person with autism can deduce someone else's ideas about themselves. That is too difficult for most people with autism. Teach them rather: "Nobody sees what you feel, so you must always say it."
- Teach them all sorts of tricks with which they can compensate for their lack of intuition. A boy with autism was often teased at school with his stereotypical conversation topic (a certain TV program). We could teach him the difference between well-intentioned interest and teasingly questioning, but the other children play this game so subtly that he would still realize too late each time that they were already teasing him. Therefore, it is better to advise him never to talk about his favorite TV program for longer than two minutes and to find another child. In this way, he may miss the well-intentioned interest of other children, but he will also never be teased for longer than two minutes.
- Avoid too abstract conversations about their feelings. Even if they can recognize and verbalize their feelings, people with autism often cannot imagine solutions for socio-emotional problems. Also, do not expect that if someone with autism knows what another person feels, they will also immediately know how best to deal with that feeling. Talk rather in terms of situations and (adapted) reactions in situations. Give them concrete and practical scripts for tackling socio-emotional problems. Make socio-emotional concepts concrete and visual and provide them with concrete solutions.

why?

a&e 117

However meaningful psychoeducation and psychological counseling may be with a view to making self-image positive, it is much more important to ensure that people with autism achieve more success in their lives. Programs like 'I am special' are little more than a drop in the ocean when the person with autism continuously fails in life. "They tell me I'm 'okay', but nothing works in my life and it's a mess…" For children and young people with low self-esteem, 'I am special' will probably bring little solace if, at the same time, their living environment is not adapted in such a way that they experience more successes than setbacks. It is up to the environment to adapt situations and developmental tasks so that people with autism can succeed in them. Surviving with autism is a beautiful goal but insufficient. Having success in life, despite autism, means much more in terms of quality of life. It is no coincidence that the word 'happiness' (geluk) is related to 'succeeded' (gelukt)… We can increase the self-esteem of people with autism by adapting the environment and expectations to the limitations of people with autism and by giving space to their talents.

bloknootje 2015

People with autism do not need pity. On the contrary, they wish to belong to society as full-fledged individuals, not despite but *with* their autism.

…!? 130

Someone with autism does not stop 'being autistic' at 4 p.m. He/she retains the handicap and the resulting difficulties with understanding, even when at home. Therefore, adjustments are necessary both in the home environment and in the work or school situation. In a familiar environment, people with autism often function very well. They have learned a number of routines and rules, and they know them. They function based on their memory, on their trust that their environment functions as it does every day. But what if the routines and habits change? What if the house is rearranged and the TV is placed elsewhere? What if the daily routine changes during the holidays? What if rules change or people are added or leave? What if someone new comes along who does not understand or (re)cognize the communication and empathy problems of the person with autism? What if that person cannot make themselves understood to the person with autism or does not recognize the specific, unique way of communicating of the person with autism? If there are no aids available at such moments, difficulties arise. Someone with autism needs aids that make the environment understandable, and that help them make themselves understandable to others.

…!? 126

A person with autism gets lost due to their handicap in a chaotic environment full of stimuli that are impossible to make sense of. Autism is not a behavioral disorder; it is a disorder in understanding. It is not the person with autism who is chaotic; the environment is a chaos for someone with autism. Consequence: it is not the person with autism who needs to be 'tackled' or treated, but the environment. If adjustments need to be made anywhere, it is in the environment, and not in the person. To help someone with autism, we must first change the environment, and thus ourselves. Improve the world, start with yourself…

'overestimation'

by others

…!? 105

…!? 111

bldn 128-129

In gifted individuals with ASD, very normal behavior can be present. When the environment is known, clear, and predictable, they can fall back on rules or scripts they have learned. Some gifted individuals with ASD have learned and acquired so much over the years that it even seems as if they have 'overcome' their disorder. The autism has, as it were, 'faded'. It can be observed that normally gifted individuals with autism sometimes adapt, reduce, or diversify their limited and stereotypical interests as they get older to lessen the negative impact on themselves and their environment. Gifted people with autism thus seem capable

of getting certain deviant or disruptive behaviors under control to some extent, making them less visible to the outside world. Moreover, compensation and camouflage come not only from the person with autism themselves, but often or mostly also from their environment. Without being aware of it, parents and caregivers also conceal the autism by the extent to which and the way in which they adapt to the person with autism. This can cast doubt on a suspicion of an autism spectrum disorder. Or the capabilities of the person with autism can be greatly overestimated.

bldn 123-124

Some gifted individuals with autism exhibit an isolated ability to easily handle certain metalinguistic language aspects such as word games. … . Such peak skills can lead to overestimation of (language) abilities.

self-overestimation

bldn 248-249

Despite being aware of their difficulties, adolescents with autism rate their general social skills significantly more positively than parents and teachers. Parents rate social functioning lower than the participants do for themselves. In assessing the social functioning of gifted adults with autism, questions about the quality of execution and the degree of support in carrying out daily activities are probably more important than the question of whether or not they carry out these activities. The qualitative analysis shows that the majority of the individuals with autism studied need to be helped by their parents for the execution of most activities.

bldn 253

A detailed inquiry into the quality of execution of societal tasks with parents or other individuals in the environment provides a more realistic view of the capabilities and limitations of adults with ASD than self-reporting on whether or not these tasks are performed. All participants are supported and guided in their functioning, either by parents (or partner) or by healthcare providers.

bldn 254

The assessment of social functioning in adulthood is more favorable for normally to highly gifted individuals with ASD than for the entire spectrum, but relatively unfavorable compared to non-disabled peers. Only a small minority manage to live independently, hold a regular job, or maintain a partner relationship. These individuals perform many household and societal tasks, such as preparing meals, cleaning, managing finances, leisure activities, and going out, but they do so only thanks to the support of parents and healthcare providers. The specific limitations of gifted individuals with ASD only become apparent through an intensive (detailed) inquiry into the way they perform societal tasks.

bldn 296

A remarkable finding concerns the difference in assessment between the participants and the parents. The adult individuals with autism with a late diagnosis in the study assess their own social functioning significantly higher than their parents do, while adults with an early autism diagnosis hardly differ from their parents in their assessment. Most adolescents with

autism have a rather unrealistic view of their own functioning and shortcomings. The current research indicates that this is particularly the case for individuals with a late diagnosis. Given the finding that more participants with an early diagnosis receive professional help, we can assume that they are more aware of the support they receive in their social functioning. We suspect that participants with a late diagnosis do not notice the extensive help provided by parents or do not perceive it as help. The finding that individuals with a late diagnosis, in particular, rate their functioning higher than their parents or others in their environment do, has important implications for diagnostic practice. Especially in the case of a late diagnosis in adolescents and (young) adults, self-reporting is largely used to gather information about (social) functioning. When questioning a (young) adult with a suspected ASD, the reliability of self-reporting should be viewed with necessary critical sense, and it is advisable to involve at least the parents in the questioning and assessment of social functioning.

bldn 297

The reliability of self-reporting on (social) functioning in individuals with a late diagnosis is lower than in those with an early diagnosis. It is possible that the self-image of those with late diagnoses is more unrealistic because their parents do a lot for them or support them behind the scenes, and they therefore also have less insight into their shortcomings and difficulties.

'overload' / 'overstimulation'

"If I get too many stimuli, I lose control."

a&e 32

The reason people with autism react so extremely to stimuli (auditory, tactile, visual…) is probably because the stimuli are also experienced very extremely, because the impact of events on people with autism is also much more extreme than for us. Many authors with autism testify to such hypersensitivity. Temple Grandin even speaks of an ‘oversensitive and immature nervous system’. It seems that feeling and thinking simultaneously is difficult for people with autism. Either they feel (and get overwhelmed by their emotions because they cannot put them into perspective), or they think (and have no room to experience the accompanying feelings).

'overwhelmed, being'

by emotions

a&e 29

People with autism also often express their feelings in a very extreme way. Or their emotional expressions come across as extreme. At all ages, one can see extreme laughing fits, panic reactions, or tantrums in them. There are often also major mood swings: one moment they have a severe tantrum, a few moments later they are laughing happily. A young adult with autism told me: "It's like a barrier that flips. One moment I feel happy, the next angry or sad. It can all change so quickly with me." It seems as if there is no brake on the expression of feelings in people with autism. Or is it perhaps that people with autism are

hypersensitive and therefore react so extremely? People with autism have difficulty regulating and modulating. Because they can less oversee and understand stimuli in their context, they come across as much more absolute. This applies not only to stimuli coming from outside, but also to what comes from within. People with autism have difficulty distancing themselves from stimuli, processing them from a broader whole, the coherence. This distance is necessary to relativize things: relating is relativizing. People with autism cannot relativize very well. They are 'caught' by the things they experience, including their own feelings. If they are angry, then they are angry. They are overwhelmed, consumed by that feeling. The feeling is absolute. They are, as it were, blinded by the feeling: blind to other elements in their environment that situate what they feel in a broader framework and could therefore relativize it. People with autism generally have difficulty suppressing reactions to an immediate context. As a result, they have much less control over their feelings. An explosive expression is the result of an emotional explosion within.

a&e 35

A very common problem in people with ASD is being overwhelmed by a feeling. The physical experience is not put into perspective but dominates everything. As a result, a warning feels like terror, a preference like infatuation, having less energy like depression. With such a flood of emotions, the person with autism does recognize the quality of what they feel, but it is as if the brain has turned the volume knob to maximum. As a result, even pleasant feelings can become unpleasant.

a&e 97

With gifted people with autism, we can often put events into perspective 'afterwards' and thereby teach them to 'relativize', but there is a high chance that they will still be overwhelmed by their emotion next time.

a&e 107

Do not project your own experiential and emotional world onto that of someone with autism. You can empathize with others, someone with autism cannot. You understand situations differently than someone with autism, because you can give meaning to those situations and someone with autism little or not at all. People with autism live in a different world. Therefore, also be careful with interpreting so-called emotional experiences in people with autism. It is not because you experience a situation in a certain way, that someone with autism feels the same in the same situation. For example, do not expect someone with autism to also be sad in situations where other people are sad. Keep in mind that people with autism can be over- or under-sensitive to certain stimuli and that the emotional meaning of many situations escapes them because they do not understand them. Accept their different experience and certainly do not prescribe feelings.

a&e 107

People with autism already have it difficult enough with their own feelings. Therefore, do not overwhelm them with your own emotional expressions when they are upset or reacting emotionally. Stay calm and composed, however difficult that may be. Acting emotionally yourself only makes it more complicated for them.

@ 60

'overview'

need for

…!? 78-79

Time is difficult for people with autism. Time is, after all, a very abstract, almost intangible concept for them. It requires a lot of imagination and visualization. They are very often confused by it. They live mainly in the here and now and can spontaneously and independently hardly transcend that here and now. They therefore ask for a lot of clarification about planning and time. It makes it easier for people with autism to get an 'overview' in advance of the activities that are planned. This gives them a visual anchor that makes the abstract concept of time more tangible and therefore more predictable.

'overview, sense of' / 'clarity'

…!? 108

Because they often do not see the whole picture, but rather focus on concrete details, they often jump from one thing to another, omit – for us – important parts of a story, or get stuck on what others find unimportant.

…!? 121

pain

emotional suffering

a&e 34

People with autism experience the world differently. One of the most difficult things for them to understand are their own experiences. Many people with autism have problems processing bodily sensations and how these may or may not relate to their feelings. Sometimes a person with autism knows they feel something, but not what they feel. The brain cannot give meaning to the bodily experience. For people with autism, it is just as difficult to understand their own emotions as to understand those of others. In one study, normally gifted individuals with autism had difficulties identifying and describing their feelings. Typically, gifted people with autism need a long and painful learning process to achieve some form of self-awareness.

unbearable suffering

(on) 7-8

Twenty-six people with Asperger's syndrome testify to the suffering, take us behind the fragile facade with which they are forced to hide a world of suffering, often on the verge of

liveability. A content that takes us to very diverse facets of the suffering that being different entails. You will notice that many of these people balance on the edge of this (un)bearable suffering. Understanding from the environment can make the difference. The description of this suffering is heart-wrenching and leaves us speechless.

sensory hypersensitivity

a&e 31

It is not an uncommon phenomenon for someone with autism to have abnormal tolerance thresholds for various sensory perceptions. For example, it is known that certain people with autism cover their ears or react very extremely when there is (certain) noise. It is suspected that they do this because the noise causes them pain. From autobiographies and personal accounts of people with autism, we have since learned that a striking number of individuals with autism have sensory problems: they are hyposensitive or (and this occurs much more frequently) hypersensitive to certain sensory sensations.

peak skills

bldn 56

bldn 284

bldn 123-124

Some gifted individuals with autism exhibit an isolated ability to easily handle certain metalinguistic language aspects such as word games. … . Such peak skills can lead to overestimation of (language) abilities.

pedantic

…!? 110

The language use of normally gifted people with autism is often formal and pedantic. It sometimes resembles the stiff language of legal texts or notarial deeds. Children with autism often speak too maturely. The form of the language often comes across as unnatural or strange.

bldn 48-49

'performance deficit'

When people with autism cannot do something or do it incorrectly, it is not always because they do not know how to do it. But often it is a 'performance deficit' that prevents them: they know how to do it, but they do not succeed in putting the theory into practice. This is related, among other things, to * their serial thinking: not being able to do two things at once * their slow thinking: in the ever-changing context and in interaction with others, they are not fast enough to process information appropriately and react appropriately and quickly enough * their detail-oriented thinking: not 'seeing' the main issues, but remaining 'stuck' on details

performance deficit

a&e 73-74

In real life, things often go wrong for people with autism during social interactions because they need relatively much thinking time to empathize with someone else. Their problems in the area of empathy cannot be reduced to merely a cognitive deficit, a lack of knowledge. Many normally gifted people with autism know many emotions and emotional terms, and they have an extensive collection of scenarios. They do not lack theoretical knowledge. The problems they have with understanding the (emotional) world are related to difficulties in several areas simultaneously: the integration of communication skills, emotional responsiveness, paying attention to the most relevant information, prioritizing social stimuli, and cognitive skills. The flow of human interactions is too swift for the slow processing of social information in people with autism. They are not fast enough and not quick-witted enough in their social perspective-taking. They lack social intuition: the direct, rapid, and implicit understanding of mental states such as ideas and feelings in others through focused but unconscious perception of information originating from facial expressions, tone of voice, body movements, and so on. Due to their slowness and context blindness, they have great difficulty in practice, even though they may have a lot of theoretical knowledge.

a&e 106

The improvements demonstrated by training are sometimes also illusory improvements. Various studies show that children with autism, as a result of tests or training, develop alternative strategies to arrive at the correct answers. For example, in Sally-Anne tasks, they might learn to choose the box or container "where the ball is not." Based on this strategy, they give the correct answer, but this does not mean they are capable of perspective-taking, because their answer is not based on a person's perspective at all. A boy with autism was even so naive as to reveal his compensation strategy to the tester. When he hesitated on a certain question (for which answer "A" was the correct answer) and the tester encouraged him, the boy replied: "I think B is the correct answer, but it will probably be A." When the tester then asked why he said that, the boy replied: "Look, I've had to do many of these tests, and each time it turned out that I gave the wrong answer. That's why I always say the opposite of what I think now." The tester had grossly overestimated the boy. It is precisely because they do not acquire the correct insights, but use alternative strategies, that in all the aforementioned trainings the children were able to apply what they learned in identical scenarios, but with different material, but not in scenarios in which they were not trained. Perhaps the biggest limitation of the trainings lies in the fact that, just as in measurements and experiments for perspective-taking, the problems are explicitly stated. As a test subject or participant in a training, you know that you have to look for what others think and feel, because that is simply explicitly and emphatically asked. Precisely therein lies the transfer problem of all kinds of trainings in 'emotional intelligence' and social skills. In real life, problems do not present themselves explicitly: you have to recognize and sense for yourself that you need to look for the emotions and thoughts of others. Learning perspective-taking may be achievable, to a certain extent, but the problem in autism is not so much in competence (being able and knowing) but in the spontaneous activation and application of that ability and knowledge, the so-called performance. And that difficulty is not easily overcome, for two reasons. Firstly, because of the well-known paradox 'now be spontaneous'. If people with autism remain highly dependent on 'cues' that activate

perspective-taking, is there then talk of *real* perspective-taking? Secondly, because the problem of spontaneous activation is linked to a core problem in autism, namely that of central coherence. Since it is a core problem, remediation or treatment is far from simple and probably very limited. We will discuss the relationship between emotional intelligence and 'autistic thinking' further on. All sorts of training in learning to recognize, name, deduce, and predict the emotions of others prove to be useful, but their effect on functioning in real life appears to be extremely limited. An improvement in performance on all sorts of tasks concerning perspective-taking by no means signifies an improvement in the underlying, fundamental deficits regarding emotion recognition and perspective-taking. It is not because we have been able to teach a blind person to navigate a certain route without bumping into anything or going the wrong way, that they can also see. The trainings in emotion recognition and perspective-taking do not lead to fundamental changes. The autistic disorders in dealing with their own feelings and those of others are much deeper than we think.

