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### **'absolute' thinkers**

Context blindness 'cover/back cover'

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

### **abstract**

*vs. concrete*

### **adapt 'us'**

a&e 107-109

Some practical tips

- People with autism have a hard enough time dealing with their own feelings. Therefore, do not flood them with expressions of your own feelings when they are upset or react emotionally. Stay calm and collected, no matter how difficult it is. Acting emotionally only makes things more complicated for them.

Do not expect someone with autism to (spontaneously) take other people's feelings into account. Don't expect too much effect from statements like: "Now do this to please me." Or: "If you do that, I will be unhappy or sad." People with autism do not understand enough about the feelings of others to take them into account. They do not realize enough the relationship between their own behavior and the feelings of others.

- Do not project your own experience and feelings 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 has little or no meaning. People with autism live in a different world.

- Therefore, be careful when interpreting so-called emotional experiences in people with autism. Just because you experience a situation in a certain way does not mean that someone with autism will feel the same in the same situation. For example, don't 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 it. Accept their different experience and certainly don't prescribe feelings.

- Be careful with emotionally charged statements from people with autism. For example, if someone with autism says they are depressed, that is not necessarily the case. People with autism have difficulty expressing their feelings adequately. They often imitate the statements of others, echolically, without it being an appropriate representation of their feelings at that moment.

- People with autism do not communicate their feelings so spontaneously. And when they do communicate, they cannot match the wavelength sufficiently with the receiver. Someone can be very depressed even though it is not noticeable to anyone.

If you want someone with autism to feel good, first and foremost, provide 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 how to express their frustrations appropriately. An environment adapted to autism is the prerequisite for a good feeling, both for people with autism and for parents and supervisors.

- Protect them from emotionally difficult situations. Avoid teaching skills that will get them into trouble. Teaching a boy with autism to make contact with a girl is nice, but this opens the door to all kinds of frustrations. An initial, fleeting and superficial contact will be successful, but once the relationship with the girl requires more complex skills (such as empathy), the boy will fail and the girl will drop out. Such experiences will lead to great frustration in the boy: heartbreak, 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 himself puts it: "When I was younger, I was discouraged to discover that some people have bad intentions. This is something all people with autism should learn."

- It is better to teach them too strict or too general rules that they can apply everywhere, rather than expecting them to sense the nuances of the world of feelings. The line "sometimes people don't see what you feel" assumes that the person with autism can

infer someone else's ideas about themselves. That is too difficult for most people with autism. Teach them earlier: "No one sees what you feel, so you have to keep saying it."

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

- Avoid overly abstract conversations about their feelings. Even if they can identify and express their feelings, people with autism often cannot imagine solutions to social-emotional problems. Don't expect that if someone with autism knows what someone else is feeling, he or she will immediately know how to best deal with that feeling. Prefer to talk in terms of situations and (adapted) responses in situations. Give them concrete and practical scripts for tackling social-emotional problems. Make social-emotional concepts concrete and visual and provide them with concrete solutions.

#### adjust environment

a&e 117

a&e 147

...!? 116

...!? 124-125

administration

*difficulty with*

'afterwards'

*answers*

*delayed processing/reacting*

agenda

*to formulate*

aggression

a&e 32-34

People with autism seem to experience feelings such as sadness, anxiety, fear or anger more often than we do.

This can partly be explained because they find communication difficult and are therefore less likely to communicate. So they often only communicate out of necessity: when they feel bad.

However, another reason for their many expressions of negative emotions is that they actually feel bad more often. Due to their disability, their limited and different understanding of the world, they experience a lot more frustrations than we do.

People with autism are more likely to be under stress. They are 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 do anything about... In short, life is not easy for them. It is not without reason that depression and anxiety are very common in people with autism, especially from adolescence onwards: the years of failures and walking on the tips of their toes eventually take a toll. When it is 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 keep calm.

And in addition, 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 those sensations hurt them.

In addition to teaching them alternative solution, social and communication strategies, which should prevent the person with autism from having to turn to aggressiveness; On the



other hand, it should also be considered to remove as many causes of problems and negative feelings such as pain and stress from their environment, so that they will simply feel bad and/or misunderstood or frustrated less often. Understanding their shortcomings and problems and appropriate communication on our part can do many wonders. Slight adjustments to 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 defiance. In extreme cases, depression can also lead to suicidal behavior (suicidal tendencies), although suicidal behavior in people with autism has never been systematically investigated. Relatively new is the insight that catatonia can occur as a complication. In catatonia, a person becomes extremely slow and rigid in his or her movements, resulting in a decline or regression in self-care skills. Depression not only affects the person with autism themselves, but also those around them. The behavioral problems associated with depression, especially aggression, can have a serious negative impact on family life.

...!? 43

It is also good to know that someone with autism, just as someone without autism, usually uses not one but different forms of communication depending on the situation and/or the 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 questions, you have still not been able to make it clear to the door-to-door seller of completely useless goods that you are not interested, you may also resort to a more primitive and concrete form of communication: slamming the door...

a&e 107-109

Some practical tips

- People with autism have a hard enough time dealing with their own feelings. Therefore, do not flood them with expressions of your own feelings when they are upset or react emotionally. Stay calm and collected, no matter how difficult it is. Acting emotionally only makes things more complicated for them.

'all' or 'nothing'

*feelings*

'everything'

a&e 29

People with autism often express their feelings in a very extreme way. Or their emotional expressions come across as extreme. At all ages, extreme fits of laughter, panic reactions or tantrums can be seen in them.

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

It seems as if people with autism have no inhibitions about expressing their feelings. Or is it perhaps the case that people with autism are oversensitive and therefore react in such an extreme way?

People with autism have difficulty regulating and modulating. Because they are less able to oversee stimuli and understand them in their context, they appear much more absolute. This applies not only to stimuli that come from outside, but also to what comes from within. People with autism have difficulty distancing themselves from stimuli and processing them from a broader perspective, the coherence. That distance is necessary to put things into perspective: to relate is to put things into perspective. People with autism cannot put things into perspective very well. They are 'caught' by the things they experience, including by their own feelings. When they're angry, they're angry. They are overwhelmed, preoccupied with 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 context and could therefore put it into perspective. People with autism generally have difficulty suppressing responses to immediate context. As a result, they have much less control over their feelings. An explosive expression is the result of an explosion of feeling within.

'nothing'

a&e 32

A possible explanation for the absence of emotional responses 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 things. .... We often see that only when the understanding for the purely intellectual side of the matter has been achieved, do the emotions then become released. People with autism often have a delayed emotional response to events. ...

The reason that people with autism react so extremely to stimuli (auditory, tactile, visual, etc.) 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 a 'hypersensitive and immature nervous system'.

It seems that feeling and thinking at the same time is difficult for people with autism. Either they feel (and become overwhelmed by their emotions because they cannot put them into perspective), or they think (and have no space to experience the feelings that come with them).

## ambiguity, ambiguous language

...!? 60

## angst

a&e 121-122

People with autism, just like any of us, can also be afraid and have anxiety. In fact, anxiety is one of the most common problems in autism, along with depression. A Dutch study found in a group of 44 children with an autism spectrum disorder that 84% of them met the criteria for some type of anxiety disorder. Temple Grandin, an American woman with autism, says that her main emotion during adolescence was fear. For example, any change in the classroom routine caused her intense anxiety. In addition to the normal fears, we often also notice so-called ones in them illogical fears.