a&e 116

Research shows that it is particularly difficult for young people with autism to gain insight into their own share in interpersonal problems. The young people also find it difficult to discover why other people find them strange. What proves particularly difficult is the awareness and knowledge of the consequences of autism in concrete daily situations. These difficulties are in line with the limitations these adolescents have in the socio-emotional field. Normally gifted adolescents and young adults often have good abstract knowledge of emotions, relationships, and social behavior but primarily lack practical skills in the socio-emotional field. The same often applies to their knowledge of autism. Sometimes their theoretical knowledge of autism is even impressive, but knowing what that autism means for them concretely and in everyday situations is much more difficult.

perseveration

bldn 63

The concept of executive functions also helps explain the attention problems in people with an autistic disorder. Directing and sustaining attention would, according to a number of studies, not immediately pose a major problem for individuals with an autistic disorder, but shifting attention, the so-called 'attention shifting', does. These problems occur when the person with autism is already engaged in a particular activity. It is therefore about difficulties in letting go of a point of attention. The problem with 'attention shifting' would thus fit within a more general deficit in cognitive flexibility, which is an important predictor for social adjustment.

personality

perspective-taking

a&e 73

People with autism spontaneously opt for business-like and intellectually logical solutions rather than emotionally logical ones. In real life, the emotional expressions of someone else

are often not included in their meaning-making (their understanding of the situation). They often do not even notice them, or other stimuli attract more of their attention at that moment. People with autism are insufficiently spontaneously focused on emotional (and social) information.

a&e 142

second-order

a&e 23-24

The difficulties people with autism have, for example, in recognizing the feelings of others are not the result of a lack of relatedness, sensitivity, or affection, but the result of a deficit in their thinking. This deficit is in the area of metarepresentation or second-order representation. When I imagine that a banana is a pistol, that is a first-order representation or representation. Such a first-order representation seems easy, but many people with autism – especially if they also have an intellectual disability – are hardly capable of it. They lack the imaginative ability to turn bananas into pistols, blocks into cars, and fathers into horses. But people with autism and reasonable intelligence can do so, albeit sometimes in a limited and (be)strange(ning) way. If I imagine that you imagine that a banana is a pistol, then that is a step higher: a second-order representation. A step higher, and therefore more difficult. This thought operation is very difficult even for gifted people with autism. Yet it is the basis of understanding others, the foundation of empathy (feeling into). To recognize and understand the inner life (thinking and feeling) of others, metarepresentation is a necessary condition. Building on this ability, children in normal development around four or five years old begin to understand what others have in terms of their own feelings, wishes, and thoughts. They have what is called thinking about thinking, or a 'theory of mind'. The development of such a theory of mind begins early in development, from the first year of life. One of its precursors, for example, is the shared attention that is already present in the first months of life in normally developing children. Shared attention is the foundation of sharing feelings with others. If a child really likes a rattle, they look at their mother and back at the rattle to, as it were, make the mother a part of their pleasure: "Look, how nice." The child shares their pleasure in the toy with their mother. Ordinary babies can do this very quickly. When they get a bit older, they not only let others share in their attention via eye contact, but also in other ways: they point to something or they come to show something. Children not only share their attention, they also share the attention of others. If you look somewhere, very young children follow your gaze. And they share your pleasure, your interest. Research shows that children with an autism spectrum disorder show much less shared attention. Not only do they point much less to objects to share their attention, children with autism also do not readily come to show something. Shared attention includes not only cognitive elements, but also emotional ones. Children not only look at the faces of others to obtain information (as in the experiment with the cliff) but also to share feelings. And that also happens much less in children with autism. Compared to ordinary children and even to children with an intellectual disability, children with autism express far fewer positive feelings when they share their attention with someone. Because children with autism do not, or far too little, realize that others have their own world of thoughts and feelings, because they can hardly imagine these thoughts and feelings, they show difficulties in recognizing the feelings of

others, and they have difficulties in communicating and dealing with others. That is the central idea in cognitive theory.

phasing out support

…!? 126

planning

a&e 130

Conversations with people with autism are best structured and planned. There must be a clear objective and a clear line, preferably indicated by a pre-prepared agenda.

play

social play

a&e 87

Not understanding and being able to use body language well often leads to insecurity and fear of failure. A man with autism told me that he is even afraid that a woman will fall in love with him, because then he doesn't know how to react. The subtle and complex game of intimate body language is a great mystery for people with autism.

a&e 108

Teach them all sorts of tricks with which they can compensate for their lack of intuition. A boy with autism was often teased at school with his stereotypical conversation topic (a certain TV program). We could teach him the difference between well-intentioned interest and teasingly questioning, but the other children play this game so subtly that he would still realize too late each time that they were already teasing him. Therefore, it is better to advise him never to talk about his favorite TV program for longer than two minutes and to find another child. In this way, he may miss the well-intentioned interest of other children, but he will also never be teased for longer than two minutes.

symbolic play

bldn 53-54

3.2.3. Disorder in Imagination The disorder in imagination is closely related to the disorders in communication and social interaction. Rutter (1968) and Wing and Gould (1979) quickly made the connection between language and abstract or symbolic thinking. The specific problems concerning the social aspects of communication influence the skills to imitate the behavior of other people with understanding of the meaning and intention, and thereby lead to a disorder in imaginative ability (Wing, 1988). Conversely, according to Leslie (1987), a disorder in imagination leads to social deficits: an inability for representation (understanding referents or signifiers as symbols for a reality) and metarepresentation (the ability to decouple representations from perceived reality) disrupts the development of the ability to

share representations of reality with other people. The disorder in the development of representation and metarepresentation also results in disorders in communication (Verpoorten, 1996). The disorder in imagination manifests itself quite early in play development. Many children with ASD do not engage in fantasy play, and their play is limited to immediate sensory and perseverative stimulation or strictly mechanical functional play (Van Berckelaer-Onnes, 1988; 1991). Some children with autism do, at first sight, engage in imaginative play, usually later than their peers, but it is not real fantasy play, but rather concrete imitation (Van Berckelaer-Onnes & Kwakkel-Scheffer, 1996). The apparent fantasy play is limited to (usually literally) reenacting what they have seen another child do or on television. If imaginative play does develop, it often remains very limited: there is little variation, and symbolization remains limited to the simple level of object substitution; imagining something out of nothing is hardly possible for them (Libby, Powell, Messer & Jordan, 1998). No new meanings are really generated (Harris & Leevers, 2000; Jarrold, Boucher & Smith, 1996; Lewis & Boucher, 1995), and often imaginative play is limited to copying and performing a limited number of actions in an isolated whole (Mulders, Hansen & Roosen, 1996) and without an inner experience (Van Berckelaer-Onnes, 1991). In more structured situations and after instructions, children with autism seem to achieve something that resembles 'pretend play' (Charman & Baron-Cohen, 1997). It is still insufficiently clear whether the difficulties in engaging in spontaneous imaginative play are the result of a competence deficit, a performance deficit, or a combination of both (Jarrold, Boucher & Smith, 1993). Even if they play fantasy games themselves, children with ASD do not succeed in playing along with the fantasy games of other children (Wing, 2000a). Children with Autistic Disorder or Asperger's Disorder are less creative, and if they are creative, their creativity is primarily based on reality and not on imagination (Craig & Baron-Cohen, 1999). As children with ASD grow older, the lack of imaginative ability primarily translates into a deficit in social imagination. People with ASD often do not get much further than copying others' behavior without a real understanding of the meaning and purpose of that behavior (Wing, 1988). They also lack the imaginative ability to predict events based on past experiences and therefore anticipate too little (Wing, 1998a).

bldn 58

3.3.1. 'Theory of Mind' The term 'Theory of Mind' originates from Premack and Woodruff (1978) and refers to the ability to attribute thoughts, intentions, feelings, and ideas to oneself and others and, based on this, to predict and anticipate the behavior of others. The social deficits of people with ASD are understood in this hypothesis as a consequence of a specific cognitive problem: the inability to attribute mental states to oneself and others. This inability would stem from an inability for 'metarepresentation', the ability to 'decouple' representations from presentations (perceived reality) and thus simultaneously manipulate multiple alternative representations (Leslie, 1987). This ability develops between 18 and 24 months and allows children to develop 'pretend play', in which, for example, a banana is used as a 'telephone'. In 'pretend play', especially when shared with someone else, the representations (a banana as a 'telephone') do not refer to reality (a banana is not a telephone) but to the conception and meaning-making of someone (the person themselves or another person) about that reality (I pretend this banana is a telephone). Leslie considers such metarepresentations, i.e., representations of representations, as the basis for developing the ability to attribute mental states to others. Referring to the observation that 'pretend play' is often absent in children with Autistic Disorder, Leslie (1987) formulated the hypothesis that

the ability of people with ASD for metarepresentation is impaired. This results in a disorder in the development of a 'Theory of Mind'.

bldn 64

Although the hypothesis of an executive deficit can offer an interesting explanation for cognitive rigidity and perseverations, there are still – just as for the 'Theory of Mind' hypothesis – a number of criticisms to be formulated. To date, the hypothesis offers an insufficient explanation for certain social problems. Rumsey (1985) found no significant correlation between performance on the WCST and the score for socially adaptive functioning on the Vineland Social Maturity Scales. The study by Jarrold, Boucher, and Smith (1994) shows that an executive dysfunction also does not explain the lack of imaginative play: children with Autistic Disorder seem to have no problems suppressing the salient functional meaning of an object (e.g., a pencil) to make something else out of it (e.g., a toothbrush). On the other hand, Jarrold, Boucher, and Smith (1993) do see problems with executive function as an explanation for the finding that children with Autistic Disorder primarily show deficits in spontaneous imaginative play, but much less in structured situations where symbolic play is elicited. Executive function could offer an explanation for the hypothesis that it is not so much a competence problem but rather a performative problem that underlies the disorder in symbolic play.

bldn 69

Finally, Van Berckelaer-Onnes (Van Berckelaer-Onnes & Kwakkel-Scheffer, 1996) also sees the central coherence disorder as a plausible explanation for the qualitative deficits in the play development of children with ASD. The lack of exploration, the perseverative and stereotypical nature of manipulative play, and the difficulties in achieving combinatorial play can be understood from a fragmentary perception, where meaning-making remains limited to one detail and does not transcend the concrete level: these children do not see a car, but a wheel-that-can-turn. The poor quality of functional play, which usually involves only loose associative actions and mechanically learned or imitated actions, testifies to an inability to meaningfully embed actions in a meaningful context.

bldn 90

Diagnosis at a later age. Classification is also not easy at a later age. A first reason lies in the fact that a number of DSM-IV criteria, such as the lack of symbolic or social imitative play, are explicitly aimed at children and therefore not applicable to adolescents or adults (Piven, Harper, Palmer & Arndt, 1996; Volkmar & Cohen, 1988). Ohta et al. (1987) also previously pointed out the need for a clear list of criteria for autism in adolescents and adults.

bldn 98

Wolff seems to interpret autistic deviations in imaginative play primarily as an absence of symbolic play or a delayed development thereof. A possible delay in symbolic play is more characteristic of a developmental delay than of an ASD, where it is primarily the quality of imagination that is impaired, and thus rather a disturbed development.

bldn 21

The term 'Infantile autism' was replaced by 'Childhood Autism', but the choice to explicitly mention an 'age of onset' as a criterion was retained: abnormal development must have

been observed before the age of three in at least one of the following three areas: receptive or expressive language, social attachment or reciprocal social interaction, and functional or symbolic play.

bldn 25

Both DSM-IV and ICD-10 also mention a criterion relating to the age of onset: deviant or delayed development before the age of three in at least one of the following areas: social interaction, language use in social communication, and functional or symbolic play.

stereotypical play

…!? 46

Lore is engaged in her stereotypical play: moving a small chain back and forth in front of her eyes.

the game of communication

…!? 14

Communication is a game you play with at least two people. There must always be at least one sender and at least one receiver. A radio set is of little use if there are no radio broadcasts. Just as a telephone only makes sense if there is at least one other telephone. If you are the only one in the world with a telephone, you will derive little communication pleasure from it.

positive atmosphere

a&e 130

pragmatics

…!? 48

Communication always has a function. Whoever communicates, sends a message and transmits information with a certain intention. Without intentions, communication remains a meaningless affair. What does one want to achieve with communication? In people with autism, we often see very limited functionality. They often insufficiently understand the power, might, and possibilities of communication, and therefore their communication is limited to a restricted number of functions.

…!? 109

It is not so much the words that normally gifted people with autism have difficulties with. They are able to store an immense dictionary with their good memory. The difficulty lies in what you can or should do with those words, when you use them.

…!? 20

Using language to achieve a certain goal is called the pragmatics of language. It is the pragmatic aspects of language that (even highly gifted) people with autism have the most difficulty with. Why does someone say something? What are their underlying intentions? Pragmatics is much less a 'linguistic' problem than an intuitive or socio-emotional one. It is a very dynamic and changeable (context-bound) given. And it has to do with all aspects of human interaction. It has a lot to do with the social aspects of communication. * When and how does someone say something to you, or to someone else? And why? With what purpose, with what intentions? * 'How' do you best say something to someone, with a certain goal in mind? What information do you provide? Not too little? Not too much? * When is it best to say something to a certain person, and when not? When is it best to remain silent? Has my conversation partner given me all the information, or is he/she withholding something? And for what reasons? * How do you ensure that the message you want to convey is also understood by the other person as it is intended? How do I ensure that I myself understand the other person's message as it is intended? * What are the (unwritten) rules of communication in a certain context? How often do you repeat something? Which words can you use and which not? How loud can your voice volume be? What tonality should you adopt? What 'accent' do you use, should you speak Standard Dutch or in dialect form? Are you allowed to gesticulate? … Human communication involves much more than language. To find out the correct meaning, the intention, the function of a message, vocabulary and grammar alone are not enough! Precisely because the pragmatic aspects of communication have so much to do with coherence, context, and especially the social context, they pose the greatest difficulty for people with autism. In the exchange of information, emotional, cognitive, and motivational factors play a decisive role in addition to language-technical factors.

preoccupations

preparation

People with autism have difficulty with things (events) they are not prepared for. For example, when someone asks a question or makes a remark they had not anticipated. As long as people with an autism spectrum disorder are familiar with or prepared for what happens, is said, or is asked, they react normally. As soon as they are not prepared for or familiar with a certain situation, event, or context, they find it much more difficult. See also: resistance to change.

preparing

A conversation or activity with a person with autism always goes much better if we first make a (visual: written/graphical) preparation.

predictability

…!? 78

Time is difficult for people with autism. Time is, after all, a very abstract, almost intangible concept for them. It requires a lot of imagination and visualization. They are very often confused by it. They live mainly in the here and now and can spontaneously and independently hardly transcend that here and now. They therefore ask for a lot of clarification about planning and time.

every day the same

…!? 114

…!? 124-125

Always doing the same thing at the same place and the same time? People with autism have difficulty with changes. They need predictability. If habits and familiar routines change or disappear, they are confused and panicky. Because they have these difficulties, it is best that we give them as predictable a life as possible. Every day the same thing at the same moment and in the same place. For example: always watching TV for a bit after dinner. Wrong! Whoever offers someone with autism the same program every day makes life enormously predictable and therefore meets a need of the person with autism. But life is not such that you can do the same thing every day. Something unexpected can happen: unexpected visitors, the TV breaks down, a doctor's appointment, the potatoes are burnt. Moreover, if you do the same thing every day for a while, someone with autism will eventually expect that, and any change will become not just a frustration, but an outright disaster. We must adapt to the handicap of autism. But on the other hand, we help people with autism if we give them the means to adapt to living together. And that life inevitably involves changes. Adapted communication, for example a daily schedule, helps them to deal with changes because they can then 'see' the changes in advance. If you know in advance that something is going to change, then that change becomes somewhat easier to accept. Predictability is important, but that does not mean we cannot build in changes. Always doing the same thing does not help someone with autism in the long term, on the contrary. Giving them the means to cope with changes does. Don't all those schedules make them more rigid, stiffer than they already are? Not at all, at least if we use visual and clarifying communication precisely to announce changes and modifications. Not only how you communicate, but also what you communicate makes one flexible or rigid. By introducing daily schedules, work schedules, by clarifying meanings in the environment, we are precisely trying to teach someone with autism to deal with changes. With adapted communication, we aim precisely to clarify new, previously misunderstood or unutterable things for the person. Precisely by our adaptation to the handicap (rigidity in thinking and doing), we teach someone with autism to adapt as much as possible to our existence (flexibility, suppleness). If someone with autism can 'see' that there will be two activities in a moment of free time, and if those activities 'speak for themselves', so that the person with autism knows what to do with them, then the type of activity, what is in the box, suddenly becomes much less important. And something different may be offered than the usual activity. If we, through our adaptations, make the broad outlines of existence clear for someone with autism, then details that are unimportant to us but to which the person with autism attaches great value or

remains 'stuck' on, also become less important for the person with autism. Moreover, through our adaptations, we can introduce many variations and changes into the life of someone with autism. Precisely through daily schedules, work schedules, and the like, we make their lives much less monotonous. And that is a great relief for most people with autism. In essence, they enjoy doing something different sometimes, not always having to do the same activities. The 'urge' to keep everything the same is merely a survival reaction of someone who has to do without any hold in the environment.

need for

People with autism find it difficult to organize information processing in their minds. They are usually much slower than people without autism, especially when it comes to information processing that does not follow a predictable pattern: every unexpected event is an enormous challenge for people with autism, and information that was not expected is much harder for them to analyze and process. When everything runs exactly as expected, or in a structured environment where there are no unexpected questions or events, but everything follows a fixed pattern, a fixed script, a fixed procedure, and there are only a limited number of possibilities for what the information can be … then it may be that people with autism are actually extremely fast in processing the (precisely defined in advance and therefore expected, predictable set of) information. People with autism have great difficulty with unpredictability.

sensory hypersensitivity / sensory oversensitivity

Brein 67-68

More than we expect, gifted people with autism, just like those with an additional intellectual disability, suffer from certain stimuli, especially sounds and tactile stimuli, but also sometimes from certain colors and light. This problem is severely underestimated in normally gifted people with autism, despite the many testimonies from people with autism themselves. "My mother, my teachers, and my governess all did good things for me, only they were not aware of my sensory problems. If they had known this, I would have had fewer tantrums and other behavioral problems." Certain sounds, tactile stimuli can be truly painful for people with autism and – that is only human – they therefore anxiously avoid situations and things associated with these unpleasant sensations. For example, a child can suddenly have a tantrum or rather a panic attack if the car turns in a certain direction, because the last time in that street there were roadworks where a jackhammer was used. Especially the unpredictability of these sounds is very tiring and unbearable for people with autism. You would develop resistance to change for less if every new situation involves a risk of unpleasant and painful sensations.

'progress'

bldn 49-50

projection

a&e 37

People with autism react emotionally and also express their feelings, but they do not really communicate them. Communication implies that you express your feeling *to* someone. We only speak of communication when there is a focus on another person. People with autism do express their feelings, but very little directed towards another person. They share their feelings much less. Parents sometimes think their child communicates feelings while there is no communication at all. They see their child crying, laughing, roaring angrily. What they see is only an expression of feelings, not real communication. There is a high chance that if the child has fallen and is in pain, it will be crying, but will not go to someone to make that pain known to a person. And sometimes parents probably see feelings that the child does not even have, because people with autism express their feelings differently: idiosyncratically (assigns personal meanings to words, expressions, gestures…) and/or echolalically (literally repeats sentences it has heard or makes exact imitations of what it has seen without adapting this to the context). A child with autism who laughs is not necessarily happy.

a&e 107

Do not project your own experiential and emotional world onto that of someone with autism. You can empathize with others, someone with autism cannot. You understand situations differently than someone with autism, because you can give meaning to those situations and someone with autism little or not at all. People with autism live in a different world. Therefore, also be careful with interpreting so-called emotional experiences in people with autism. It is not because you experience a situation in a certain way, that someone with autism feels the same in the same situation. For example, do not expect someone with autism to also be sad in situations where other people are sad. Keep in mind that people with autism can be over- or under-sensitive to certain stimuli and that the emotional meaning of many situations escapes them because they do not understand them. Accept their different experience and certainly do not prescribe feelings.

a&e 124-125

When assessing the experience of people with autism, projection is the biggest pitfall for anyone who wants to guide people with autism psychologically or psychotherapeutically. If this guidance is particularly difficult for people with autism, it is not only because of the autism. Not autistic thinking but our thinking is the main obstacle… The challenge for the therapist lies mainly in setting aside their own 'neurotypical projections': avoiding problems in order to project a 'normal', non-autistic experience onto a person who perceives and experiences fundamentally differently. Because of their different perception and thinking, people with autism sometimes experience situations very differently than people without autism. We should not conclude too quickly that we accurately know the experience of people with autism. Psychological guidance is the interface where the 'theory of mind' of the client and that of the therapist meet or do not.

psychiatric tests

unreliability

bldn 121-128

bldn 124

Despite the positive impression that the language of gifted people with ASD gives – at least at first hearing – there are still a number of specific shortcomings and deviations. For example, the word choice of gifted people with autism is less fluent and flexible: they repeat words or parts of sentences, have difficulty switching to the next word. The conversations of gifted individuals with autism are often superficial, repetitive, and not very concrete in content (they 'theorize' a lot). They take unexpected and unclear turns in a conversation, and due to their associative thinking, there is often little logical line in their story. These characteristics can lead to incorrect classifications of schizophrenia or psychosis. A classic psychiatric interview or a conversation during a test, with its predictable and structured question-and-answer pattern, does not sufficiently bring these communication problems to light. Classic language tests are also too limited. Regarding imagination as well, problems manifest differently in normally gifted individuals with autism. Many gifted children with ASD, unlike developmentally delayed children, do, for example, engage in a kind of symbolic play. Their fantasy play often seems very normal at first glance, but it is actually a stereotypical but sophisticated form of imitation and not real and creative fantasy. The difficulties of children with ASD in distinguishing fantasy from reality and their literal understanding of language and other symbolic indications can also mistakenly lead a diagnostician to think of psychosis. Gifted people with autism primarily lack social imagination: the ability to predict events based on past experiences. Many diagnosticians, however, do not immediately think of social imagination when considering the diagnostic criterion of absent or impaired imagination. A lack of this is also difficult to ascertain in a conversation or test. Normally gifted individuals with autism show significant shortcomings in conceptual problem-solving thinking. They make more perseverative errors, find it difficult to integrate information, make inferences, and selectively focus on relevant details. Adult gifted individuals with autism also exhibit concrete thinking (unable to think abstractly), impoverished thinking, superficial thinking, and obsessional thinking. These phenomenological similarities with the thinking style of people with other disorders, such as schizophrenia and attention disorder, can lead to an incorrect classification.

bldn 296

A remarkable finding concerns the difference in assessment between the participants and the parents. The adult individuals with autism with a late diagnosis in the study assess their own social functioning significantly higher than their parents do, while adults with an early autism diagnosis hardly differ from their parents in their assessment. Most adolescents with autism have a rather unrealistic view of their own functioning and shortcomings. The current research indicates that this is particularly the case for individuals with a late diagnosis. Given the finding that more participants with an early diagnosis receive professional help, we can assume that they are more aware of the support they receive in their social functioning. We suspect that participants with a late diagnosis do not notice the extensive help provided by parents or do not perceive it as help. The finding that individuals with a late diagnosis, in

particular, rate their functioning higher than their parents or others in their environment do, has important implications for diagnostic practice. Especially in the case of a late diagnosis in adolescents and (young) adults, self-reporting is largely used to gather information about (social) functioning. When questioning a (young) adult with a suspected ASD, the reliability of self-reporting should be viewed with necessary critical sense, and it is advisable to involve at least the parents in the questioning and assessment of social functioning.

psychological counseling

see: psychotherapy

psychological structural stability

see: rigidity, need for predictability, resistance to change

psycho-education

@ 60

Talking about feelings is one of the hardest things for people with autism. A highly gifted man with autism writes: 'I spent most of my life in some form of psychotherapy with therapists who assumed I knew what the words meant but that I couldn't handle my own processing of them. Their interventions consisted mainly of guiding me in naming things I didn't feel. If I then said that this wasn't what I felt, mainly because I didn't know how to describe how I *did* feel, I was told I was resisting therapy and that I wasn't open to my feelings. During those years when people were concerned about my feelings, no one ever bothered to explain to me what those words meant.' Unless they are made very concrete and explained, feelings are not the most appropriate gateway for psychoeducation or training for people with ASD. Talking about feelings can be delicate. Feelings need to be addressed, but for them, it is a not very concrete and especially not very tangible matter. Experience also shows that talking too long and too much about feelings only leads to derailment. They then get entangled in abstract terms. They get overwhelmed by emotions, because they can make too little distinction between talking about feelings and feeling itself. And sometimes they get lost in all those words. From this, we should not conclude that feelings should not be discussed at all. But the way we discuss these matters is different with people with autism. Talking with someone with autism – also about feelings – is primarily about clarifying and elucidating. People with autism are often in a muddle with their feelings. For them, these are an inextricable tangle of impressions. We can best help them by first and foremost listening to the problems they are struggling with. Once the knot is found, we can clearly define the problem and neatly list all factual data related to it to create clarity and overview. We first discuss the facts to clarify the context in which the feelings of the person with autism occur. This way, we can better interpret and clarify the meaning of the feelings. And only then can we talk about them. Talking about the feelings themselves can be very 'sensitive'. People with autism need to be protected from themselves to some extent. Peer pressure and lack of assertive communication, or lack of impulse control, mean that someone with autism might still talk about something they would rather not, or prefer not to, talk about. Communication happens very quickly for them, and within that whirlwind of questions and answers, quickly finding an appropriate formulation to indicate that you do not want to answer a question is

not always easy for people with autism. Perhaps that is why slow and cautious individual talk therapies are better than dynamic group discussions.

psychopathy

a&e 75

The empathetic deficits in people with autism regularly lead to the question of whether people with autism are not, in fact, a bit psychopathic. However, there is a fundamental difference between psychopathy and autism. Psychopaths, unlike autistics, can usually take the perspective of others. They understand (cognitively) quite well that they are causing suffering to their victim, but it hardly touches them emotionally. In people with autism, there is no problem with emotional responsiveness, but with understanding. Once they understand that their own behavior elicits negative emotions in another (and this usually only happens after someone has explained it to them), they usually express their regret and also genuinely 'feel' for the person. A psychopath is not ignorant, but insensitive. An autistic person is not insensitive, but primarily ignorant. But also often just clumsy. Autism is, to a large extent, a performance problem. People with autism often have the theoretical knowledge, but are clumsy in applying it in practice. They do look for a solution, a possible reaction, when confronted with a painful situation of someone else, especially if they are encouraged to do so. But their problem-solving has an 'autistic' tinge.

a&e 67-69

Normally gifted people with autism sometimes give the impression that they are capable of normal empathy, but this can be very misleading. It is not normal empathy; it is very egocentric. They do not emotionally put themselves in the other person's shoes, but recognize a scenario that they themselves have experienced: they fall back on their own experiences instead of empathizing with the other person's experience. As long as the other person feels the same as what they themselves felt in a particular situation, they will react appropriately, and it will seem as if they are truly empathetic. Their lack of empathy only becomes apparent when their own experience does not entirely match how the other person experiences a similar situation. Normally gifted people with autism not only resort to their own experiences, sometimes they seem very empathetic because they fall back on learned scenarios. They have, as it were, a library of situations in their heads, from which they have learned how people then feel. For people with autism, empathy is a matter of working, of 'calculating' and 'deciphering'. They also need more time and 'hints'. People without autism do not have to work at all to be empathetic; it is something instinctive and intuitive. It is precisely this intuition that people with autism lack. In that respect, people with autism deserve much praise and admiration: probably no one makes such heavy efforts to empathize with others as people with autism. Because it is not self-evident for them, they have to make many efforts. Accusing people with autism of not having enough empathy is therefore not fair. You don't blame a visually impaired or blind person for not seeing, do you? On the contrary, we must accommodate people with autism in their handicap and not 'get' them on their shortcomings. We must give them the time and space, and support if necessary, to be able to take a full place in society and live a full life, despite their social limitations.

psychosis

a&e 120

Depression in people with autism can result in an increase in problematic behaviors. Social withdrawal may increase, and various 'psychotic' behaviors may occur. A relatively new insight is that catatonia can occur as a complication. Catatonia is traditionally seen as a form of psychosis. In catatonia, a person becomes extremely slow and rigid in their movements, resulting in deterioration or regression in self-care skills.

bldn 129

Gifted individuals are particularly vulnerable to additional psychiatric disorders, especially from adolescence onwards. They then become more aware of their problems and have to deal with more stress, which is the result of excessively high expectations from the environment. These can primarily result in an additional depression but can also lead to anxiety and obsessive disorders. In addition, undifferentiated psychoses with delusions and hallucinations can occasionally occur. Most problems disappear once the stress is identified and removed, although they can also become chronic.

bldn 124

Despite the positive impression that the language of gifted people with ASD gives – at least at first hearing – there are still a number of specific shortcomings and deviations. For example, the word choice of gifted people with autism is less fluent and flexible: they repeat words or parts of sentences, have difficulty switching to the next word. The conversations of gifted individuals with autism are often superficial, repetitive, and not very concrete in content (they 'theorize' a lot). They take unexpected and unclear turns in a conversation, and due to their associative thinking, there is often little logical line in their story. These characteristics can lead to incorrect classifications of schizophrenia or psychosis. A classic psychiatric interview or a conversation during a test, with its predictable and structured question-and-answer pattern, does not sufficiently bring these communication problems to light. Classic language tests are also too limited. Regarding imagination as well, problems manifest differently in normally gifted individuals with autism. Many gifted children with ASD, unlike developmentally delayed children, do, for example, engage in a kind of symbolic play. Their fantasy play often seems very normal at first glance, but it is actually a stereotypical but sophisticated form of imitation and not real and creative fantasy. The difficulties of children with ASD in distinguishing fantasy from reality and their literal understanding of language and other symbolic indications can also mistakenly lead a diagnostician to think of psychosis. Gifted people with autism primarily lack social imagination: the ability to predict events based on past experiences. Many diagnosticians, however, do not immediately think of social imagination when considering the diagnostic criterion of absent or impaired imagination. A lack of this is also difficult to ascertain in a conversation or test. Normally gifted individuals with autism show significant shortcomings in conceptual problem-solving thinking. They make more perseverative errors, find it difficult to integrate information, make inferences, and selectively focus on relevant details. Adult gifted individuals with autism also exhibit concrete thinking (unable to think abstractly), impoverished thinking, superficial thinking, and obsessional thinking. These phenomenological similarities with the thinking style of people with other disorders, such as schizophrenia and attention disorder, can lead to an incorrect classification.

psychotherapy

a&e 120

Although psychotherapy, especially psychodynamic psychotherapy, has limited value in approaching people with autism, gifted individuals with autism can particularly benefit from it if the psychotherapy is adapted to autism. Several studies promote the use of structured and directive forms of psychotherapy, primarily involving cognitive behavioral strategies. However, according to autism expert Patricia Howlin, these strategies rarely succeed when applied in isolation, i.e., when not combined with adapted educational and behavioral interventions.