## 'antisocial'

bldn 49

It active-but-bizarre type takes very active initiative in social contact. But because people of this type, like all other people with an ASD, have problems with understanding interactions smoothly and easily, the method of contact is naive, strange, maladaptive and one-sided. They make contact in an egocentric way: for example, they talk endlessly about their own themes or interests, only rely on themselves when making contact and have difficulty responding to the feelings, needs or interests of others when making contact. People of the active-but-bizarre type do take the initiative to interact with others, for example in a conversation or game, but they do not know how to insert themselves into the conversation or game and often appear pushy and disruptive. A healthy distance seems to be missing. People from this group are often missed in the diagnosis: they are labeled as behaviorally disordered or antisocial.

Many gifted people with an ASD belong to this group. As a group, active-but-bizarre individuals tend to have average to high intelligence, although there can be large individual differences.

a&e 38

People with autism express their feelings. But they do this in a different way than other people, often extreme and even more often not adapted to the context. They have difficulties communicating their feelings in a way that is understandable to those around them. Van

Dalen, quoted earlier, 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 is unable to convey these in a way that is understandable to others. This way you very quickly come across as angry, while that is not the intention at all. The more you as an autistic person try to convey your emotions, the less will come of it."

arrogant

pedantic - haughty

ask 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 happens even in normally gifted people with autism, and they usually have a wide vocabulary and abstract language forms at their disposal. During a course for gifted young people with autism, it is striking how some apparently find it easier to get a bottle of water in the kitchen than to ask for one at another table. Or they go around the table to take the plate of toppings at the other end instead of asking for it.

ask 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 happens even in normally gifted people with autism, and they usually have a wide vocabulary and abstract language forms at their disposal. During a course for gifted young people with autism, it is striking how some apparently find it easier to get a bottle of water in the kitchen than to ask for one at another table. Or they go around the table to take the plate of toppings at the other end instead of asking for it.

...!? 127

We often see that people with autism do not have much difficulty 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, when they have a bad day, when they become unbalanced and confused, they can no longer function at the same (apparently) high level. They then need extra support and appropriate communication. We should never underestimate how much effort communication can take

for individuals with autism spectrum disorder. Not even among the so-called 'high-functioning people'.

associative

*memory*

*think*

attention

*attention disorder*

'attention shifting'

bldn 63

The concept of executive functions also helps explain the attention problems in people with an autistic disorder. According to a number of studies, focusing and maintaining attention would not immediately pose a major problem for people with an autistic disorder, but switching attention, the so-called 'attention shifting', does. These problems occur when the person with autism is already engaged in a certain activity. So it concerns difficulties in letting go of a point of attention.

The problem with attention shifting would therefore fit within a more general deficit in cognitive flexibility, which is an important predictor of social adjustment.

'autistic' logic

autistic preoccupation

*enthusiasms/stereotypical or obsessive interests*

*sexuality*

autobiographical memory

a&e 35

a&e 124

Because of their weakness central coherence People with autism cannot see the forest for the trees. Not even regarding their own experiences and perceptions. This problem, known

as a typical autistic problem of 'episodic memory' (episodic memory), means that the classic method 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, falling into a lot of unnecessary details, can be quite a challenge. People with autism experience serious difficulties, especially in reporting their feelings: either nothing happens, or a confusing and associative story comes out.

...!? 108

Many gifted people with autism testify that they often find it terribly difficult to find words to express, especially their personal experiences and feelings.

People with autism and normal giftedness have difficulty telling a 'real story' or reporting their experiences. This is due to their difficulty in understanding events in context

@ 23

#### autonomy

a&e 129

#### 'bad' intentions

a&e 108

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

a&e 156

Due to their lack of empathy, people with autism, no matter how gifted they are, remain naive and vulnerable. That is why people with autism must be able to count on our support. We live in a world of manipulation. People with autism lack the empathy to avoid being manipulated themselves. We can teach them a number of scenarios, but fundamentally they are left with an inability to notice the pitfalls for themselves in time in the many and rapidly changing interactions between people. People with autism sometimes need to be protected from the less good intentions of others. They all too often become victims of others because they do not see the evil intentions.

be distracted

be flooded

*through emotions*

become overstressed

behavior

a&e 36

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

being 'caught'

*in speed*

*through emotions*

being bullied

being caught 'at speed'

...!? 58

We must not forget that people with autism have a lot of 'work' to decipher a message and extract the essence from it. People with autism process information piece by piece. People with autism are mainly visual thinkers and have difficulty with auditory processing of spoken language and with abstract terms.

Our communication is often too fast for people with autism. It is often sufficient to wait a little longer and give them time to process the information. Then you see that someone with autism responds correctly to the message.

...!? 110

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

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

### 'bigger picture'

People with autism quickly lose sight of the 'bigger picture'; they focus on, or are 'preoccupied' with, details. They no longer see the forest for the trees: they see too much detail and become blind to the context, the bigger picture.

### brain processes

#### *coordination*

#### calculate

a&e 74

a&e 154

### camouflage

a&e 61

...!? 110-112

### 'can't' vs. 'don't want'

...!? 39

Communication, social skills, smooth cooperation with others; adapting to changes and unexpected events,... all of that can go wrong for people with autism. It is often incorrectly 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.

For them it is more a matter of 'not being able to' than of 'not wanting to'. Everyone needs to be able to make themselves understood and to understand others; also people with autism.

You may communicate less or avoid social contacts if you:



you always experience the powerlessness of not being able to communicate

you often experience that your communication does not come across as you intend

you hardly understand the other

you cannot follow the speed at which others think or talk

you are not given the time to think about your words

you are not given the time to adapt to (unexpected) changes

People with autism do not think or communicate 'less' than other people, but above all 'differently'. Especially slower and associative, on one track and visual instead of auditory. They can't do two things at the same time, but they can be very good at one particular thing. They have difficulty adapting and communicating and have difficulty seeing 'the bigger picture'. But they are attentive to (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 a single track and have difficulty thinking or following conversations on more than one track at a time. They have difficulty processing information.

Even though sometimes it seems because of their enormous vocabulary and enormous flow of words that they can express themselves as well as anyone else, sometimes they just talk for hours and fail to get their message across, also because they often fail to express the message they want to convey to themselves simply and correctly.

People with autism also think 'associatively' and allow themselves to be carried away and/or misled by details: they jump from detail to detail, making those exuberantly long and excessively long-winded and complex 'spaghetti' arguments that can no longer be followed, 'where a cat can no longer find its young', in which the essence and main point are completely lost to the listener.

It is difficult for the autistic to limit himself to the essentials and concentrate on the essentials, because of his 'associative' ("back and forth") thinking.

## catatonia

a&e 120

Depression in people with autism can result in an increase in problematic behaviors. Social withdrawal may increase and all kinds of 'psychotic' behavior may occur. Relatively new is the insight 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 his or her movements, resulting in decline 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 an observation, when integrated into a larger whole, loses its meaning as a separate detail and takes on a completely different meaning. This meaning arises from the context.

A disorder in the provision of meaning as a function of the context is seen as the central underlying cognitive deficit in people with autism. Information processing in people with autism has little or no tendency towards central coherence (integrative intelligence). They have fragmented information processing, characterized by disconnection rather than coherence. People with an autistic disorder do not spontaneously connect the different pieces of information with each other, nor with the (broader) context.

### channel

### chaos

...!? 126

Someone with autism is lost due to their disability in a chaotic environment full of stimuli that cannot be made sense of. Autism is not a behavioral disorder, it is a disorder of understanding. It is not the person with autism who is chaotic, the environment is chaos for someone with autism. Result: it is not the person with autism that needs to be 'addressed' 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 therefore ourselves. Improve the world, start with yourself..

### 'chick on the branch'

...!? 108

To the extent that they can fall back on learned sentences or scenarios, people with autism can talk very well. It becomes more difficult for them when they cannot fall back on those things. Many gifted people with autism testify that they often find it terribly difficult to find words to express, especially their personal experiences and feelings.