concretizing and visualizing - showing more than talking – talking while doing

a&e 127-129

Talking while doing. The long-held assertion that people with autism do not benefit from psychotherapy has since been disproven and found to be incorrect. However, the assertion that classic psychotherapy is not, or insufficiently, effective for this population remains valid. The specific information processing disorder inherent to autism and the resulting problems in communication, self-reflection, and problem-solving behavior are at odds with most common models for psychological counseling. Due to the specificity of the disorder, it is very important to start from the specific and essentially different autistic perception and information processing, taking into account the social and communicative difficulties of the person, and their lack of empathy and imagination. A good understanding of the essentially different cognitive style of people with autism is essential. This implies that the way information is communicated will be fundamentally different. Thus, regardless of the theoretical angle from which counseling originates, it will always first and foremost have to take autism into account, which also means that one will have to work as concretely as possible. This has consequences for the form of information exchange, but also for the content. The more concrete the communication and content, the better. With Joris, who was severely depressed, the psychologist had agreed to work on his problems. A week later, Joris called her with the question: "This working on my problems, is it something like looking for a saint in a church or more like digging in the garden?" Joris had understood the word 'working' quite literally and linked it to concrete images in his head. In the psychological counseling of people with autism, words are an important pitfall. As we wrote earlier in this book, behind the words of people with autism, there is often a different, autistic meaning. Misunderstandings can also arise in the other direction of communication, from counselor to person with autism. Whoever talks to people with autism should constantly check what they understand of what is being discussed. It is advisable to regularly have the person with autism repeat in their own words what is being brought up in a conversation. The way people with autism view themselves, others, and the entire world is the starting point of any psychotherapeutic process. This also applies to the psychological counseling of people with autism. Traditional open-ended questions, such as "What's wrong?", "Tell me about your problems" are, however, not immediately the best approach. Because of their weak central coherence, people with autism cannot see the forest for the trees, also not regarding their own experiences and perceptions. This problem, known as the typical autistic problem

concerning 'episodic memory', means that the classic way of questioning often does not lead to an accurate problem formulation. People with autism find it particularly difficult to distinguish between what is relevant and what is incidental. Telling what exactly happened at a certain moment (the facts of an event), without, for example, getting lost in a lot of unnecessary details, can already be a major challenge. Especially in reporting their feelings, people with autism experience serious difficulties: either nothing comes out, or a confused and associative story emerges. A more structured and directive way of questioning is indicated, and questioning techniques that are visual and mathematical, such as Likert scales (statements that you can score on a 4- or 5-point scale, for example) or sorting and checking systems, are more effective. Even normally gifted people with autism have difficulty communicating verbally. Moreover, they have the greatest difficulty organizing their own thoughts and putting them into perspective. To address both problems somewhat, it is important to have them write as much as possible. Writing is much slower than talking. You get visual feedback from it, and you don't have to simultaneously pay attention to the reactions of the person you are communicating with. Experience shows that people with autism, if they can write, can express their thoughts and feelings much better on paper than in a conversation. When assessing the experience of people with autism, projection is the biggest pitfall for anyone who wants to guide people with autism psychologically or psychotherapeutically. If this guidance is particularly difficult for people with autism, it is not only because of the autism. Not autistic thinking but our thinking is the main obstacle… The challenge for the therapist lies mainly in setting aside their own 'neurotypical projections': trying to avoid projecting a 'normal', non-autistic experience onto a person who perceives and experiences fundamentally differently. Because of their different perception and thinking, people with autism sometimes experience situations very differently than people without autism. An example: quite a few people with autism who are divorced indicate that they miss their partner. However, their missing is of a completely different quality than that of people without autism. They do not so much miss their partner as a person as the activities and routines that were associated with that person. A woman with autism told me that people always express pity when she tells them that she has been "alone" for years. She does not understand why people always link "being alone" to "being lonely." For her, being alone is not a sad thing, on the contrary. She has had several failed relationships and found being together more difficult than being alone. We should therefore not conclude too quickly that we accurately know the experience of the person with autism. Psychological counseling is the interface where the "theory of mind" of the client and that of the therapist meet or do not. Even more than in guiding people without autism, we therefore need to test what they say. In doing so, we must not only check the images or ideas, but even the words. Due to their different (language) understanding, people with autism can sometimes give a very personal meaning to certain words. A young woman presents to her therapist with the problem that she is lesbian. Instead of immediately focusing on her experience regarding this, the therapist asks: "What is 'lesbian'?" The woman answers: "That is someone who likes to look at women, and I like to look at women." The psychotherapist then explains the word and tells her that lesbian means: having a sexual preference for someone of the same sex. The problem is immediately resolved for the young woman with this simple explanation: "But then I'm not lesbian, because I wouldn't want that. I just like looking at beautiful women." Especially normally gifted individuals with autism are sometimes overestimated in their language comprehension. These problems mainly apply to all sorts of psychological terms and concepts that belong to the 'language' of psychotherapy. Jim Sinclair, a highly gifted man with autism, writes in this regard: "I spent most of my life in some form of psychotherapy

with therapists who assumed I knew what the words meant but that I couldn't handle my own processing of them. Their interventions consisted mainly of guiding me in naming things I didn't feel… If I then said that this wasn't what I felt, mainly because I didn't know how to describe how I *did* feel, then I was told I was resisting therapy and that I wasn't open to my feelings. All those years of concern about my feelings, no one ever bothered to explain to me what those words meant!" Unless they are made very concrete and explained, feelings are not the most appropriate gateway for the psychological counseling of people with autism. Talking about feelings can be delicate. Feelings need to be addressed, they do have feelings, after all, but for them it is a not very concrete and especially not very tangible matter. Experience also shows that talking too long and too much about feelings only leads to derailment. They get entangled in abstract terms. They get overwhelmed by the emotions, because they can make too little distinction between talking about feelings and the feeling itself. And sometimes they get lost in all those words. In conversations about emotional matters, space is first made for concrete doing, only then for feeling. If they can do something, then they have something concrete to proceed with. Solutions are best achieved through assignments, for example, "Write down by next time when you have had an argument with your parents." Talking about feelings is more about doing things together than talking together. In conversations with people with autism about feelings, the rule applies: talking while doing.

depression

a&e 120

Depression in people with autism is rarely expressed through verbalizing depressive feelings. When diagnosing depression, targeted observation often provides more information than verbal questioning or self-reporting. So far, little research has been done on treatment options for depression in people with autism. The scarce studies suggest that various psychosocial and pharmaceutical interventions can be used in treatment. Although psychotherapy, especially psychodynamic psychotherapy, has limited value in approaching people with autism, gifted individuals with autism can particularly benefit from it if the psychotherapy is adapted to autism. Several studies promote the use of structured and directive forms of psychotherapy, primarily involving cognitive behavioral strategies. However, according to autism expert Patricia Howlin, these strategies rarely succeed when applied in isolation, i.e., when not combined with adapted educational and behavioral interventions. Medication is increasingly being used to control behavioral and mood symptoms in autism. Despite its popularity, research on the use of psychotropic drugs in people with autism is still relatively limited. Psychotropic drugs ideally form part of a total package that also includes other treatments, as described above. The most commonly prescribed medications are antidepressants. Selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors, the so-called SSRIs, are increasingly used in cases of autism to control both depression and aggression.

factors determining effectiveness/success

psych, p. 675

It is assumed that especially the skills of the therapist and the quality of the relationship between the therapist and the client are important for the success of the therapy. There must

be a 'click' between the two. The characteristics of the therapist make a difference: some therapists are consistently better than others. There appears to be virtually no effect of age, gender, experience, or diploma of the therapist. However, therapy seems to work better if the therapist and client have the same political, social, and cultural background. It is suspected that the correspondence between the client's expectations and the therapist's orientation also plays a role. Some people want their problems to be addressed very directly, without detours. Others, on the contrary, shudder at the thought of a therapist explaining to them how things should be. The best recipe for the failure of psychological counseling or therapy is a therapist who only pays attention to what he/she themselves considers important, and attaches no importance to the problems that the client sees as the reason for therapy.

public reference

a&e 79

People with autism seem to have too little awareness of the influence they can exert on the thinking and feeling of others. Due to this lack of awareness, they also have little insight into what emotions their own behavior causes in others. Their behavior lacks public reference. They hardly, if at all, spontaneously wonder how the other person will feel when they do or say certain things.

'pushy' / 'intrusive'

realism

social empathy

social imagination

The typical characteristic of people with autism is that they have no, or a severely diminished, realistic social imagination. When they try to empathize with the thought world of others or try to estimate what the actual reactions, intentions, plans, expectations of others (will) be, they all too often miss the mark. A lack of realistic social imagination is practically one of the core concepts (core symptoms) of autism spectrum disorders.

reasoning

a&e 74

a&e 154

reciprocity

in social interaction

bldn 48

The social disorder in people with autism primarily concerns qualitative differences with the social interaction of normal people, especially regarding the reciprocity of social interaction. It relates to things like shared attention.

'reducing support' / 'phasing out support'

…!? 126

'refusal to change' / 'resistance to change'

Difficulty letting go of tasks once I've started them

…!? 124-125

Bldn 122

Resistance to change in normally gifted individuals does not so much manifest as typical opposition or tantrums. It is more a matter of difficulty adapting to new situations (Bartak & Rutter, 1976). This is often invisible to parents and caregivers, especially in slightly older children and in adolescents and adults. Many gifted children and young people with Autistic Disorder show no unusual or extreme reactions to changes (Newson et al., 1984-1985). Once they are adults, almost half are no longer even concerned about changes, and about a third are even aware of their own routines and rituals. They may even enjoy certain concrete changes. Some seek out new experiences or activities to include in their collections. Resistance to change in gifted individuals with ASD manifests at a different, less concrete level and in small details, barely noticeable to the diagnostician. Their resistance is primarily a 'mental' resistance (Vermeulen, 1998). Things and events are supposed to be as they imagine them, in accordance with their ideas and expectations. They try to find a foothold in the world by collecting or creating rules and scripts themselves. Due to their intelligence, these can even be very complex. As long as nothing happens that contradicts these rules, an outsider notices nothing of the rigidity. It only becomes apparent when the rule is violated or not fully followed. Ritualistic behaviors also occur in normally gifted individuals with ASD. These are most intense during childhood but decrease from adolescence onwards and are often no longer easily recognizable in adulthood (Tsai, 1992a). In adults, we sometimes notice 'mental' rituals, sometimes even quite complex ones: for example, they must complete

a certain line of thought or a mental collection before they can start something new. Mental rituals are, however, by definition unobservable.

125

'relationships'

building and maintaining

@ 22-23

Many people with autism express a desire for a … relationship. Due to their autism, they experience great difficulties in building or maintaining a relationship. Their relationship network is often limited. Frequent changes of school or living group make this network even more vulnerable. Extra care is needed to offer them as many opportunities as possible for social contact.

a&e 71-73

It seems that people with autism do not always spontaneously focus their perception on details that are relevant from a socio-emotional point of view. People with autism are insufficiently spontaneously focused on emotional information. People with autism only achieve emotional perspective-taking when someone else points them to the right information or when the context for interpretation is clear. The perspective must be learned or clarified externally.

…!? 111

Due to their overselectivity problem, they focus their communication on only one aspect, usually the – often technical – content. The language use of intelligent people with autism gives the impression that communication for them is more a means of exchanging objective information than a means of shaping and nurturing personal relationships.

…!? 109

From their typical way of thinking, normally gifted people with autism are more focused on facts, objective and fixed data, knowledge, enumerations, the pure content. If they focus on anything in communication, it is more on the content than the form, more on what they say than how they say it. They are more concerned, for example, with the completeness of their list of stops during their train journey, than whether their story about their trip to the seaside comes across and whether they are not boring their listener.

…!? 108

Due to their overselectivity, people with autism sometimes focus their attention on something different from what the conversation partner expects or considers important. Switching attention to a new conversation topic or to new conversation partners is also not so self-evident for them. Example: In a conversation, they can suddenly continue talking about a topic that was closed some time ago. They, as it were, get stuck on the first topic of the conversation and then ask a question about it, or add something, while you are already talking about something completely different.

'relativizing' / 'putting into perspective'

a&e 29

People with autism also often express their feelings in a very extreme way. Or their emotional expressions come across as extreme. At all ages, one can see extreme laughing fits, panic reactions, or tantrums in them. There are often also major mood swings: one moment they have a severe tantrum, a few moments later they are laughing happily. A young adult with autism told me: "It's like a barrier that flips. One moment I feel happy, the next angry or sad. It can all change so quickly with me." It seems as if there is no brake on the expression of feelings in people with autism. Or is it perhaps that people with autism are hypersensitive and therefore react so extremely? People with autism have difficulty regulating and modulating. Because they can less oversee and understand stimuli in their context, they come across as much more absolute. This applies not only to stimuli coming from outside, but also to what comes from within. People with autism have difficulty distancing themselves from stimuli, processing them from a broader whole, the coherence. This distance is necessary to relativize things: relating is relativizing. People with autism cannot relativize very well. They are 'caught' by the things they experience, including their own feelings. If they are angry, then they are angry. They are overwhelmed, consumed by that feeling. The feeling is absolute. They are, as it were, blinded by the feeling: blind to other elements in their environment that situate what they feel in a broader framework and could therefore relativize it. People with autism generally have difficulty suppressing reactions to an immediate context. As a result, they have much less control over their feelings. An explosive expression is the result of an emotional explosion within.

a&e 97

With gifted people with autism, we can often put events into perspective 'afterwards' and thereby teach them to 'relativize', but there is a high chance that they will still be overwhelmed by their emotion next time.

relevant information, distinguishing from irrelevant information

repetition

…!? 41

A person with autism has too few varied communication possibilities to convey the same message in different ways to different people; he is not able to adapt the 'language' of the message to the other person; if he is not understood, he will rather repeat the message several times in the same way than try different ways. One of the consequences of this is that often only familiar people, such as parents, can understand the child.

repetitive

behaviors

a&e 108

thoughts

bldn 125

Resistance to change in normally gifted individuals with autism does not so much manifest in the form of typical opposition or tantrums. It is rather a difficulty in adapting to new situations. This is often invisible. Many gifted children and young people with autism show no unusual or extreme reactions to changes. Once they are adults, almost half are no longer even concerned about changes, and about a third are even aware of their own routines and rituals. Resistance to change in gifted individuals with ASD manifests at a different, less concrete level and in small details. Their resistance is primarily a 'mental' resistance. Things and events are supposed to be as they imagine them, in accordance with their ideas and expectations. They try to find a foothold in the world by collecting or creating rules and scripts themselves. Due to their intelligence, these can even be very complex. As long as nothing happens that contradicts these rules, an outsider notices nothing of the rigidity. It only becomes apparent when the rule is violated or not fully followed. Ritualistic behaviors also occur in normally gifted individuals with autism. These are most intense in children but decrease from adolescence onwards. In adults, we rather notice 'mental' rituals: for example, they must complete a certain line of thought or a mental collection before they can start something new.

right hemisphere deficit

bldn 33

bldn 119

rigidity

a&e 117

…!? 124-125

bldn 125-126

Resistance to change in gifted individuals with ASD manifests at a different, less concrete level and in small, barely noticeable details. Their resistance is primarily a 'mental' resistance. Things and events are supposed to be as they imagine them, in accordance with their ideas and expectations. They try to find a foothold in the world by collecting or creating rules and scripts themselves. Due to their intelligence, these can even be very complex. As long as nothing happens that contradicts these rules, an outsider notices nothing of this rigidity. It only becomes apparent when the rule is violated or not fully followed. Ritualistic

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routines / rituals

a&e 108

bldn 125-126

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'saying stop'

…!? 80

Making transitions is difficult for all people with autism. They have difficulty with the concept of 'stop'. They can sometimes find it difficult to stop something and then switch to something else. Especially if they are engaged in their favorite or stereotypical activities, or if they are doing something they consider very important.

school career

bldn 254 285

scripts / scenarios

a&e 67-69

Especially normally gifted people with autism sometimes give the impression that they are capable of empathy, but this can be very misleading. It is not true empathy; it is very egocentric. They do not emotionally put themselves in the other person's shoes, but recognize a scenario that they themselves have experienced: they fall back on their own

experiences instead of empathizing with the other person's experience. As long as the other person feels the same as what they themselves felt in a particular situation, they will react appropriately, and it will seem as if they are truly empathetic. Their lack of empathy only becomes apparent when their own experience does not entirely match how the other person experiences a similar situation. Normally gifted people with autism not only resort to their own experiences, sometimes they seem very empathetic because they fall back on learned scenarios. They have, as it were, a library of situations in their heads, from which they have learned how people then feel. The empathy of people with autism is very technical and very egocentric. It is limited to the encyclopedia of scenarios they have built up from their own experiences or from other information sources, such as television.

…!? 108

bldn 125-126

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'second-order perspective taking'

security

belonging – certainty – predictability – clarity - lucidity

Predictability, clarity, overview… it all aims to provide the person with autism with certainty and a sense of security.

Brein 67-68

Especially the unpredictability of, for example, sounds can be very tiring and unbearable for people with autism. You would develop resistance to change for less if every new situation involves a risk of unpleasant and painful sensations. For example, a child can suddenly have a tantrum or rather a panic attack if the car turns in a certain direction, because the last time in that street there were roadworks where a jackhammer was used. More than we expect, gifted people with autism, just like those with an additional intellectual disability, suffer from certain stimuli, especially sounds and tactile stimuli, but also sometimes from certain colors and light. This problem is severely underestimated in normally gifted people with autism, despite the many testimonies from people with autism themselves. "My mother, my teachers, and my governess all did good things for me, only they were not aware of my sensory problems. If they had known this, I would have had fewer tantrums and other behavioral problems." Certain sounds, tactile stimuli can be truly painful for people with autism and – that is only human – they therefore anxiously avoid situations and things associated with these unpleasant sensations. Therefore, people with autism have a very strong need for certainty and predictability.

…!? 124-125

Whoever offers someone with autism the same program every day makes life enormously predictable and therefore meets a need of the person with autism. But life is not such that you can do the same thing every day. Something unexpected can happen: unexpected visitors, the TV breaks down, a doctor's appointment, the potatoes are burnt. Moreover, if you do the same thing every day for a while, someone with autism will eventually expect that, and any change will become not just a frustration, but an outright disaster. We must adapt to the handicap of autism. But on the other hand, we help people with autism if we give them the means to adapt to living together. And that life inevitably involves changes. Adapted communication, for example a daily schedule, helps them to deal with changes because they can then 'see' the changes in advance. If you know in advance that something is going to change, then that change becomes somewhat easier to accept. Predictability is important, but that does not mean we cannot build in changes. Always doing the same thing does not help someone with autism in the long term, on the contrary. Giving them the means to cope with changes does. Don't all those schedules make them more rigid, stiffer than they already are? Not at all, at least if we use visual and clarifying communication precisely to announce changes and modifications. Not only how you communicate, but also what you communicate makes one flexible or rigid. By introducing daily schedules, work schedules, by clarifying meanings in the environment, we are precisely trying to teach someone with autism to deal with changes. With adapted communication, we aim precisely to clarify new, previously misunderstood or unutterable things for the person. Precisely by our adaptation to the handicap (rigidity in thinking and doing), we teach someone with autism to adapt as much as possible to our existence (flexibility, suppleness). If someone with autism can 'see' that there will be two activities, and if those activities 'speak for themselves' so that the person with autism knows what to do with them, then the type of activity suddenly becomes much less important. And something different may be offered than the usual activity. If we, through our adaptations, make the broad outlines of existence clear for someone with autism, then details that are unimportant to us but to which the person with autism attaches great value or remains 'stuck' on, also become less important for the person with autism. Moreover, through our adaptations, we can introduce many variations and changes into the life of someone with autism. Precisely through daily schedules, work schedules, and the like, we make their lives much less monotonous. And that is a great relief for most people with autism. In essence, they enjoy doing something different sometimes, not always having to do the same activities. The 'urge' to keep everything the same is merely a survival reaction of someone who has to do without any hold in the environment.

self-awareness

a&e 34-35

People with autism experience the world differently. One of the most difficult things for them to understand are their own experiences. Many people with autism have problems processing bodily sensations and how these may or may not relate to their feelings. Sometimes a person with autism knows they feel something, but not what they feel. The brain cannot give meaning to the bodily experience. For people with autism, it is just as difficult to understand their own emotions as to understand those of others. In one study, normally gifted individuals with autism had difficulties identifying and describing their

feelings. Typically, gifted people with autism need a long and painful learning process to achieve some form of self-awareness.

self-determination

a&e 129

Because (socio-emotional) problem-solving is very difficult for people with autism, we cannot always expect people with autism to spontaneously come up with the right solutions for their (social, emotional) problems. Anyone who wants to help them with this is therefore best advised to offer a concrete range of solutions. Ideally, we let them choose from several solutions that we or they propose. Clarity is paramount in conversations with people with autism. Talking about (socio-emotional) problems is therefore a fairly directive process for people with autism. However, this by no means implies that we impose (our) solutions. Especially with gifted people with autism, it is rather advisable to let them choose solutions themselves.

self-esteem

bldn 248-249

Despite being aware of their difficulties, adolescents with autism rate their general social skills significantly more positively than parents and teachers. Parents rate social functioning lower than the participants do for themselves. In assessing the social functioning of gifted adults with autism, questions about the quality of execution and the degree of support in carrying out daily activities are probably more important than the question of whether or not they carry out these activities. The qualitative analysis shows that the majority of the individuals with autism studied need to be helped by their parents for the execution of most activities.

bldn 253

A detailed inquiry into the quality of execution of societal tasks with parents or other individuals in the environment provides a more realistic view of the capabilities and limitations of adults with ASD than self-reporting on whether or not these tasks are performed. All participants are supported and guided in their functioning, either by parents (or partner) or by healthcare providers.

bldn 254

The assessment of social functioning in adulthood is more favorable for normally to highly gifted individuals with ASD than for the entire spectrum, but relatively unfavorable compared to non-disabled peers. Only a small minority manage to live independently, hold a regular job, or maintain a partner relationship. These individuals perform many household and societal tasks, such as preparing meals, cleaning, managing finances, leisure activities, and going out, but they do so only thanks to the support of parents and healthcare providers. The specific limitations of gifted individuals with ASD only become apparent through an intensive (detailed) inquiry into the way they perform societal tasks.

bldn 296

A remarkable finding concerns the difference in assessment between the participants and the parents. The adult individuals with autism with a late diagnosis in the study assess their own social functioning significantly higher than their parents do, while adults with an early autism diagnosis hardly differ from their parents in their assessment. Most adolescents with autism have a rather unrealistic view of their own functioning and shortcomings. The current research indicates that this is particularly the case for individuals with a late diagnosis. Given the finding that more participants with an early diagnosis receive professional help, we can assume that they are more aware of the support they receive in their social functioning. We suspect that participants with a late diagnosis do not notice the extensive help provided by parents or do not perceive it as help. The finding that individuals with a late diagnosis, in particular, rate their functioning higher than their parents or others in their environment do, has important implications for diagnostic practice. Especially in the case of a late diagnosis in adolescents and (young) adults, self-reporting is largely used to gather information about (social) functioning. When questioning a (young) adult with a suspected ASD, the reliability of self-reporting should be viewed with necessary critical sense, and it is advisable to involve at least the parents in the questioning and assessment of social functioning.

bldn 297

The reliability of self-reporting on (social) functioning in individuals with a late diagnosis is lower than in those with an early diagnosis. It is possible that the self-image of those with late diagnoses is more unrealistic because their parents do a lot for them or support them behind the scenes, and they therefore also have less insight into their shortcomings and difficulties.

self-evaluation

self-insight

a&e 116

Research shows that it is particularly difficult for young people with autism to gain insight into their own share in interpersonal problems. The young people also find it difficult to discover why other people find them strange. What proves particularly difficult is the awareness and knowledge of the consequences of autism in concrete daily situations. These difficulties are in line with the limitations these adolescents have in the socio-emotional field. Normally gifted adolescents and young adults often have good abstract knowledge of emotions, relationships, and social behavior but primarily lack practical skills in the socio-emotional field. The same often applies to their knowledge of autism. Sometimes their theoretical knowledge of autism is even impressive, but knowing what that autism means for them concretely and in everyday situations is much more difficult.

self-overestimation

bldn 248-249

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self-reflection

self-reliance

bldn 248-249

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bldn 254

The assessment of social functioning in adulthood is more favorable for normally to highly gifted individuals with ASD than for the entire spectrum, but relatively unfavorable compared to non-disabled peers. Only a small minority manage to live independently, hold a regular job, or maintain a partner relationship. These individuals perform many household and societal tasks, such as preparing meals, cleaning, managing finances, leisure activities, and going out, but they do so only thanks to the support of parents and healthcare providers. The specific limitations of gifted individuals with ASD only become apparent through an intensive (detailed) inquiry into the way they perform societal tasks.

bldn 296

A remarkable finding concerns the difference in assessment between the participants and the parents. The adult individuals with autism with a late diagnosis in the study assess their own social functioning significantly higher than their parents do, while adults with an early autism diagnosis hardly differ from their parents in their assessment. Most adolescents with autism have a rather unrealistic view of their own functioning and shortcomings. The current research indicates that this is particularly the case for individuals with a late diagnosis. Given the finding that more participants with an early diagnosis receive professional help, we can

assume that they are more aware of the support they receive in their social functioning. We suspect that participants with a late diagnosis do not notice the extensive help provided by parents or do not perceive it as help. The finding that individuals with a late diagnosis, in particular, rate their functioning higher than their parents or others in their environment do, has important implications for diagnostic practice. Especially in the case of a late diagnosis in adolescents and (young) adults, self-reporting is largely used to gather information about (social) functioning. When questioning a (young) adult with a suspected ASD, the reliability of self-reporting should be viewed with necessary critical sense, and it is advisable to involve at least the parents in the questioning and assessment of social functioning.

bldn 297

The reliability of self-reporting on (social) functioning in individuals with a late diagnosis is lower than in those with an early diagnosis. It is possible that the self-image of those with late diagnoses is more unrealistic because their parents do a lot for them or support them behind the scenes, and they therefore also have less insight into their shortcomings and difficulties.

self-report

a&e 116

Research shows that it is particularly difficult for young people with autism to gain insight into their own share in interpersonal problems. The young people also find it difficult to discover why other people find them strange. What proves particularly difficult is the awareness and knowledge of the consequences of autism in concrete daily situations. These difficulties are in line with the limitations these adolescents have in the socio-emotional field. Normally gifted adolescents and young adults often have good abstract knowledge of emotions, relationships, and social behavior but primarily lack practical skills in the socio-emotional field. The same often applies to their knowledge of autism. Sometimes their theoretical knowledge of autism is even impressive, but knowing what that autism means for them concretely and in everyday situations is much more difficult.

bldn 248-249

Despite being aware of their difficulties, adolescents with autism rate their general social skills significantly more positively than parents and teachers. Parents rate social functioning lower than the participants do for themselves. In assessing the social functioning of gifted adults with autism, questions about the quality of execution and the degree of support in carrying out daily activities are probably more important than the question of whether or not they carry out these activities. The qualitative analysis shows that the majority of the individuals with autism studied need to be helped by their parents for the execution of most activities.

bldn 253

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depression

a&e 120

Depression in people with autism is rarely expressed through verbalizing depressive feelings. When diagnosing depression, targeted observation often provides more information than verbal questioning or self-reporting.

sensory hypersensitivity

a&e 31

It is not an uncommon phenomenon for someone with autism to have abnormal tolerance thresholds for various sensory perceptions. For example, it is known that certain people with autism cover their ears or react very extremely when there is (certain) noise. It is suspected that they do this because the noise causes them pain. From autobiographies and personal accounts of people with autism, we have since learned that a striking number of individuals with autism have sensory problems: they are hyposensitive or (and this occurs much more frequently) hypersensitive to certain sensory sensations.

brein 67-68

More than we expect, gifted people with autism, just like those with an additional intellectual disability, suffer from certain stimuli, especially sounds and tactile stimuli, but also sometimes from certain colors and light. This problem is severely underestimated in normally gifted people with autism, despite the many testimonies from people with autism themselves. "My mother, my teachers, and my governess all did good things for me, only they were not aware of my sensory problems. If they had known this, I would have had fewer tantrums and other behavioral problems." Certain sounds, tactile stimuli can be truly painful for people with autism and – that is only human – they therefore anxiously avoid situations and things associated with these unpleasant sensations. For example, a child can suddenly have a tantrum or rather a panic attack if the car turns in a certain direction, because the last time in that street there were roadworks where a jackhammer was used. Especially the unpredictability of these sounds is very tiring and unbearable for people with autism. You would develop resistance to change for less if every new situation involves a risk of unpleasant and painful sensations.

serial thinking

People with autism are serial thinkers, i.e., they tackle problems one by one, they cannot be busy with multiple problems at the same time or with multiple topics at the same time. Everything happens consecutively, one by one. Not in parallel. Not on multiple tracks at the same time.

sexuality

abuse

Brein 110-111

Because of their social naivety, there is a risk that people with autism will be sexually abused.

autistic preoccupation

@ 21

Most children, young people, and adults with autism have sexual feelings, desires, and needs. Like other people, they can be very different in this regard. Some individuals never show any sexual interest. The environment even wonders if they are asexual. Others are very preoccupied with sex. For some, sex becomes an autistic preoccupation.

difficulties

a&e 85

It often happens that people with autism, perhaps precisely because their desire in the area of intimate relationships is in sharp contrast to their capabilities, idealize intimate relationships: an intimate relationship is the key to perfect happiness.

Brein 110-111

They lack the necessary social skills for an intimate relationship. The tension between sexual desire and the inability to give shape to that desire can lead to many problems. In addition, they are often laughed at, ostracized, or even bullied because of their strange way of making contact.

a&e 85-86

Moreover, communication is not self-evident for people with autism. Body language is a means of communication that is often even more difficult for them to understand than spoken language.

Brein 55

The subtle signals that another person, for example, sends out to indicate that a relationship certainly cannot be more than platonic, are insufficiently understood by the person with autism. It is only after many frustrations that the realization dawns.

@ 22

People with autism often find it difficult to recognize, name, and appropriately deal with their own (and others') feelings. They have the right to be supported in dealing with feelings. … . People with autism process emotions differently than non-autistic people and have the right to their own 'autistic' emotions, also regarding sexuality. The difficulties people with autism have in terms of social integration and their sometimes 'autistic' way of experiencing sexuality … must be the starting point for supporting them in their sexual needs. However, the right to experience sexuality ends where the rights of others are compromised. Some people with autism cross the line of social acceptability due to a lack of social insight and weak perspective-taking. They sometimes need help in this area and have the right to be supported in finding a socially acceptable way of experiencing sexuality. Many people with autism express a desire for a … relationship. Due to their autism, they experience great difficulties in building or maintaining a relationship. Their relationship network is often limited. Frequent changes of school or living group make this network even more vulnerable. In residential groups, there is usually an imbalance between the number of boys and girls.

Extra care is needed to offer them as many opportunities as possible for social contact. Relationships that arise … must be taken seriously. Facilities are best advised to develop a policy to deal with this. Young people must be given the chance to grow in this: the bar for progressing further in a relationship is often set higher for young people with a developmental disorder than for ordinary adolescents, who also learn by trial and error.

@ 25

@ 154

experimenting

@ 32

Developing relational and sexual skills means not only knowledge but also: practicing, experimenting, learning from the reactions of others. Precisely in this area, people with autism have their limitations and sometimes proceed in an unconventional way. They learn more slowly anyway, and due to their social limitations, they get fewer opportunities to gain experience and learn from it. It is therefore possible that some people with a developmental disorder will experiment drastically and unconventionally in the area of sexuality and relationship formation, and thereby exhibit inappropriate behavior.

'shared' attention

a&e 22-23

Shared attention is the foundation of sharing feelings with others. If a child likes a rattle, they look at their mother and back at the rattle to, as it were, make the mother a part of their pleasure: "Look, how nice." The child shares their pleasure in the toy with their mother. Ordinary babies can do this very quickly. When they get a bit older, they not only let others share in their attention via eye contact, but also in other ways: they point to something or they come to show something. Children not only share their attention, they also share the attention of others. If you look somewhere, very young children follow your gaze. And they share your pleasure, your interest. Research shows that children with an autism spectrum disorder show much less shared attention. Not only do they point much less to objects to share their attention, children with autism also do not readily come to show something. Shared attention includes not only cognitive elements, but also emotional ones. Children not only look at the faces of others to obtain information, but also to share feelings.

short fuse

a&e 29

People with autism also often express their feelings in a very extreme way. Or their emotional expressions come across as extreme. At all ages, one can see extreme laughing fits, panic reactions, or tantrums in them. There are often also major mood swings: one moment they have a severe tantrum, a few moments later they are laughing happily. A young adult with autism told me: "It's like a barrier that flips. One moment I feel happy, the next angry or sad. It can all change so quickly with me." It seems as if there is no brake on

the expression of feelings in people with autism. Or is it perhaps that people with autism are hypersensitive and therefore react so extremely? People with autism have difficulty regulating and modulating. Because they can less oversee and understand stimuli in their context, they come across as much more absolute. This applies not only to stimuli coming from outside, but also to what comes from within. People with autism have difficulty distancing themselves from stimuli, processing them from a broader whole, the coherence. This distance is necessary to relativize things: relating is relativizing. People with autism cannot relativize very well. They are 'caught' by the things they experience, including their own feelings. If they are angry, then they are angry. They are overwhelmed, consumed by that feeling. The feeling is absolute. They are, as it were, blinded by the feeling: blind to other elements in their environment that situate what they feel in a broader framework and could therefore relativize it. People with autism generally have difficulty suppressing reactions to an immediate context. As a result, they have much less control over their feelings. An explosive expression is the result of an emotional explosion within.

slowness

…!? 58

…!? 99

…!? 110

social imagination

bldn 124

Gifted people with autism primarily lack social imagination: the ability to predict events based on past experiences. Many diagnosticians, however, do not immediately think of social imagination when considering the diagnostic criterion of absent or impaired imagination. A lack of this is also difficult to ascertain in a conversation or test.

social intelligence

a&e 71

It seems that people with autism do not spontaneously focus their perception on details that are relevant from a socio-emotional point of view. Emotional and social aspects of a situation appeal to them much less than non-emotional ones. People with autism often focus their perception on (for us) irrelevant details. In a situation, they often do not see the emotional information, because in their perception other things and details are more prominent.