People with autism and normal giftedness have difficulty telling a 'real story' or reporting their experiences. This is due to their difficulty in understanding events in context.

Because they often do not see the whole, but rather focus on concrete details, they often

jump from one topic to another, leave out important parts of their story - for us - or get hung up on what is an unimportant detail for others. It happens that someone with autism starts a sentence, breaks it off to talk about a related topic and then starts the first sentence again. Due to their associative thinking, there is often little logical line in their story. Without outside guidance, they can keep associating 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 say too much, sometimes too little or the wrong things.

### choose yourself

a&e 129

### clarity

...!? 108

Because they often do not see the whole, but rather focus on concrete details, they often jump from one topic to another, leave out important parts of a story - for us - or get stuck in what others consider unimportant.

...!? 121

### clumsiness

bldn 56

### coherence

#### *lack of*

### communicate in writing

a&e 124

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

communication

*'straightforward' / clarity / unambiguity / literal / unambiguity*

*concrete and visual*

*docking*

*emotionally incorrect*

*exhausting, requiring a lot of energy*

*in writing*

*limitations in highly and normally gifted people*

*otherwise*

*pedantic, formal, stiff, wooden, harky*

*slow*

*turn-taking*

*visual*

*word-finding problems*

*≠expressie*

communication disorder

communication emergency

*interlocutor*

communication styles

*imitate the communication style of television programs*

*limited range of communication styles*

compensate

a&e 61

...!? 110-112

...!? 127

We often see that people with autism do not have much difficulty 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 them become unbalanced, confused, and no longer functioning at the same (seemingly) high level. They then need extra support and appropriate communication.

#### conceal - keep hidden

People with autism can also (if they have sufficient capabilities and especially in an unfavorable environment) try to keep their autism hidden.

See also: compensate - camouflage.

#### concentration problems

...!? 62

Difficulty concentrating; be easily distracted.

When you speak to someone with autism, the sounds of the spoken language are just one aspect of the many details of the environment. People with autism have difficulty filtering the many stimuli they perceive and selecting the most important ones. A child with autism may be so preoccupied with the reflection of light in the teacher's glasses that he or she cannot 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. In concrete terms, this means that all confusing and distracting environmental factors are eliminated as much as possible. So do not communicate something to a child from a distance in a noisy room. If necessary, make the child stop what he is doing so that his concentration can shift to communication. Make sure that the child can hear you clearly, and especially see you. People with autism focus more on the visual and have more difficulty with the auditory.

a&e 130

Finally, some general tips for conversations with people with autism.

People with autism are easily subject to information and/or stimulus overload. They process (certainly verbal) information much slower than we do, see the distinction between main issues and side issues much less quickly, and therefore have to process many more details. Much faster than other people, their heads become full and they no longer absorb anything. Conversations with someone with autism should not be too tiring and should not require too much concentration for too long. The person needs to be supported by clarification and clarification, and it may take longer for each 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 at once. Depending on the

developmental age and the mental capabilities of the person with autism, it is better to slow down a bit and deal with 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, as a conversation partner you 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 wearing a striped shirt or sweater. The lines literally dance before his eyes and that stimulus is so insistent and confusing that he can no longer pay 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 that makes yourself less of a source of distraction, or a position where your voice is more audible or clearer to the person with autism.

Conversations with people with autism must also be structured. There must be clear leadership and a clear line of action, preferably indicated by a previously drawn up agenda.

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

concrete

*visual*

*vs. abstract*

concretize

see: abstract, concrete

...!? 59-61

Use language that includes a concrete picture: speak in images

Figurative language and proverbs are described as figures of speech. Now there are two types of imagery.

In the first type, a thought or concept is expressed indirectly through an image. Indirectly 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: metaphorical, something that is transferred). Our language is full of metaphors:

- a camel is the ship of the desert
- evening falls

- that woman bluntly says that her husband is an icy type
- death comes like a thief in the night

Due to their literal thinking style, people with autism are easily 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 a ship in reality, the mouth with which the woman complains about her husband is just as moist as in other statements and her husband (we hope so for his sake) probably has a normal body temperature, death is not a person, therefore not a thief.

Children and young people with autism are misled by such statements because they only live in one reality: reality. They therefore understand hyper-realism. And so a boy did not dare to come out after afternoon snack for days, after being urged to put his bicycle inside, because 'night was falling'.

There is also a second kind of imagery. Images are used that are not transferred from another reality but relate to the concrete situation itself. Since people with autism think in pictures ('Thinking in pictures' is even the title of a book by Temple Grandin, about autism: 'Thinking in pictures'), we help them understand our communication when we do just that: speak in PICTURES.

So we don't say: 'Now you have to work'. Because there is no concrete image that goes with work.

But we say: 'Now you must read this text in silence'. Because you say specifically what you mean, and also create a concrete image of what is expected of the person with autism.

In 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 differently than you mean.

You can think of hundreds of images of work: cleaning, writing, digging, hammering, washing dishes, ironing, making beds, driving a truck, sawing...

We don't say, "Get ready to go."

We say: 'Put on your coat' (concrete image).

We don't say, "Clean it up."

We say: 'Put your duplicate in the box' (concrete image).

We avoid words or expressions that can be completed in multiple ways. Better one specific task. Cleaning up, preparing and working are not connected to a concrete picture but are collective words and abstractions - categorical words - that can be completed in more than one way. 'Reading in silence', 'putting the duplicate in the box' and 'putting on your coat' are concrete images that you can conjure up in your head. That expression clearly belongs to the images and is 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 completed (if the person with autism is already able to do so). A person with autism has difficulty generating images (visualizing, imagining). That is why it is better to immediately place one concrete image in his head (via a sentence/statement that leaves 'little to the imagination' and conjures up one precise image as concretely and unambiguously as possible).

...!/? 114

### Communicate specifically 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 interpreted) can confuse or lead them on the wrong track. It makes the world very unpredictable if you don't know what concrete meaning you should give to such an open or abstract concept. Even gifted people with autism have a hard time with this.

Gifted people with autism can understand the words, but often miss the unspoken meaning behind the words. When a teacher instructed a child with autism who wrote very sloppily to write 'legibly', the boy responded: 'But I write legibly!'. And he was literally right, because by readable he meant that he could read it himself... but he didn't understand that everyone was meant to be able to read his writing and not just himself...

It is better not to take anything for granted when communicating with a gifted person with autism. When a child with autism was told he was going swimming, he panicked terribly and started crying. Even though it loved swimming, it didn't want to come along. Afterwards it became clear why. They had not literally said that they would return home after swimming...

### Avoid asking vague questions

Precisely because they have difficulty with 'open endings' and grasping the intentions behind the 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?', he may answer 'yes', but just continue doing what he was doing. If you take the question literally, you are only asked if he can help. And if he can do that, then the answer on 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 assignment (to help).

When communicating with people with autism, it is best to immediately ask the question behind the question. Then in the example it is better to give an assignment 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 give a clear order to tidy up.



conduct disorder

*autism is not a behavioral disorder*

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 recorded correctly. The confidant or mentor plays an important role in helping the person to apply new knowledge and skills in the daily situation.

context insensitivity

contextblindheid

conversations

*'straightforward' / clarity / unambiguity / literal / unambiguity*

*feed*

*to follow*

*with several people*

core symptoms

*of autism*

*triad of disorders*

correct

*associative*

*detailed thinking*

*serial*

*slow*

*visual*

'customized'

*communicate*

*to deal with*

dealing with autism as a counselor / caregiver / therapist

a&e 107-109

Some practical tips

- People with autism have a hard enough time dealing with their own feelings. Therefore, do not flood them with expressions of your own feelings when they are upset or react emotionally. Stay calm and collected, no matter how difficult it is. Acting emotionally only makes things more complicated for them.

Do not expect someone with autism to (spontaneously) take other people's feelings into account. Don't expect too much effect from statements like: "Now do this to please me." Or: "If you do that, I will be unhappy or sad." People with autism do not understand enough about the feelings of others to take them into account. They do not realize enough the relationship between their own behavior and the feelings of others.

- Do not project your own experience and feelings 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 has little or no meaning. People with autism live in a different world.

- Therefore, be careful when interpreting so-called emotional experiences in people with autism. Just because you experience a situation in a certain way does not mean that someone with autism will feel the same in the same situation. For example, don't 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 it. Accept their different experience and certainly don't prescribe feelings.

- Be careful with emotionally charged statements from people with autism. For example, if someone with autism says they are depressed, that is not necessarily the case. People with autism have difficulty expressing their feelings adequately. They often imitate the statements of others, echolically, without it being an appropriate representation of their feelings at that moment.

- People with autism do not communicate their feelings so spontaneously. And when they do communicate, they cannot match the wavelength sufficiently with the receiver. Someone can be very depressed even though it is not noticeable to anyone.

If you want someone with autism to feel good, first and foremost, provide 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 how to express their frustrations appropriately. An environment adapted to autism is the prerequisite for a good feeling, both for people with autism and for parents and supervisors.

- Protect them from emotionally difficult situations. Avoid teaching skills that will get them into trouble. Teaching a boy with autism to make contact with a girl is nice, but this opens the door to all kinds of frustrations. An initial, fleeting and superficial contact will be

successful, but once the relationship with the girl requires more complex skills (such as empathy), the boy will fail and the girl will drop out. Such experiences will lead to great frustration in the boy: heartbreak, 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 himself puts it: "When I was younger, I was discouraged to discover that some people have bad intentions. This is something all people with autism should learn."

- It is better to teach them too strict or too general rules that they can apply everywhere, rather than expecting them to sense the nuances of the world of feelings. The line "sometimes people don't see what you feel" assumes that the person with autism can infer someone else's ideas about themselves. That is too difficult for most people with autism. Teach them earlier: "No one sees what you feel, so you have to keep saying it."
- Teach them all kinds of tricks to compensate for their lack of intuition. A boy with autism was often teased at school about his stereotypical topic of conversation (a certain TV program). We could teach him the difference between well-intentioned interest and teasing questions, but the other children play this game so subtly that he would always realize too late that they are already teasing him. Therefore, it is better to advise him never to talk about his favorite TV program for more than two minutes and to find another child. This way he may miss the well-intentioned interest of other children, but he will also never be teased for more than two minutes.
- Avoid overly abstract conversations about their feelings. Even if they can identify and express their feelings, people with autism often cannot imagine solutions to social-emotional problems. Don't expect that if someone with autism knows what someone else is feeling, he or she will immediately know how to best deal with that feeling. Prefer to talk in terms of situations and (adapted) responses in situations. Give them concrete and practical scripts for tackling social-emotional problems. Make social-emotional concepts concrete and visual and provide them with concrete solutions.

## deferred

### *emotion*

### *processing*

### *response*

## delayed processing/reacting

Often people with autism take more time to process information. In real, everyday life they often can't respond or react fast enough to (social) circumstances.

## depression

a&e 120

Depression in people with autism is rarely expressed through the verbalization of depressed feelings. When diagnosing depression, a targeted observation often provides more information than a verbal questioning or a self-report.

To date, little research has been conducted into treatment options for depression in people with autism. The scarce studies suggest that various psychosocial and pharmaceutical interventions can be used in the treatment.

Although psychotherapy, especially psychodynamic therapy, has limited value in the approach to people with autism, gifted individuals with autism in particular can benefit from it when psychotherapy is adapted to autism. Several studies promote the use of structured and directive forms of psychotherapy that mainly include cognitive behavioral strategies. However, according to autism expert Patricia Howlin, these strategies are rarely successful when applied in isolation, in other words when they are not combined with appropriate educational and behavioral interventions.

Medication is increasingly being used to control behavioral and mood symptoms in autism. Despite their popularity, research into the use of psychotropic drugs in individuals with autism is still fairly limited. Psychotropic drugs are ideally 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 the case of autism to control both depression and aggression.

## detailed 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. The autistic symptoms must always be viewed in the light of the complete triad. If symptoms are separated from this, they can easily lead to confusion or misclassification. The differences between autistic behavioral symptoms and the same symptoms, but within a different classification, are often qualitative and require a diagnosis

that goes beyond a pure behavioral description. Hyperactive behavior, obsessive-compulsive behavior, unusual and disturbed social interactions, for example, also occur in other disorders, but have a different background. Finally, comorbidity with other disorders also complicates accurate classification, especially in normally gifted and elderly individuals.

Correct classification of autism remains largely dependent on the diagnostician's clinical experience and intuition in recognizing a particular qualitative behavioral pattern. A reliable classification of autism also requires a significant investment. In order to arrive at a correct classification, it is necessary to extensively question the 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 entire triad of disorders and not limit oneself to an isolated part, such as communication. In addition, a thorough developmental history, especially of social development, makes an indispensable contribution to the 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 to a purely behavioral diagnosis for too long. Recent developments in the field of insight into the specific neurocognitive deficits of people with autism should 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 is more likely to focus on language and perhaps decide on a semantic pragmatic syndrome, a psychologist with an interest in neuropsychology is more likely to see indications for Non Verbal Learning Disorder (NLD), and a psychiatrist may see more in a diagnosis of schizoid personality disorder. The diagnosis of autism must therefore be multidisciplinary.

The mentioned difficulties in diagnosing autism occur at different ages and giftedness levels, 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 of the autism spectrum. At the moment, there is a lack of instruments that can be used with more gifted and older people with a suspicion of an ASD.

Furthermore, current diagnostic instruments all assess behavior. However, the behavior of people with ASD can vary greatly depending on the context. The behavioral assessment is very 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.

A remarkable observation concerns the difference in assessment between the participants and the parents. The adults studied with autism with a late diagnosis rate their own social functioning significantly higher than their parents, while adults with an early autism diagnosis hardly differ from their parents in their assessment. Most adolescents with autism have an unrealistic view of their own functioning and deficits. Current research indicates that this is especially 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 with their social functioning. We suspect that participants with a late diagnosis do not notice the many help that parents provide or do not experience it as help.

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

*different way*

*communicate*

*expression*

*interpret*

*listen*

'how' you say something

...!? 52-53

Communication in people with autism is especially different. Sometimes we are misled because someone with autism does not shape their communication sufficiently so that the function is not clear. The purpose or function of a particular communication is not immediately clear from the words used, but from the way in which they are communicated. It is mainly so-called paralinguistic aspects of language that clarify the function of communication. Paralinguistic aspects are the non-linguistic or extra-linguistic aspects of language and include intonation, sentence melody, voice volume, etc. We recognize a question by its intonation, even without it having to contain an interrogative sentence structure or interrogative pronoun.

Take for example the following sentence: Tuscany is beautiful. If you read that sentence out loud and at the end, with the word 'beautiful', you speak higher than at the beginning, then the function of the sentence changes. You no longer provide information about Tuscany but ask a question about Tuscany, in particular whether it is beautiful or not. Based on the

intonation and sentence melody, we can find out whether something is a statement or a question.

Written language has no paralinguistic aspects unless we invent special codes and characters to replace them, such as question and exclamation marks. These allow us to give different functions to one and the same sentence: Tuscany is beautiful. Tuscany is beautiful? Tuscany is beautiful!!!)