a&e 73

People with autism only achieve emotional perspective-taking when someone else points them to the right information or when the context for interpretation is clear. The perspective must be learned or clarified externally. People with autism spontaneously opt for business-like and intellectually logical solutions rather than emotionally logical ones. In real life, the emotional expressions of someone else are often not included in their

meaning-making (their understanding of the situation). They often do not even notice them, or other stimuli attract more of their attention at that moment. People with autism are insufficiently spontaneously focused on emotional (and social) information.

a&e 74

In real life, things often go wrong for people with autism during social interactions because they need relatively much thinking time to empathize with someone else. Their problems in the area of empathy cannot be reduced to merely a cognitive deficit, a lack of knowledge. Many normally gifted people with autism know many emotions and emotional terms, and they have an extensive collection of scenarios. They do not lack theoretical knowledge. The problems they have with understanding the (emotional) world are related to difficulties in several areas simultaneously: the integration of communication skills, emotional responsiveness, paying attention to the most relevant information, prioritizing social stimuli, and cognitive skills. The flow of human interactions is too swift for the slow processing of social information in people with autism. They are not fast enough and not quick-witted enough in their social perspective-taking

social interaction

bldn 48-50

The social disorder in people with autism primarily concerns qualitative differences with the social interaction of normal people, especially regarding the reciprocity of social interaction. People with autism, for example, have problems with shared attention. The social disorder can manifest itself in very diverse ways. Four social subtypologies are distinguished (four types of manifestations of the disorder in social interaction): The aloof or inattentive type is the easiest to recognize, and individuals in this group most closely match the classic image of autism. A large number of this group also have an intellectual disability. However, a small number of normally gifted people with autism also belong to this variant within the autism spectrum. People with autism of the aloof type come across as indifferent to other people, especially peers and strangers. They often accept physical approach from familiar and trusted people. They seem to have no interest in other people, and contact is mainly instrumental, such as pulling other people along as a kind of instrument they use to obtain a certain object. Individuals in the aloof group usually become very absorbed in their own, stereotypical activities. As they grow up, some learn to accept the presence of others, but they show little or no interest in others and rarely initiate contact themselves. The passive type presents a somewhat different picture. Individuals in this group rarely initiate an interaction spontaneously, but they passively accept the approach of others. They are, as it were, on the sidelines; they take no initiative themselves but follow at the request of others. This can make them acceptable partners for peers, for example, as playmates: they are willing to do what is asked of them. In some children, the problems only become apparent when we expect more initiative from them. Unlike the aloof group, we regularly see other diagnoses than autism in them: usually atypical autism, but sometimes even Asperger's syndrome. The active-but-bizarre type very actively initiates social contact. But because individuals of this type, like all other people with ASD, have problems with smoothly and fluently understanding interactions, their manner of contact is naive, strange, inappropriate, and one-sided. They make contact in an egocentric way: for example, they talk endlessly about their own themes or interests, they base their contact solely on themselves, and they

have difficulty responding to the feelings, needs, or interests of others in their contact. Individuals of the active-but-bizarre type do initiate interaction with others, for example in a conversation or game, but they do not know how to join the conversation or game and often come across as intrusive and disruptive. A healthy distance seems to be lacking. Individuals in this group are often missed in diagnostics: they are labeled as behaviorally disturbed or antisocial. Many gifted individuals with ASD belong to this group. As a group, active-but-bizarre individuals generally have average to high intelligence, although there can be large individual differences. In the pompous or rigidly formalistic type, social problems are very subtle. Individuals belonging to this type are excessively polite or formal. They are aware of others and the importance of appropriate interactions and therefore adhere very strictly to social conventions. As children, they usually had clear problems with social interactions and were mostly classifiable under one of the other social subtypes mentioned above. Due to their good intellectual abilities, they gradually manage to compensate for and camouflage many of these difficulties. In literature, this is often described as 'progress', but it is not genuine progress in social development, rather the learning of various alternative strategies to appear as normal as possible and to survive optimally. For example, it is noticeable that these individuals try to grasp social events intellectually: they memorize certain social rules and 'survive' social activities based on learned or acquired 'scripts' ('scenarios', 'playbooks'). However, they lack the intuition necessary to understand the subtleties of interpersonal interaction. They adhere very strictly to social rules and have difficulty adapting to situations where the expected behavior deviates from the known scenario. Lack of empathy and social naivety are most characteristic of this group. We find this subtype most often in highly gifted adults with autism, and many of them receive a diagnosis of Asperger's Disorder. The social problems of individuals of the pompous/rigidly-formalistic type cannot be identified through a few casual contacts, conversations, or tests, because their intellectual approach allows them to react quite appropriately in those situations. Their social problems only become apparent in more intensive and longer-lasting contacts where spontaneity, empathy, and emotional support are required. There is a correlation between the subtypes and intelligence. We also see a shift in type according to age: a child who is very clearly active but bizarre in social interaction as a teenager may have been passive or even aloof as a toddler. Also, depending on the context, the same person can exhibit behavior from a different subtype: children, young people, and adults can function differently at home than at work and, for example, actively initiate contact at home but be rather passive at school or work.

interpersonal problems

a&e 116

Research shows that it is particularly difficult for young people with autism to gain insight into their own share in interpersonal problems. The young people also find it difficult to discover why other people find them strange. What proves particularly difficult is the awareness and knowledge of the consequences of autism in concrete daily situations. These difficulties are in line with the limitations these adolescents have in the socio-emotional field. Normally gifted adolescents and young adults often have good abstract knowledge of emotions, relationships, and social behavior but primarily lack practical skills in the socio-emotional field. The same often applies to their knowledge of autism. Sometimes their theoretical

knowledge of autism is even impressive, but knowing what that autism means for them concretely and in everyday situations is much more difficult.

social naivety

bldn 50

In the pompous or rigidly formalistic type, social problems are very subtle. Individuals belonging to this type are excessively polite or formal. They are aware of others and the importance of appropriate interactions and therefore adhere very strictly to social conventions. As children, they usually had clear problems with social interactions and were mostly classifiable under one of the other social subtypes mentioned above. Due to their good intellectual abilities, they gradually manage to compensate for and camouflage many of these difficulties. In literature, this is often described as 'progress', but it is not genuine progress in social development, rather the learning of various alternative strategies to appear as normal as possible and to survive optimally. For example, it is noticeable that these individuals try to grasp social events intellectually: they memorize certain social rules and 'survive' social activities based on learned or acquired 'scripts' ('scenarios', 'playbooks'). However, they lack the intuition necessary to understand the subtleties of interpersonal interaction. They adhere very strictly to social rules and have difficulty adapting to situations where the expected behavior deviates from the known scenario. Lack of empathy and social naivety are most characteristic of this group. We find this subtype most often in highly gifted adults with autism, and many of them receive a diagnosis of Asperger's Disorder. The social problems of individuals of the pompous/rigidly-formalistic type cannot be identified through a few casual contacts, conversations, or tests, because their intellectual approach allows them to react quite appropriately in those situations. Their social problems only become apparent in more intensive and longer-lasting contacts where spontaneity, empathy, and emotional support are required.

'evil' intentions

a&e 155

Due to their lack of empathy, people with autism, however gifted they may be, remain naive and vulnerable. Therefore, people with autism must be able to count on our support. We live in a world where manipulation occurs. People with autism lack the empathy to avoid being manipulated themselves. We can teach them some scenarios, but fundamentally they remain with an inability to timely notice the pitfalls for themselves in the many and rapidly changing interactions between people. People with autism sometimes need to be protected against the less good intentions of others. They too often become victims of others because they do not see through the evil intentions.

a&e 108

Teach them resilience and skills to protect themselves, rather than trying to follow others and thus getting themselves into trouble. Or as Temple Grandin, an American woman with autism, expresses it herself: "When I was younger, I had to discover with discouragement that some people have bad intentions. This is something that all people with autism should learn."

social network

building and maintaining

social relationships

interpersonal problems

a&e 116

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social skills

a&e 71-73

It seems that people with autism do not always spontaneously focus their perception on details that are relevant from a socio-emotional point of view. People with autism only achieve emotional perspective-taking when someone else points them to the right information or when the context for interpretation is clear. The perspective must be learned or clarified externally. People with autism spontaneously opt for business-like and intellectually logical solutions rather than emotionally logical ones. In real life, the emotional expressions of someone else are often not included in their meaning-making (their understanding of the situation). They often do not even notice them, or other stimuli attract more of their attention at that moment. People with autism are insufficiently spontaneously focused on emotional (and social) information.

the social aspects of language

…!? 105

…!? 111

Due to their overselectivity problem, they focus their communication on only one aspect, usually the – often technical – content. The language use of intelligent people with autism gives the impression that communication for them is more a means of exchanging objective information than a means of shaping and nurturing personal relationships.

…!? 109

From their typical way of thinking, normally gifted people with autism are more focused on facts, objective and fixed data, knowledge, enumerations, the pure content. If they focus on anything in communication, it is more on the content than the form, more on what they say than how they say it. They are more concerned, for example, with the completeness of their list of stops during their train journey, than whether their story about their trip to the seaside comes across and whether they are not boring their listener.

…!? 108

Due to their overselectivity, people with autism sometimes focus their attention on something different from what the conversation partner expects or considers important. Switching attention to a new conversation topic or to new conversation partners is also not so self-evident for them. Example: In a conversation, they can suddenly continue talking about a topic that was closed some time ago. They, as it were, get stuck on the first topic of the conversation and then ask a question about it, or add something, while you are already talking about something completely different.

…!? 64

Providing tools so that communication becomes easier. Communication is a very complicated process for people with autism, in which a multitude of visible and invisible parameters, functions, and variables must be monitored and regulated simultaneously across different channels. Communication is very demanding for people with autism, and at the same time, they are overwhelmed by a multitude of information from both 'within', from themselves – i.e., from their (sometimes faltering, and always very randomly associating) memory, and from their emotions (which often come across as very intense, and difficult to control, or even just to interpret) – and from 'without' – i.e., the facial expressions, gestures, voice sounds, and other signals from others, the feedback and the reaction of the other to their own verbal and non-verbal signals, etc. When we provide tools for this, it becomes easier for people with autism to express themselves. Then we remove the obstacles that the technical aspects of language and communication form, which due to their difficulty hinder the higher and more important functions of language and communication for people with autism, namely: its pragmatics and social function.

speed

…!? 58

We must not forget that people with autism have a lot of 'work' to do to decipher a message and extract its essence. People with autism process information piece by piece. People with autism are primarily visual thinkers and have difficulty with auditory processing of spoken language and with abstract terms. Our communication often proceeds too quickly for people with autism. Often, it is enough to wait a little longer and give them time to process the information. Then you see that someone with autism does react correctly to the message.

a&e 73-74

In real life, things often go wrong for people with autism during social interactions because they need relatively much thinking time to empathize with someone else. Their problems in

the area of empathy cannot be reduced to merely a cognitive deficit, a lack of knowledge. Many normally gifted people with autism know many emotions and emotional terms, and they have an extensive collection of scenarios. They do not lack theoretical knowledge. The problems they have with understanding the (emotional) world are related to difficulties in several areas simultaneously: the integration of communication skills, emotional responsiveness, paying attention to the most relevant information, prioritizing social stimuli, and cognitive skills. The flow of human interactions is too swift for the slow processing of social information in people with autism. They are not fast enough and not quick-witted enough in their social perspective-taking.

a&e 69

For people with autism, empathy is a matter of working, of 'calculating' and 'deciphering'. They also need more time and 'hints'. People without autism do not have to work at all to be empathetic; it is something instinctive and intuitive. It is precisely this intuition that people with autism lack. In that respect, people with autism deserve much praise and admiration: probably no one makes such heavy efforts to empathize with others as people with autism. Because it is not self-evident for them, they have to make many efforts. Accusing people with autism of not having enough empathy is therefore not fair. You don't blame a visually impaired or blind person for not seeing, do you? On the contrary, we must accommodate people with autism in their handicap and not 'get' them on their shortcomings. We must give them the time and space, and support if necessary, to be able to take a full place in society and live a full life, despite their social limitations.

a&e 130

People with autism process (especially verbal) information much slower than we do. They see the essence of a message less quickly, but have to process more details.

a&e 154

True empathy, authentic ability to empathize, is not achieved by looking things up in an encyclopedia or a dictionary of feelings, not by applying learned rules, and not by calculating algorithms. These strategies are not sufficient for real life. That presupposes too much banal and trivial prior knowledge. It goes too fast and has too many distracting stimuli, so that factual knowledge of the emotional world falls short. Normally and well-gifted people with autism can learn a lot about feelings, but it remains limited to a rather academic knowledge, dominated by formulas, rules, and scenarios. People with autism lack the ability to convert what they learn about feelings into spontaneous and flexible empathy. The ability to quickly and flexibly direct attention to what is truly relevant in an emotional context, the ability to be ad rem, is lacking even in the most highly gifted people with autism. The deficit in empathy in people with autism is much deeper than the deficits in recognizing and naming feelings or a deficit in theory of mind. Social skills are much more than just understanding. For social skill, speed and flexibility of reacting to the other are of much more decisive importance than knowledge. What people with autism lack is much more fundamental than some kind of thought operation: they lack feeling.

…!? 110

People with autism lack the flexibility and speed assumed to understand a message. Communication is a process that happens terribly fast. It's strange if our conversation

partner only reacts to our message after a few minutes or even hours. We expect an immediate reaction. That speed is sometimes too high for people with autism, and then they don't react, or only much later. Or they camouflage and compensate with an answer that is usually appreciated by the other person: 'Yes'.

…!? 116

…!? 99

'straightforward'

stress

a&e 33

People with autism have and express more negative feelings because they have more negative experiences. Due to their disability, their limited and/or different understanding of reality and this world, they experience many more frustrations than we do. People with autism are under more stress.

…!? 43

It is also good to know that someone with autism, just like someone without autism, usually uses not one but several forms of communication depending on the situation and or the possibilities. What people with autism also have in common with people without autism is the fact that as stress increases, the form of communication also becomes more concrete and primitive. If, after ten minutes of polite and civilized requests, you still haven't been able to make it clear to the door-to-door salesman of totally useless goods that you are not interested, you will probably also resort to a more primitive and concrete communication: slamming the door…

bldn 115

Since many characteristics of autism spectrum disorders occur in milder form within the normal variation, almost everyone can name one or more typical behaviors of themselves that resemble autism. Moreover, we see a lot of 'seemingly autistic behavior' occurring in (normal) people who are under a sufficient degree of stress.

style of communication

…!? 107

…!? 41

A person with autism has too few varied communication possibilities to convey the same message in different ways to different people, adapted to different contexts. He is not able to adapt the 'language' of the message to the other person. If he is not understood, he will rather repeat the message several times in the same way than try different ways.

'switching costs' / 'transition costs'

…!? 80

Making transitions is difficult for all people with autism. They have difficulty with the concept of 'stop'. They can sometimes find it difficult to stop something and then switch to something else. Especially if they are engaged in their favorite or stereotypical activities, or if they are doing something they consider very important.

…!? 108-109

Due to their overselectivity, people with autism sometimes focus their attention on something different from what the conversation partner expects or considers important. Switching attention to a new conversation topic or to new conversation partners is also not so self-evident for them.

bldn 63

The concept of executive function helps explain the attention problems in people with ASD. Directing and sustaining attention would, according to a number of studies, not immediately pose a major problem for individuals with ASD, but shifting attention, the so-called 'attention shifting', does. These problems are confirmed by research using the WCST. The problem with shifting attention is not general but occurs primarily when a child with autism is already engaged in a particular activity. It would therefore mainly concern difficulties in letting go of a point of attention.