It is not just intonation or sentence melody that expresses the intention of communication, but the entire apparatus of non-verbal language or body language. The words say something about the content of the communication, the body (the gestures, the eyes, the facial expression, the volume of the voice) 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 they don't 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, daddy!". The dad kept confirming this: 'Yes boy, it is dark outside'. The boy kept asking this until his dad instructed him to lower the shutters. After a while, the dad understood why his son repeated "It's dark outside, Dad!" so often. The boy made no comment at all, but asked permission to lower the shutters. However, this was not clear from the way the boy communicated.

People with autism are often misunderstood because they fail 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 incident is told with the same facial expression as a trivial fact, a small incident is expressed as if it were a world tragedy, a request for permission sounds like an order..

Communication is a complicated process that requires many things to be organised: the roles of sender and receiver, choosing, combining and smoothly adapting the appropriate forms, clarifying the function of the communication, etc.

Communication is therefore much more than just a matter of the right words. Once said, it is not exactly done...

...!? 109-110

Not just what you say, but especially how

A very important part of the social, pragmatic aspect of communication is the way you communicate. The verbal aspect of communication reflects the content of the communication, the non-verbal ensures that something happens. The non-verbal aspects of



speech support the message (or not). Important elements include: physical proximity, posture, gestures, facial expression, hand movements, eye gaze, voice intonation...

Based on their typical way of thinking, normally gifted people with autism are more focused on facts, objective and fixed facts, knowledge, lists, the pure content. If they focus on anything in communication, it is on the content rather than the design, on what they say rather than how they say it. For example, they are more concerned about the completeness of their list of stops during their train ride, than whether their story about their journey to sea comes across and whether they do not bore their listener.

It is not so much the words that normally gifted people with autism have difficulty 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 both a fait divers and something very emotional in the 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 comment does not always sound like a happy comment. The language used by normally gifted people with autism is often very formal and pedantic. It is sometimes reminiscent of the stiff language of legal texts or notarial deeds. Children with autism often speak too maturely. The design of the language often appears unnatural or strange.

Normally gifted people with autism not only have difficulty using, but also and especially understanding, the non-verbal aspects of communication. And that often says much more than the words themselves. For example, people's eyes often tell a lot more than what those same people say. Gifted adults with autism hardly even understand the language of the eyes.

Words and sentences do not always have a fixed meaning. A dictionary is not enough to understand them. Gifted people with autism usually know only dictionary definitions, but lack the ability to discern 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 allow people without autism to intuitively deal with meanings smoothly. Because gifted people with autism have particular difficulty with those subtle non-verbal signals, they often miss the nuances in messages. We create these nuances, for example, through our intonation. Depending on the word I emphasize, the next sentence will take on a completely 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 I do want to do something else. I don't want to do that and so you should never ask me again...).

**difficulties with communication**

**discordant developmental profile**

Because an autistic spectrum disorder is a specific deficit rather than a general deficit, individuals with an ASD often show a discordant developmental profile, with specific deficits and specific outliers.

A remarkably good skill in a specific area occurs in one in ten people. Examples of such 'peak skills' are often found in the areas of drawing, making music, memory for data, mental arithmetic and early reading.

### disorder in the (social) imagination

#### distance

a&e 29

People with autism have difficulty regulating and modulating. They are 'caught' by the things they experience, including by their own emotions. They have difficulty overseeing the stimuli that come in and placing them in context. The feeling that comes over them is absolute. They are swamped, preoccupied. They are, as it were, blinded by the feeling or the many stimuli: they become blind to the context and coherence and have difficulty putting things into perspective. The necessary distance missing. The explosive, demanding expression is the result of an 'imperative' explosion of feeling within.

Social motivation is also much lower for them at such moments, because it disappears due to being 'blinded' by the emotion. Stimulating social motivation at such moments, by being understanding, attentive and empathetic, is therefore the best way to respond.

### distinguish relevant information from irrelevant information

#### docking

See : communication / docking

#### echolalie

...!? 67-69

Echolalia: stimulation or untraining?

Echolalia is the literal repetition of someone else's words or sentences. The repetition can immediately follow the other person's statement, but also minutes, hours, days, sometimes even months later. A frequently heard synonym is parrots.

Echolalia occurs in more than 85% of all speaking individuals with autism. It is not always easy to determine this in someone with autism, certainly not in the more gifted people and certainly not if the echolalia has been postponed (if it does not follow immediately, but only

occurs much later). You also have to know a person with autism quite well to know whether a statement is echolical or not. For a long time, echolalia was considered an abnormality, something pathological. Echolalia was thought to have no communicative function or purpose whatsoever.

Meanwhile, scientific research has shown the opposite. Echolalia is a strategy to compensate for difficulties in language acquisition. Echolalia therefore makes sense and can have various functions and, for example, serve to confirm communication, to attract attention, or even to ask something. Although echolalia is a rather unusual, unconventional way of speaking, we should not simply unlearn it. It is important to see how intelligible 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 pronunciation is related to the context or is simply expressed everywhere...

In most cases, echolalia is 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 to more appropriate and communicative forms of echolalia or even to normal language use with an occasional fossil of echolalia.

This means that we should not unlearn echolalia, but rather encourage it. We also see that children in whom echolalia has been recognized in its communicative function subsequently learn to speak better. Especially if an attempt is made to replace pure echolalia with more flexible and creative language use. To prevent children with autism from having to subsequently adjust the echolically acquired words or sentences into more conventional or understandable forms, we can ensure that they are immediately presented with the correct form.

Suppose a child using echolalia points to the milk. You see that and you ask: 'Milk?' or 'Do you want milk?'. The child will repeat this, also in the interrogative form. If the echolalia functions as asking for milk, the child will spontaneously say 'Milk?' or 'Do you want milk?' a little later. Then we have to transform that into 'Milk!' or 'I want milk'. We can avoid this step by offering the child a good model from the start. When the child then points to the milk, we say 'I want milk' or 'Milk'. We 'use' echolalia, as it were, to elicit and encourage correct speech and intonation.

...!? 111

Know what you're saying

Through language we gain access to someone's thinking. And we also use language to express our ideas. The language of normally gifted people with autism is like a mirror of their thinking.

Typical for normally gifted people with autism is that they often use words, expressions and sentences without fully understanding their meaning. Their language is much more

echological than we suspect. Their language use may demonstrate a good memory and associative thinking (they link certain expressions to certain situations), but it is not sufficiently based on a process of assigning meaning.

Normally gifted people with autism are therefore very easily overestimated in their understanding of spoken language.

They often give the impression of understanding language because they respond appropriately to an instruction or message. However, it is forgotten that people with autism often do not get their information from language but from other elements. They often create a kind of 'internal script' of events based on past experiences. In other words, they know the routines. A verbal message does not add any information and therefore they respond based on the routine rather than the message. Try giving a different message, you often see them respond 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 appear self-centered. True empathy assumes that you can empathize and empathize with other people who have experienced, or are experiencing, something that you have not (yet) experienced yourself.

Normally gifted people with autism in particular often give the impression that they are capable of empathy, but that can be very misleading. It's not real empathy, it's very self-centered. They do not put themselves in the other person's shoes, but recognize a situation or scenario that they have experienced themselves. They fall back on their own experiences instead of empathizing with the experience of others. As long as the other person feels the same as what they felt in a given situation, they will respond appropriately. Their lack of empathic abilities only comes to light when their own experience does not completely match how someone else experiences or has experienced a certain situation. Then they come whole egocentric over.

That said, it's safe to say that no one puts as much effort into being empathetic as people with autism. Despite their disability, they do everything they can to be as empathetic as possible, but in 'their way'. They calculate and calculate how they can best respond. They work 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 classical intelligence.

Normally gifted people with autism not only fall back on their own experiences, they sometimes 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 feel.