'tailor-made' / 'customized'

communication

…!? 25

Children with autism exhibit a very specific and individual way of expressing feelings. Their word and language use is often idiosyncratic (:they assign their own meanings to words, which deviate from the generally accepted meanings). Only if you know the child very well can you understand what the child means. E.g.: A child with autism fell off a small step at a young age and hurt herself. Her father had replied "she fell off the step" when the mother asked what was wrong when she heard her child crying. Since then, the child always used the expression "She fell off the step" to indicate when she had hurt herself.

a&e 28

E.g.: A babysitter had gone to great lengths to make spaghetti because the child kept repeating 'spaghetti'. But he didn't want to eat the spaghetti. The mother knew immediately what had gone wrong: her son didn't want spaghetti at all, but always used the word 'spaghetti' to indicate that he was very hungry. But that didn't mean he actually wanted to eat spaghetti; often he craved something completely different. Also the speed with which one communicates, being visual, unambiguous and clear, not communicating on multiple tracks at the same time, and giving time to think of words and process incoming information… are points of attention where in communicating with people with autism we must adapt our communication to them, if we want to be efficient in our communication.

treatment

a&e 76-77

Because people with autism experience insufficient coherence in the world around them, we must help them place things, people, and events. We also want to issue a warning here. Every person with autism gives their own meanings to what he or she sees. Different people with autism therefore also give different meanings. Creating overview and clarity is therefore a strategy. The recipe can be different for each person with autism. You as a parent or service provider know the person with autism best. Tips from other parents and service providers can provide useful ideas but must always be adapted to the individual situation.

a&e 107

Do not project your own experiential and emotional world onto that of someone with autism. You can empathize with others, someone with autism cannot. You understand situations differently than someone with autism, because you can give meaning to those situations and someone with autism little or not at all. People with autism live in a different world. Therefore, also be careful with interpreting so-called emotional experiences in people with autism. It is not because you experience a situation in a certain way, that someone with autism feels the same in the same situation. For example, do not expect someone with autism to also be sad in situations where other people are sad. Keep in mind that people with autism can be over- or under-sensitive to certain stimuli and that the emotional meaning of many situations escapes them because they do not understand them. Accept their different experience and certainly do not prescribe feelings.

a&e 128

talking

a&e 127

People with autism have difficulties focusing on what is relevant. Therefore, we must show them what is important and essential. Talking with people with autism about their emotions and their consequences is more showing than talking. Clarifying and offering solutions. Talking with someone with autism – also about feelings – is primarily about clarifying and elucidating. People with autism are often in a muddle with their own feelings. For them, it is an inextricable tangle of impressions. Letting them talk freely about it only makes the tangle more inextricable. We can best help by first and foremost listening to the knots they are struggling with. Very targeted and concrete questions can help with this. Once the knot is found, it comes down to bringing clarity, for example by explaining words and concepts clearly.

tantrums

a&e 29

People with autism also often express their feelings in a very extreme way. Or their emotional expressions come across as extreme. At all ages, one can see extreme laughing fits, panic reactions, or tantrums in them. There are often also major mood swings: one

moment they have a severe tantrum, a few moments later they are laughing happily. A young adult with autism told me: "It's like a barrier that flips. One moment I feel happy, the next angry or sad. It can all change so quickly with me." It seems as if there is no brake on the expression of feelings in people with autism. Or is it perhaps that people with autism are hypersensitive and therefore react so extremely? People with autism have difficulty regulating and modulating. Because they can less oversee and understand stimuli in their context, they come across as much more absolute. This applies not only to stimuli coming from outside, but also to what comes from within. People with autism have difficulty distancing themselves from stimuli, processing them from a broader whole, the coherence. This distance is necessary to relativize things: relating is relativizing. People with autism cannot relativize very well. They are 'caught' by the things they experience, including their own feelings. If they are angry, then they are angry. They are overwhelmed, consumed by that feeling. The feeling is absolute. They are, as it were, blinded by the feeling: blind to other elements in their environment that situate what they feel in a broader framework and could therefore relativize it. People with autism generally have difficulty suppressing reactions to an immediate context. As a result, they have much less control over their feelings. An explosive expression is the result of an emotional explosion within.

a&e 97

With gifted people with autism, we can often put events into perspective 'afterwards' and thereby teach them to 'relativize', but there is a high chance that they will still be overwhelmed by their emotion next time.

testing

unreliability

bldn 121-128

a&e 124

Because of their weak central coherence, people with autism cannot see the forest for the trees. This also applies to their own experiences and perceptions. This problem, known as a typical autistic problem concerning 'episodic memory', means that the classic way of questioning often does not lead to an accurate problem formulation. People with autism find it particularly difficult to distinguish between what is relevant and what is incidental. Telling what exactly happened at a certain moment (the facts of an event), without, for example, getting lost in a lot of unnecessary details, can already be a major challenge. Especially in reporting their feelings, people with autism experience serious difficulties: either nothing comes out, or a confused and associative story emerges. A more structured and directive (but not manipulative…!) way of questioning is indicated, and questioning techniques that are visual and less emotional, such as Likert scales or sorting and checking systems, are more effective. Traditional open questions, such as "What happened?" or "What is the matter?" are not immediately the best starting point.

bldn 124

Gifted people with autism primarily lack social imagination: the ability to predict events based on past experiences. Many diagnosticians, however, do not immediately think of social imagination when considering the diagnostic criterion of absent or impaired imagination. A lack of this is also difficult to ascertain in a conversation or test.

bldn 49-50

In the pompous or rigidly formalistic type, social problems are very subtle. Individuals belonging to this type are excessively polite or formal. They are aware of others and the importance of appropriate interactions and therefore adhere very strictly to social conventions. As children, they usually had clear problems with social interactions and were mostly classifiable under one of the other social subtypes mentioned above. Due to their good intellectual abilities, they gradually manage to compensate for and camouflage many of these difficulties. In literature, this is often described as 'progress', but it is not genuine progress in social development, rather the learning of various alternative strategies to appear as normal as possible and to survive optimally. For example, it is noticeable that these individuals try to grasp social events intellectually: they memorize certain social rules and 'survive' social activities based on learned or acquired 'scripts' ('scenarios', 'playbooks'). However, they lack the intuition necessary to understand the subtleties of interpersonal interaction. They adhere very strictly to social rules and have difficulty adapting to situations where the expected behavior deviates from the known scenario. Lack of empathy and social naivety are most characteristic of this group. We find this subtype most often in highly gifted adults with autism, and many of them receive a diagnosis of Asperger's Disorder. The social problems of individuals of the pompous/rigidly-formalistic type cannot be identified through a few casual contacts, conversations, or tests, because their intellectual approach allows them to react quite appropriately in those situations. Their social problems only become apparent in more intensive and longer-lasting contacts where spontaneity, empathy, and emotional support are required.

'their' adaptation

supporting people with autism by adapting our behavior and communication to their limitations

…!? 124

We must adapt to the handicap of autism. People with autism have difficulty with changes. They need predictability. If habits and familiar routines change or disappear, they are confused and panicky. Because they have these difficulties, it is best that we give them as predictable a life as possible. Whoever offers someone with autism the same program every day makes life enormously predictable and therefore meets a need of the person with autism. But life is not such that you can do the same thing every day. Something unexpected can happen: unexpected visitors, the TV breaks down, a doctor's appointment, the potatoes are burnt. Moreover, if you do the same thing every day for a while, someone with autism will eventually expect that, and any change will become not just a frustration, but an outright disaster. Life simply involves changes. On the other hand, we can therefore help people with autism if we give them the means to adapt to living together. Adapted communication, for

example a daily schedule, helps them to deal with changes because they can then 'see' the changes in advance. If you know in advance that something is going to change, then that change becomes somewhat easier to accept. Predictability is important, but that does not mean we cannot build in changes. Always doing the same thing does not help someone with autism in the long term, on the contrary. Giving them the means to cope with changes does. Don't all those schedules make them more rigid, stiffer than they already are? Not at all, at least if we use visual and clarifying communication precisely to announce changes and modifications. Not only how you communicate, but also what you communicate makes one flexible or rigid. By introducing daily schedules, work schedules, by clarifying meanings in the environment, we are precisely trying to teach someone with autism to deal with changes. With adapted communication, we aim precisely to clarify new, previously misunderstood or unutterable things for the person. Precisely by our adaptation to the handicap (rigidity in thinking and doing), we teach someone with autism to adapt as much as possible to our existence (flexibility, suppleness).

We can help people with autism by adapting our communication style. Supporting communication is, firstly, working on a good understanding. Being patient, being clear, giving people time. Working serially (always being busy with no more than one track, sticking to one topic at a time when giving them information) as a speaker and at the same time, as a listener, trying to follow their associative thinking (when they jump from one thing to another) or to steer it (when they get stuck on one detail or lose the 'thread' of the conversation). Helping the person with autism to understand us. Adapt your communication form. People with autism find it difficult to grasp meanings and messages that are packaged in sounds, gestures, and even drawings. If we want to help them understand us better, if we also want to understand *them* better, then we must first adapt ourselves. This adaptation mainly consists in the good choice of a communication form, channel, and style in which the person with autism can understand us, can decipher our intentions. Since most people with autism do not sufficiently master spoken language in all its facets, we should simplify spoken communication as much as possible or necessary (and that is often much more than we think). Limit the message to the essentials. People with autism, because of their problems with coherence thinking, find it particularly difficult to distinguish the essential from the incidental in what they perceive. The more words we use, the harder it becomes for them to pick out the most important words, and the greater the chance that they filter out the wrong words. Because this style is rather abrupt and resembles 'commanding', some people consider this an unfriendly way of communicating. However, limiting spoken language to the essentials is not at all unfriendly if you do it in a friendly way: carefully, slowly, patiently, with a friendly intonation. Such language use is less confusing for most people with autism and is therefore very helpful and thus a pleasant way of communicating. Give time. It often happens that someone with autism does not react immediately or appropriately to a message or instruction. We should not forget that people with autism have a lot of 'work' to do to decipher a message and extract its essence. People with autism process information piece by piece, detail by detail. This is called 'serial thinking'. Our communication often proceeds too quickly for people with autism. So give them enough time to process all the pieces of information and to reassemble the message for themselves. Often, waiting a little longer is enough for someone with autism to react appropriately to a message. Repeat the message if necessary but do not change it. It may still be that the message has not really gotten through, and then it must be repeated. If you repeat a message, it is best to keep

using the same word and to avoid synonyms or paraphrases (that means repeating something but in different words). It is much less confusing if you repeat 'look' five times in a row, than if you vary with 'pay attention', 'see', 'here', and the like. Avoid ambiguous language. All people with autism have difficulty with ambiguous language. This is not only about words with multiple meanings, but also and perhaps especially about statements and announcements that acquire a different meaning depending on how you pronounce them and with what paralingual elements you accompany them. To avoid misunderstandings as much as possible, we limit the use of too vague, ambiguous, or figurative language. Even those who focus on this will notice that there are still often situations in which someone with autism interprets a word or sentence differently than intended. A simple example: when Joke was told 'Come, let's go and have a look on our tiptoes' (literally: 'on our stocking feet'), Joke said: 'No, because I have my shoes on.' Avoid vague and negative language. To be as clear as possible, we should also avoid any negation in our language. By saying what is not allowed or not possible, a person with autism does not know what is then possible or allowed. For example: Lies takes her brother's toy. The father says: 'Lies, don't do that!' First, Lies must understand what that message refers to: what am I not allowed to do? For people with autism, who have difficulty deriving meanings from context, this is already quite a task. But suppose Lies does understand that father is talking about taking the toy. It is not clear from father's message what Lies *can* or even *should* do. Father would do much better to say: 'Lies, play with your own dolls', then it is clear what Lies can or may do instead. Negative statements such as 'no', 'stop', 'cut it out', 'get rid of that', 'not like that' do not provide clarity for someone with autism. E.g. When we make it clear to a child that it is not allowed to climb on the cupboard, we do not say 'no' but 'come here'. This is in positive speech form. People with autism understand positive speech forms more easily. Our language is also full of vague expressions like maybe, soon, about, later… try to make things as concrete and clear as possible. Use language that has a concrete picture associated with it: speak in images. Figurative language and proverbs are described as imagery. Now there are two types of imagery. In the first type, a thought or concept is expressed indirectly by means of an image. Indirect because the image is not directly applicable to the concrete situation being discussed but refers to a similar situation. The image of one situation is transferred and applied to another. Such an image is called a metaphor (metaphor is Greek for: figurative, something that is transferred). Our language is full of metaphors: a camel is the ship of the desert; the evening falls; that woman dryly states that her husband is an ice-cold type; death comes like a thief in the night. Due to their literal way of thinking, people with autism are quickly confused by such language. Since the images are transferred from one reality to another, they should not be understood realistically or literally. A camel is, of course, not really a ship, the mouth with which the woman complains about her husband is just as moist as with other statements, and her husband (we hope for him) probably has a normal body temperature, death is not a person, so not a thief either. Children and young people with autism are misled by such statements because they live in only one reality: *the* reality. They therefore understand hyperrealistically. And so a boy dared not go outside for days after tea time, after he had been urged to put his bicycle inside, because ‘the night was going to fall’. There is also a second type of imagery. In this, images are used that are not transferred from another reality but that relate to the concrete situation itself. Since people with autism think in images (‘Thinking in Pictures’ is even the title of a book by Temple Grandin, about autism), we help them understand our communication if we do precisely that: speak in IMAGES. So we do not say: ‘Now you must work’. Because there is no concrete image that belongs to working. But we say: ‘Now you must read this text in silence’. Because you concretely say

what you mean, and also evoke a concrete image of what is expected of the person with autism. This way we limit the chances that the person with autism does not understand what is expected of him/her; or that he/she understands something different from what you mean. You can think of hundreds of images for working: cleaning, writing, digging, hammering, washing dishes, ironing, making beds, driving a truck, sawing… We do not say: ‘Get ready to leave’. We say: ‘Put on your coat’ (concrete image). We do not say: ‘Tidy up’. We say: ‘Put your Duplo in the box’ (concrete image). We avoid words or expressions that can be filled in in multiple ways. Better one concrete task. Tidying up, getting ready, and working are not connected to a concrete picture but are collective words and abstractions – categorical words – that can be filled in in more than one way. ‘Reading in silence’, ‘putting the Duplo in the box’, and ‘putting on your coat’ are concrete images that you can conjure up in your head. These expressions unequivocally belong to the images and are not abstract. They belong to a concrete image and do not refer to a multitude of many different activities and/or interpretations and corresponding images that can be filled in (if the person with autism is even capable of that). A person with autism has difficulty generating images (visualizing, imagining). Therefore, it is better to immediately place one concrete image in their head (via a sentence/statement that ‘leaves little to the imagination’ and evokes one precise image as concretely and unambiguously as possible). Ensure the communication gets through. When you speak to someone with autism, the sounds of spoken language are just one aspect of the many details in the environment. People with autism find it difficult to filter the many stimuli they perceive and to pick out the most important ones. A child with autism can be so engrossed by the reflection of light in the teacher's glasses that he does not hear what the teacher is saying. If you want to be understood by someone with autism, this means that all confusing and distracting environmental factors must be eliminated as much as possible. So, do not try to convey something from a distance or in a noisy room. Ensure that concentration can go to communication. Ensure that your words come across clearly, and support as much as possible with visual information carriers. People with autism focus more on the visual and have more difficulty with the auditory. It may seem strange, but with many people with autism, it is advisable to exaggerate a bit in communication, to be clearer, to be 'theatrical'. The intention is, after all, that the message gets through. The chance of this is greater if we exaggerate somewhat. Support communication with visual communication aids. For most people with autism, spoken language alone is insufficient for understanding the message. Even with people with autism who talk, it is often necessary to support the verbal with visual elements. Since people with autism are 'visual thinkers', we use visual, visible information carriers: written or drawn weekly schedules, work schedules, agendas, procedures, agreements, inventories, checklists, overviews, etc. Pictures, gestures, objects, and written text are visual. They not only make communication more concrete (directly sensorily perceptible), they are also less fleeting than the spoken word, which disappears as soon as it is uttered.

a&e 107

Do not project your own experiential and emotional world onto that of someone with autism. You can empathize with others, someone with autism cannot. You understand situations differently than someone with autism, because you can give meaning to those situations and someone with autism little or not at all. People with autism live in a different world. Therefore, also be careful with interpreting so-called emotional experiences in people with autism. It is not because you experience a situation in a certain way, that someone with autism feels the same in the same situation. For example, do not expect someone with autism to also be sad

in situations where other people are sad. Keep in mind that people with autism can be over- or under-sensitive to certain stimuli and that the emotional meaning of many situations escapes them because they do not understand them. Accept their different experience and certainly do not prescribe feelings.

therapy

@ 60

Talking about feelings is one of the hardest things for people with autism. A highly gifted man with autism writes: 'I spent most of my life in some form of psychotherapy with therapists who assumed I knew what the words meant but that I couldn't handle my own processing of them. Their interventions consisted mainly of guiding me in naming things I didn't feel. If I then said that this wasn't what I felt, mainly because I didn't know how to describe how I *did* feel, I was told I was resisting therapy and that I wasn't open to my feelings. During those years when people were concerned about my feelings, no one ever bothered to explain to me what those words meant.' Unless they are made very concrete and explained, feelings are not the most appropriate gateway for psychoeducation or training for people with ASD. Talking about feelings can be delicate. Feelings need to be addressed, but for them, it is a not very concrete and especially not very tangible matter. Experience also shows that talking too long and too much about feelings only leads to derailment. They then get entangled in abstract terms. They get overwhelmed by emotions, because they can make too little distinction between talking about feelings and feeling itself. And sometimes they get lost in all those words. From this, we should not conclude that feelings should not be discussed at all. But the way we discuss these matters is different with people with autism. Talking with someone with autism – also about feelings – is primarily about clarifying and elucidating. People with autism are often in a muddle with their feelings. For them, these are an inextricable tangle of impressions. We can best help them by first and foremost listening to the problems they are struggling with. Once the knot is found, we can clearly define the problem and neatly list all factual data related to it to create clarity and overview. We first discuss the facts to clarify the context in which the feelings of the person with autism occur. This way, we can better interpret and clarify the meaning of the feelings. And only then can we talk about them. Talking about the feelings themselves can be very 'sensitive'. People with autism need to be protected from themselves to some extent. Peer pressure and lack of assertive communication, or lack of impulse control, mean that someone with autism might still talk about something they would rather not, or prefer not to, talk about. Communication happens very quickly for them, and within that whirlwind of questions and answers, quickly finding an appropriate formulation to indicate that you do not want to answer a question is not always easy for people with autism. Perhaps that is why slow and cautious individual talk therapies are better than dynamic group discussions.

'thinking and feeling'

not being able to 'think and feel' simultaneously

a&e 32

It seems that feeling and thinking simultaneously is difficult for people with autism. Either they feel (and then get overwhelmed by their emotions because they cannot put them into perspective), or they think (and have no room to experience the accompanying feelings).

a&e 73-74

People with autism need relatively much thinking time to empathize with someone else. In real life, that thinking time is not given. Real life is not a videotape that you can pause for a moment to look something up in your encyclopedia of scenarios or your dictionary of facial expressions. The lack of empathy is therefore not reducible to merely a cognitive deficit, a lack of knowledge. Many normally gifted people with autism know many emotional terms and have an extensive collection of scenarios. They do not lack theoretical knowledge. The problems they have with understanding the emotional world are related to difficulties in several areas simultaneously: the integration of communication skills, emotional responsiveness, paying attention to the most relevant information, prioritizing social stimuli, and cognitive skills. The flow of human interactions is too swift for the slow processing of social information in people with autism. It's not just a deficit in theory of mind. On the contrary, given the efforts people with autism make to 'reason out' the inner world of others, one could even say they are the only ones who have a 'theory' of mind. People with autism have a deficit in a *hot* theory of mind. They are not quick-witted enough in their perspective-taking.

a&e 32

A possible explanation for the absence of emotional reactions in people with autism is that they have to put so much mental energy into purely intellectually and cognitively understanding what is happening to them that there is no mental space left for processing the emotional side of the matter. … . We often see that only when understanding of the purely intellectual side has come, the emotions are then also released. People with autism often react emotionally delayed to events. … It seems that feeling and thinking simultaneously is difficult for people with autism. Either they feel (and get overwhelmed by their emotions because they cannot put them into perspective), or they think (and have no room to experience the accompanying feelings).

a&e 97

With gifted people with autism, we can often put events into perspective 'afterwards' and thereby teach them to 'relativize', but there is a high chance that they will still be overwhelmed by their emotion next time.

'thinking that the other person already knows what you know / think'

…!? 105

They lack the skills to choose the appropriate information, adapted to what the receiver already knows or does not know. Thus, they can give too much information and tell something they told you shortly before or something about what you experienced together. It can also happen that children with autism at home spontaneously tell nothing about what they experience at school or at camp. They think their parents already know everything. This is related to weak I-other differentiation and a lack of imagination, seeing coherence, metavision, perspective-taking, and theory of mind. I have experienced this personally: I expressed my own thoughts, feelings, and opinions very little, because I thought it was self-evident that others knew what my opinions, thoughts, and feelings were. Also, particularly about my traumatizing experience when my father attacked me with a gun, I told almost nothing to people who could not know this, because I thought my friends would have told those people about it long ago (to explain my withdrawn behavior, etc.) – I thought that was self-evident; unfortunately, my 'friends' apparently told nothing about this to third parties, so that I came across as very strange to my 'friends'' friends and was considered a person with a severe congenital disorder or a sick personality disorder or something like that. I therefore received very little understanding and very little support from my environment at that time.

thinking

associative

detail-oriented

serial

slow

visual

theory of mind

theory of own mind

a&e 34

timing

Most people with autism have (great) difficulty with timing. Unless perhaps in the context of a very rigidly defined, very structured activity related to a typical autistic stereotypical interest. E.g., when a person with autism has learned to do magic tricks, tell jokes, or play the piano and that has become an obsession, then in the context of this activity, timing can also be very well developed. But in a normal spontaneous, everyday or mundane natural conversation, or normal, casual, spontaneous collaboration with colleagues or classmates or fellow players or others, an autistic person will exhibit an underdeveloped sense of timing. This is related to difficulties with shared attention, and often causes problems in the social and (school) career development of the person with autism.

transfer problems

…!? 122-123

People with autism sometimes function quite well with familiar people in familiar situations. However, their functioning is tied to those familiar people and/or situations. It often happens that a person with autism cannot handle a familiar activity or competence with other people or in a different situation.

a&e 96

Teaching skills to people with autism has serious limitations. Structured learning moments do not guarantee that the person with autism will also (spontaneously) be able to apply the learned skills in other contexts or circumstances.

a&e 102-103

A major damper on this optimism are the results regarding the generalization and transfer of what has been learned to real life. Often, progress is limited to the material used in the training (mostly drawings and stories). In some computer programs, a transfer from computer tasks to paper tasks has also been observed. The transfer to material other than that used in the training is therefore difficult. Even more difficult is the generalization to domains that were not trained and to real life. Often, this transfer is not even investigated in effectiveness studies, but the few studies that did do so leave little room for optimism. For example, the study by Hadwin and colleagues showed that children with autism, despite improved performance on theory of mind tasks, showed no progress in their communication (using mental states in their language and their conversational skills) or in their spontaneous pretend play after the training. Sally Ozonoff and Judith Miller trained normally gifted adolescents with autism in both communicative and social skills, as well as in perspective-taking and social problem-solving strategies. After the training, the adolescents did perform better on theory of mind tasks such as Sally-Anne, but there was no generalization to their social behavior. Sylvie Carette evaluated the effects of perspective-taking training for children and found that, although there is a positive effect on all types of perspective-taking, conceptual perspective-taking (discovering what others think) is the most difficult to train. Here too, it turned out that the children did not spontaneously apply the learned skills in other domains of social functioning. The German group around Bolte also found that a generalization of skills is not guaranteed. This transfer problem seems to be specific to autism, because in his study, Swettenham found that, unlike the children with autism, the children in a control group did make a transfer to tasks other than those learned.

@ 32

People with autism often do not apply what they have learned in one situation to another. It is important to pay close attention to these problems with transfer. This is done through repetition, using different methods and approaches to the problem, and frequently checking whether the information has been correctly absorbed. The confidant or mentor plays an important role in helping the person apply new knowledge and skills in daily situations.

trauma - traumatization

When people with autism grow up in an unfavorable environment, they sometimes become traumatized because they are repeatedly punished for the symptoms of their disorder and the limitations of their handicap, instead of receiving help. As a result, they may exhibit maladaptive, and even delinquent, behavior, and/or other poorly developed personality traits. The more severely they are discriminated against, punished, or neglected, the more severe and complex the trauma. It is also very difficult for someone with severe limitations in communicative skills, such as people with autism, to make their trauma known, to talk about it, to process it (with the help of others), to engage in effective talk therapy/trauma processing, and so on… See also the related: depression.

triad of disorders

bldn 48

The core symptoms of autism are defined as a triad of disorders: * disorders in communication * disorders in social interaction * disorders in (social) imagination resulting in a lack of flexibility and a limited, repetitive, and/or stereotypical pattern of activities.

'trustee' / 'confidant'

@ 32

People with autism often do not apply what they have learned in one situation to another. It is important to pay close attention to these problems with transfer. This is done through repetition, using different methods and approaches to the problem, and frequently checking whether the information has been correctly absorbed. The confidant or mentor plays an important role in helping the person apply new knowledge and skills in daily situations.

understanding

'unstable' / 'easily upset'

'upset, getting'

using fixed rules

verbalizing

a&e 105

visual

communication

a&e 126

…!? 99

…!? 63

Listening is also looking. To avoid communication disorders with people with autism, we must not only adapt our 'speaking' but also our 'listening' – which must be much more 'visual'. In any case, there are many children with autism who do not (cannot) speak, and we must then especially look closely at their behavior to understand them. And there are children who communicate 'motorically' (taking a hand, pointing, going to a certain place,

reaching for something…). Examples: Jan walks to the door and makes complaining sounds (I want to go outside); Lien pulls on the caregiver's skirt and goes to the crate with soft drinks (I want to drink). But even with normally speaking people with autism, it may be necessary to give them the chance to communicate visually. (Theatrical) gestures, written text, drawn diagrams, exaggerated facial expressions or other … they sometimes *need* these to be able to express themselves clearly enough and to convey clearly enough what exactly they want to communicate.

thinking

…!? 77

From the foregoing, it becomes clear that people with autism primarily need to be able to 'see' what is expected of them and what is going to happen. People with autism are 'visual thinkers': the visual channel is therefore much easier for them than the other perceptual channels. Much of the clarification will therefore consist in visualizing meanings, coherence, and expectations. This means: making them visible, so that someone with autism immediately 'sees' the essence of the situation or the message.

visualizing

a&e 126

Show more than talk. One of the most important doing activities in conversations is visualizing: via drawings, photos, diagrams, charts… The rule of visualizing also applies to conversations about feelings. Make abstract meanings as concrete as possible by making them visible. A simple drawing can already clarify a lot. All sorts of lists are also a handy tool. People with autism love to classify, label, and categorize things into boxes and lists. Only then does the world become manageable. Therefore, all sorts of lists can be drawn up together. A list of what they are good at and what they are not good at, a list of situations that provoke anxiety and situations in which they feel safe, a list of problems and solutions… We can better convince people with autism visually than with words: the strange associations they make, the different meanings they give to things, sometimes even the delusions they have, can best be refuted in the most concrete and visual way possible.

…!? 99

…!? 116

Visualize. Normally gifted people with autism also benefit from visual aids that make visible what they cannot see. Experience shows that even with normally gifted individuals, drawings and photos can be very meaningful and useful, if not necessary. If a daily schedule says 'work', what does someone with autism imagine that to be? Working outside? Doing something on the computer? Working alone or with others? A drawing or photo immediately provides the correct and concrete information and prevents them from giving it their own interpretation based on their autistic thinking.

…!? 117

Making the different steps and rules visual gives them a better hold. To teach someone with autism the art of 'asking', the following task analysis can be used, for example. Learning points 'asking for something' Thinking in your head: * What do you want to ask * Can you ask it now? Doing

…!? 124-127

…!? 78-79

…!? 57

Avoid vague and negative language. To be as clear as possible, we should also avoid any negation in our language. By saying what is not allowed or not possible, a person with autism does not know what is then possible or allowed. For example: Lies takes her brother's toy. The father says: 'Lies, don't do that!' First, Lies must understand what that message refers to: what am I not allowed to do? For people with autism, who have difficulty deriving meanings from context, this is already quite a task. But suppose Lies does understand that father is talking about taking the toy. It is not clear from father's message what Lies *can* or even *should* do. Father would do much better to say: 'Lies, play with your own dolls', then it is clear what Lies can or may do instead. Negative statements such as 'no', 'stop', 'cut it out', 'get rid of that', 'not like that' do not provide clarity for someone with autism. E.g. When we make it clear to a child that it is not allowed to climb on the cupboard, we do not say 'no' but 'come here'. This is in positive speech form. People with autism understand positive speech forms more easily. Our language is also full of vague expressions like maybe, soon, about, later… try to make things as concrete and clear as possible. Use language that has a concrete picture associated with it: speak in images. Figurative language and proverbs are described as imagery. Now there are two types of imagery. In the first type, a thought or concept is expressed indirectly by means of an image. Indirect because the image is not directly applicable to the concrete situation being discussed but refers to a similar situation. The image of one situation is transferred and applied to another. Such an image is called a metaphor (metaphor is Greek for: figurative, something that is transferred). Our language is full of metaphors: a camel is the ship of the desert; the evening falls; that woman dryly states that her husband is an ice-cold type; death comes like a thief in the night. Due to their literal way of thinking, people with autism are quickly confused by such language. Since the images are transferred from one reality to another, they should not be understood realistically or literally. A camel is, of course, not really a ship, the mouth with which the woman complains about her husband is just as moist as with other statements, and her husband (we hope for him) probably has a normal body temperature, death is not a person, so not a thief either. Children and young people with autism are misled by such statements because they live in only one reality: *the* reality. They therefore understand hyperrealistically. And so a boy dared not go outside for days after tea time, after he had been urged to put his bicycle inside, because ‘the night was going to fall’. There is also a second type of imagery. In this, images are used that are not transferred from another reality but that relate to the concrete situation itself. Since people with autism think in images (‘Thinking in Pictures’ is even the title of a book by Temple Grandin, about autism), we help them understand our communication if we do precisely that: speak in IMAGES. So we do not say: ‘Now you must work’. Because there is no concrete image that belongs to working. But we say: ‘Now you must read this text in silence’. Because you concretely say

what you mean, and also evoke a concrete image of what is expected of the person with autism. This way we limit the chances that the person with autism does not understand what is expected of him/her; or that he/she understands something different from what you mean. You can think of hundreds of images for working: cleaning, writing, digging, hammering, washing dishes, ironing, making beds, driving a truck, sawing… We do not say: ‘Get ready to leave’. We say: ‘Put on your coat’ (concrete image). We do not say: ‘Tidy up’. We say: ‘Put your Duplo in the box’ (concrete image). We avoid words or expressions that can be filled in in multiple ways. Better one concrete task. Tidying up, getting ready, and working are not connected to a concrete picture but are collective words and abstractions – categorical words – that can be filled in in more than one way. ‘Reading in silence’, ‘putting the Duplo in the box’, and ‘putting on your coat’ are concrete images that you can conjure up in your head. These expressions unequivocally belong to the images and are not abstract. They belong to a concrete image and do not refer to a multitude of many different activities and/or interpretations and corresponding images that can be filled in (if the person with autism is even capable of that). A person with autism has difficulty generating images (visualizing, imagining). Therefore, it is better to immediately place one concrete image in their head (via a sentence/statement that ‘leaves little to the imagination’ and evokes one precise image as concretely and unambiguously as possible). Ensure the communication gets through. When you speak to someone with autism, the sounds of spoken language are just one aspect of the many details in the environment. People with autism find it difficult to filter the many stimuli they perceive and to pick out the most important ones. A child with autism can be so engrossed by the reflection of light in the teacher's glasses that he does not hear what the teacher is saying. If you want to be understood by someone with autism, this means that all confusing and distracting environmental factors must be eliminated as much as possible. So, do not try to convey something from a distance or in a noisy room. Ensure that concentration can go to communication. Ensure that your words come across clearly, and support as much as possible with visual information carriers. People with autism focus more on the visual and have more difficulty with the auditory. It may seem strange, but with many people with autism, it is advisable to exaggerate a bit in communication, to be clearer, to be 'theatrical'. The intention is, after all, that the message gets through. The chance of this is greater if we exaggerate somewhat. Support communication with visual communication aids. For most people with autism, spoken language alone is insufficient for understanding the message. Even with people with autism who talk, it is often necessary to support the verbal with visual elements. Since people with autism are 'visual thinkers', we use visual, visible information carriers: written or drawn weekly schedules, work schedules, agendas, procedures, agreements, inventories, checklists, overviews, etc. Pictures, gestures, objects, and written text are visual. They not only make communication more concrete (directly sensorily perceptible), they are also less fleeting than the spoken word, which disappears as soon as it is uttered.

'what is not said'

Normally gifted people with autism often have difficulty in communication not so much with what *is* said, but with what is *not* said. They have difficulty 'reading between the lines'.

'when to speak / not speak'

word-finding difficulties

a&e 108

As long as they have images or can fall back on scripts or learned sentences, normally gifted people with autism can express a lot. It becomes more difficult when they cannot fall back on these things. Many gifted people with autism testify that they often find it difficult to find words.

Bldn 52

The own word choice of people with ASD is generally less fluent and flexible: words or phrases can be repeated, and there is difficulty switching to subsequent words (Rumsey, Rapoport & Sceery, 1985). Unusual, literal, and idiosyncratic word use also occurs (Menyuk & Quill, 1985).

bldn 124

'world behind the world'

a&e 153

bldn 53