For people with autism, empathy is a matter of work, of 'calculating' and 'deciphering'. They also need more time and 'hints'. People without autism don't 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 a lot of praise and admiration: probably no one makes such great efforts to empathize with others as people with autism. Because it is not obvious to them, they have to make a lot of effort.

Blaming people with autism for not having enough empathy is therefore not fair. You don't blame a partially sighted or blind person for not seeing. On the contrary, we must accommodate people with autism in their disabilities and not 'catch' them for their shortcomings. We must give them the time and space, and support if necessary, to be able to take up a full place in society and live a full life, despite their social limitations.

a&e 75

The empathy deficits in people with autism regularly lead to the question of whether people with autism are not a bit of a psychopath after all? However, there is a fundamental difference between psychopathy and autism.

Psychopaths, unlike autistics, can usually take the perspective of others. They understand (cognitively) that they are causing their victim suffering, but it does not or hardly affect them emotionally. In people with autism there is no problem with emotional responsiveness, but there is a problem with understanding. Once they understand that their own behavior provokes negative emotions in someone else (and that usually only happens after someone has explained it to them), they usually express their regret and really 'feel' for the person. A psychopath is not ignorant, but he is insensitive. An autistic person is not insensitive, but above all ignorant.

But also often just clumsy. After all, autism is largely one performance problem. People with autism often have theoretical knowledge, but are unable to apply it in practice. They do look for a solution, a possible response, when they are confronted with someone else's painful situation, especially if they are encouraged to do so. But their problem solving has an 'autistic' look.

bldn 48-50

The social disorder in people with autism is mainly about qualitative differences with the social interactions of normal people, especially regarding the reciprocity of social interaction. For example, people with autism 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 people from this group most closely match the classic picture 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.

Individuals with aloof autism appear as indifferent to other people, especially peers and strangers. They often accept physical approaches from known and trusted people. They seem to have no interest in other people and the contact is mainly instrumental, such as pulling other people along as a kind of tool they use to obtain a certain object. People from the aloof group are usually 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 initiate rarely in contact.

The passive type shows a somewhat different picture. People from this group rarely interact spontaneously, but they do passively accept the approaches of others. They stand on the sidelines, as it were, they do not take the initiative themselves, but they do follow at the request of others. This means they can be an acceptable partner for peers, for example as a playmate: they are willing to do what is asked of them. For some children, the problems only become apparent when we expect more initiative from them. In contrast to the aloof group, we regularly see diagnoses other than autism: usually atypical autism, but sometimes even Asperger syndrome.

The active-but-bizarre type takes very active initiative in social contact. But because people of this type, like all other people with an ASD, have problems with understanding interactions smoothly and easily, the method of contact is naive, strange, maladaptive and one-sided. They make contact in an egocentric way: for example, they talk endlessly about their own themes or interests, only rely on themselves when making contact and have difficulty responding to the feelings, needs or interests of others when making contact. People of the active-but-bizarre type do take the initiative to interact with others, for example in a conversation or game, but they do not know how to insert themselves into the conversation or game and often appear pushy and disruptive. A healthy distance seems to be missing. People from this group are often missed in the diagnosis: they are labeled as behaviorally disordered or antisocial.

Many gifted people with an ASD belong to this group. As a group, active-but-bizarre individuals tend to have average to high intelligence, although there can be large individual differences.

At the pompous or stiff-formalistic type the social problems are very unstable. The persons belonging to this type are excessively polite or formal. They are aware of others and the importance of appropriate interactions and are therefore very adhering to social conventions. As children, they usually had significant problems with social interactions, and usually fell into one of the other social subtypes above. Thanks to their good intellectual capabilities, they gradually manage to compensate and camouflage many of these

difficulties. In the literature this is often described as 'progress', but it does not concern real progress in social development, but rather learning all kinds of alternative strategies to appear as normal as possible and survive optimally. It is striking that these people try to grasp social events intellectually: they learn certain social rules by heart and 'survive' social activities on the basis of learned or acquired 'scripts' ('scenarios', 'scripts'). However, they lack the intuition necessary to understand the subtleties of interpersonal interactions. They are very adhering to social rules and have difficulty adapting to situations where the expected behavior differs from the known scenario. Lack of empathy in social naivety characterize this group the most.

We find this subtype most often in gifted adults with autism and many of them are diagnosed with Asperger's Disorder. The social problems of people of the pompous/stiffly formalistic type cannot be identified with a few casual contacts, conversations or tests, because their intellectual change allows them to respond quite appropriately in those situations. Their social problems only become noticeable in more intensive and longer-lasting contacts spontaneity, empathy and emotional support are required.

There is a correlation between the subtypes and intelligence. We also see a shift in type as a function of age: a child who is clearly active as an adolescent but bizarre in social interactions may still have been passive or even aloof as a toddler. Depending on the context, the same person can also exhibit behavior from a different subtype: children, young people and adults can function differently at home than at work and, for example, make contact quite actively at home, but are more passive at school or work.

## emotional immaturity

a&e 34-35

People with autism experienced the world differently. One of the hardest things for them to understand is their own experiences. Many people with autism have difficulty processing physical sensations and how they may or may not relate to their feelings.

Sometimes someone with autism knows that he is feeling something, but not what he is feeling. The brain cannot give meaning to the physical experience. For people with autism, it is just as difficult to understand their own emotions as it is to understand those of others. In one study, normally gifted individuals with autism had difficulty 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 very common problem for 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 feels like falling in love, and less energy feels like depression. With such a flood of emotions, the person with autism recognizes the quality of

what he is feeling, but it is as if the brain has turned the volume knob to maximum. As a result, even pleasant feelings can become unpleasant.

Another common problem is incorrect processing of emotional stimuli. The brain is confused and mixes up different feelings, or gives the wrong meaning to a certain physical experience. For example, they confuse falling in love with fear.

## emotional intelligence

a&e 71-73

It seems that people with autism do not always spontaneously focus in their perception on those details that are relevant from a social-emotional point of view.

People with autism are not spontaneously focused on emotional information.

## emotions

see: feelings

## empathy

a&e 67-69

Normally gifted people with autism in particular often give the impression that they are capable of empathy, but that can be very misleading. It's not real empathy, it's very self-centered. They do not emotionally put themselves in the other person's shoes, but recognize a scenario that they have experienced themselves: 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 they felt in a given situation, they will respond appropriately and appear to be truly empathetic. Their lack of empathy only becomes noticeable when their own experience does not completely match how the other person experiences a similar situation.

Normally gifted people with autism not only fall back on their own experiences, they sometimes 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 feel.

For people with autism, empathy is a matter of work, of 'calculating' and 'deciphering'. They also need more time and 'hints'. People without autism don't 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 a lot of praise and admiration: probably no one



makes such great efforts to empathize with others as people with autism. Because it is not obvious to them, they have to make a lot of effort.

Blaming people with autism for not having enough empathy is therefore not fair. You don't blame a partially sighted or blind person for not seeing. On the contrary, we must accommodate people with autism in their disabilities and not 'catch' them for their shortcomings. We must give them the time and space, and support if necessary, to be able to take up a full place in society and live a full life, despite their social limitations.

a&e 154

Real empathy, authentic empathy, is not achieved by researching in an encyclopedia or a dictionary about feelings, not by applying learned rules and not by calculating algorithms. These strategies are not enough in real life. It goes too fast and has too many distracting stimuli, which means that actual knowledge of the emotional world is inadequate. Normal and 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 focus attention on what is really relevant in a given (emotional) context, the ability to be witty and quick-witted, is lacking in even the most gifted people with autism. The deficit in empathy in people with autism runs much deeper than the deficits in recognizing and naming feelings or theoretical perspective taking in the point of view of another. Social skills are much more than just understanding. For social skills, speed and flexibility in responding to others are much more decisive than knowledge. What people with autism miss is much more fundamental than some thinking operation. They lack intuition, they miss feeling.

## energy costs

*high*

## enthusiasm

Another (and better) word for 'obsessions' or 'obsessive/stereotypical interests' or 'autistic preoccupations'.

## episodic memory

a&e 124

Because of their weakness central coherence People with autism cannot see the forest for the trees. Not even regarding their own experiences and perceptions. This problem, known as a typical autistic problem of 'episodic memory' (episodic memory), means that the classic method 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, falling into a lot of unnecessary details, can be quite a challenge. People with autism experience serious difficulties, especially in reporting their feelings: either nothing happens, or a confusing and associative story comes out.

### 'evil' intentions

a&e 156

Due to their lack of empathy, people with autism, no matter how gifted they are, remain naive and vulnerable. That is why people with autism must be able to count on our support. We live in a world of manipulation. People with autism lack the empathy to avoid being manipulated themselves. We can teach them a number of scenarios, but fundamentally they are left with an inability to notice the pitfalls for themselves in time in the many and rapidly changing interactions between people. People with autism sometimes need to be protected from the less good intentions of others. They all too often become victims of others because they do not see the evil intentions.

a&e 108

Teach them resilience and skills to protect themselves, rather than trying to follow others and get themselves into trouble. Or as Temple Grandin, an American woman with autism, puts it: "When I was younger, I was discouraged to discover that some people have bad intentions. This is something 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, implement and evaluate the appropriate solution strategy for the solution of a particular problem and thereby suppress 'prepotent' but incorrect reactions. Executive functions play an important role in impulse control, planning behavior, organized search and flexibility. The hypothesis that there is an executive dysfunction in people with an ASD was formulated following the observation that some people developed autistic behavior after sustaining a frontal brain injury. They also showed a tendency to persevere 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 in people with autistic disorder using a battery of tests measuring functions of the frontal lobes was positive. People with an autistic disorder have problems with cognitive flexibility: they do not easily give up a strategy that was previously effective to solve a task or problem if it is no longer effective. They have problems planning their behavior. Even gifted people with autism and people with Asperger's disorder have difficulties with (social) problem-solving, both at the 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 explain the attention problems in people with an autistic disorder. According to a number of studies, focusing and maintaining attention would not immediately pose a major problem for people with an autistic disorder, but switching attention, the so-called 'attention shifting', does. These problems occur when the person with autism is already engaged in a certain activity. So it concerns difficulties in letting go of a point of attention.

The problem with attention shifting would therefore fit within a more general deficit in cognitive flexibility, which is an important predictor of 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 happens even in normally gifted people with autism, and they usually have a wide vocabulary and abstract language forms at their disposal. During a course for gifted young people with autism, it is striking how some apparently find it easier to get a bottle of water in the kitchen than to ask for one at another table. Or they go around the table to take the plate of toppings at the other end instead of asking for it.

(on) 256

expectations

*communicate*

*express*

*from others*

explosive

*expression*

*feelings*

express

*emotions*

*own feeling*

expression

~~*communicatie*~~

externalize

a&e 34

People with autism experience the world differently. One of the hardest things for them to understand is their own experiences. Many people with autism have difficulty processing physical sensations and how they may or may not relate to their feelings.

Sometimes someone with autism knows that he is feeling something, but not what he is feeling. The brain cannot give meaning to the physical experience. For people with autism, it is just as difficult to understand their own emotions as it is to understand those of others. In one study, normally gifted individuals with autism had difficulty identifying and describing their feelings. They also tended to focus on external events rather than on their own internal experiences.

extreme

*emotion*

*emotional expression*

feel

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

feeling misunderstood

a&e 37

The fact that people with autism communicate less spontaneously, less often and differently about their feelings sometimes means that they remain alone with their feelings. That they are not understood or misunderstood. This is how I met a young man with autism who had been seriously depressed for a long time. No one had noticed anything until then. People with autism are very little aware of this. They don't realize that others often can't see how they feel.

Johan, a young man with autism, had the impression that others paid little attention to him. He felt misunderstood. He had often been hungry, but no one had given him anything to eat. During a conversation with a supervisor, it emerged that Johan thought others could see his hunger. It was a real 'Eureka' experience for Johan to hear that others cannot perceive his feeling of hunger unless he communicates that feeling. Johan wrongly thought that others could see his hunger. Johan expresses his feelings, but does not communicate them, and certainly not in a way that others can understand.

feelings

*'otherwise'*

*all or nothing*

*be flooded*

*communication of emotions*

*explosive*

*express incorrectly*

*from others*

*intense*

*maladaptive*

*modulate and regulate*

*negative*

*no volume knob*

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

*own emotions*

experience

@ 22

People with autism often have difficulty recognizing, naming and dealing with their own (and other people's) feelings in an appropriate way. 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, ... .

express / put into words

a&e 34-38

People with autism experienced the world differently. One of the hardest things for them to understand is their own experiences. Many people with autism have difficulty processing physical sensations and how they may or may not relate to their feelings. And something that you do not understand clearly yourself is also difficult to explain to others.

@ 60

Talking about feelings is one of the most difficult things for people with autism. A 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 couldn't handle my own processing of them. Their interventions mainly consisted of guiding me to name things that I was not feeling. When I said that this was not what I was feeling, mainly because I didn't know how to describe how I felt, I was told that I was resisting the therapy and that I was not being 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 the psychoeducation or training of people with an ASD. Talking about feelings can be delicate. Feelings must be discussed, but for them it is a matter that is not very concrete and, above all, not very tangible. Experience shows that talking about feelings for too long and too much only leads to derailment. They then become entangled in abstract terms. They become overwhelmed by emotions because they are unable to distinguish sufficiently between talking about feelings and feeling themselves. And sometimes they lose themselves in all those words.

Talking about the feelings themselves can be very 'sensitive'. People with autism need more or less some protection from themselves. Peer pressure and the lack of assertive communication or lack of impulse control cause someone with autism to talk about something that he or she would rather not talk about. Communication is very fast for them and within that whirlwind of questions and answers, quickly finding an appropriate wording to indicate that you do not want to answer a question is not always easy for people with autism. Perhaps that's why it's better to have slow and gentle individual talk therapies rather than dynamic group conversations.

a&e 36

Just like the perception of the world around them, the inner world is also processed differently by the brains of people with autism.

They do not recognize their feelings. Or they feel 'too much'. Or they have a certain feeling, but their brain processes this information incorrectly, causing their behavior to be completely out of harmony with what they are feeling and causing them to communicate something different from what they actually feel.

The strange communication of feelings in people with autism reflects 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 meaning to them. After all, that is a condition for being able to express them. And on top of that: do they find the right wording for what they feel? When they say they've had a terrible day, was it terrible or were some of the potatoes too cold?

...!? 41 107

@ 29-30

recognize

a&e 34

People with autism experienced the world differently. One of the hardest things for them to understand is their own experiences. Many people with autism have difficulty processing physical sensations and how they may or may not relate to their feelings.

Sometimes someone with autism knows that he is feeling something, but not what he is feeling. The brain cannot give meaning to the physical experience. For people with autism, it is just as difficult to understand their own emotions as it is to understand those of others. In one study, normally gifted individuals with autism had difficulty identifying and describing their feelings.

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

*recognize*

*regulate*

*talk about*

**figurative language**

People with autism (especially young people with autism) can often have 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 imagine anything.

People often understand what is being said (literally), but they lack the imagination to also understand what is not said, what is implied or concealed.

Over time, older people with autism may have learned from their experience or through psychoeducation and become somewhat better at this. The more they are aware of their disability, the more they will be able to remedy it.

**fixed rules**

**flexibility**

bldn 63



'Executive Function' refers to the set of cognitive functions located in the frontal lobe of the brain: the ability to choose, implement and evaluate the appropriate solution strategy for the solution of a particular problem and thereby suppress 'prepotent' but incorrect reactions. Executive functions play an important role in impulse control, planning behavior, organized search and flexibility. The hypothesis that there is an executive dysfunction in people with an ASD was formulated following the observation that some people developed autistic behavior after sustaining a frontal brain injury. They also showed a tendency to persevere 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 in people with autistic disorder using a battery of tests measuring functions of the frontal lobes was positive. People with an autistic disorder have problems with cognitive flexibility: they do not easily give up a strategy that was previously effective to solve a task or problem if it is no longer effective. They have problems planning their behavior. Even gifted people with autism and people with Asperger's disorder have difficulties with (social) problem-solving, both at the 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 explain the attention problems in people with an autistic disorder. According to a number of studies, focusing and maintaining attention would not immediately pose a major problem for people with an autistic disorder, but switching attention, the so-called 'attention shifting', does. These problems occur when the person with autism is already engaged in a certain activity. So it concerns difficulties in letting go of a point of attention.

The problem with attention shifting would therefore fit within a more general deficit in cognitive flexibility, which is an important predictor of social adjustment.

forgetfulness

See: transfer problems

fragmentary / fragmentary

*communicate*

*experience - information processing*

*information processing*

*memory*

*observe*

fragmented experience, information processing

see : fragmentary

freedom

*make your own choices*

game

*game of communication*

*stereotypical game*

*symbolic game*

*the social game*

give time

...!? 58

Give time

It often happens that someone with autism does not respond immediately or adequately to a message or instruction. We should not forget that people with autism have a lot of 'work' to decipher a message and extract the essence from it. People with autism process information piece by piece, detail by detail. This is called 'serial thinking'.

Our communication is often too fast for people with autism. So give them enough time to process all the pieces of information and put the message together for themselves. It is often sufficient to wait a little longer for someone with autism to respond adequately to a message.

...!? 99

...!? 110

He lacks the fluidity and speed expected to understand a message. Communication is a process that happens terribly quickly. It is a bit strange that our conversation partner only responds to our message after a few minutes or even hours. We expect an immediate response. That speed is sometimes too high for people with autism and then they do not respond, or only respond much later. Or they camouflage and compensate with an answer that is usually appreciated by the other person.

...!? 116

Adjust the speed of communication

It is important to give people with autism enough time to process the 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 even one piece at a time, use only the necessary and essential words (be sparing with words) and give them enough time to respond.

bloknootje 2015

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

a&e 69

For people with autism, understanding others, empathy and empathy is mainly a matter of hard work. They need to think and reason more to understand things from other people's points of view. They need more time to think about this and instructions. All this does not happen intuitively, as it does with ordinary people. People with autism have just as many problems with empathy and empathy as some others have with, for example, algebra or chemistry.

good atmosphere

good feeling

good understanding

a&e 117

We can increase self-esteem in 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.

guard your own borders

haughty

arrogant - pedant

'how' you say something

...!? 52-53

Communication in people with autism is especially different. Sometimes we are misled because someone with autism does not shape their communication sufficiently so that the function is not clear. The purpose or function of a particular communication is not immediately clear from the words used, but from the way in which they are communicated. It is mainly so-called paralinguistic aspects of language that clarify the function of communication. Paralinguistic aspects are the non-linguistic or extra-linguistic aspects of language and include intonation, sentence melody, voice volume, etc. We recognize a question by its intonation, even without it having to contain an interrogative sentence structure or interrogative pronoun.

Take for example the following sentence: Tuscany is beautiful. If you read that sentence out loud and at the end, with the word 'beautiful', you speak higher than at the beginning, then the function of the sentence changes. You no longer provide information about Tuscany but ask a question about Tuscany, in particular whether it is beautiful or not. Based on the intonation and sentence melody, we can find out whether something is a statement or a question.

Written language has no paralinguistic aspects unless we invent special codes and characters to replace them, such as question and exclamation marks. These allow us to give different functions to one and the same sentence: Tuscany is beautiful. Tuscany is beautiful? Tuscany is beautiful!!!)

It is not just intonation or sentence melody that expresses the intention of communication, but the entire apparatus of non-verbal language or body language. The words say something about the content of the communication, the body (the gestures, the eyes, the facial expression, the volume of the voice) 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 they don't 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, daddy!". The dad kept confirming this: 'Yes boy, it is dark outside'. The boy kept asking this until his dad instructed him to lower the shutters. After a while, the dad understood why his son repeated "It's dark outside, Dad!" so often. The boy made no comment at all, but asked permission to lower the shutters. However, this was not clear from the way the boy communicated.

People with autism are often misunderstood because they fail 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 incident is told with the same facial expression as a trivial fact, a small incident is expressed as if it were a world tragedy, a request for permission sounds like an order..

Communication is a complicated process that requires many things to be organised: the roles of sender and receiver, choosing, combining and smoothly adapting the appropriate forms, clarifying the function of the communication, etc.

Communication is therefore much more than just a matter of the right words. Once said, it is not exactly done...

...!? 109-110

Not just what you say, but especially how

A very important part of the social, pragmatic aspect of communication is the way you communicate. The verbal aspect of communication reflects the content of the communication, the non-verbal ensures that something happens. The non-verbal aspects of speech support the message (or not). Important elements include: physical proximity, posture, gestures, facial expression, hand movements, eye gaze, voice intonation...

Based on their typical way of thinking, normally gifted people with autism are more focused on facts, objective and fixed facts, knowledge, lists, the pure content. If they focus on anything in communication, it is on the content rather than the design, on what they say rather than how they say it. For example, they are more concerned about the completeness of their list of stops during their train ride, than whether their story about their journey to sea comes across and whether they do not bore their listener.

It is not so much the words that normally gifted people with autism have difficulty 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 both a fait divers and something very emotional in the 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 comment does not always sound like a happy comment. The language used by normally gifted people with autism is often very formal and pedantic. It is sometimes reminiscent of the stiff language of legal texts or notarial deeds.

Children with autism often speak too maturely. The design of the language often appears unnatural or strange.

Normally gifted people with autism not only have difficulty using, but also and especially understanding, the non-verbal aspects of communication. And that often says much more than the words themselves. For example, people's eyes often tell a lot more than what those same people say. Gifted adults with autism hardly even understand the language of the eyes.

Words and sentences do not always have a fixed meaning. A dictionary is not enough to understand them. Gifted people with autism usually know only dictionary definitions, but lack the ability to discern 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 allow people without autism to intuitively deal with meanings smoothly. Because gifted people with autism have particular difficulty with those subtle non-verbal signals, they often miss the nuances in messages. We create these nuances, for example, through our intonation. Depending on the word I emphasize, the next sentence will take on a completely 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 I do want to do something else. I don't want to do that and so you should never ask me again...).

## humor

a&e 59

Because they are, as it were, blind to the why of behavior, people with autism are easily confused by the behavior of others. And even if they learn that people laugh when they hear a joke, for example, 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 at something and laughing at it in a less philanthropic way.

I know a young man with autism who has an IQ that far exceeds that of the average Flemish person. Every time I laugh when he tells something or every time I tease him well-intentioned by saying something while laughing about one of his little sides, he looks at me with a questioning look. When I say to him: "Just kidding, Willem!", he breathes a sigh of relief and starts laughing too. If I don't tell him that, he will remain in despair. Even though he has known me for more than five years now, unlike any other person who would clearly know after that time that our relationship is of such a nature that he can be sure that I only make well-intentioned humorous remarks, my laughter remains a source of confusion and uncertainty for the young man. He still cannot distinguish between a well-intentioned tease or a joke on the one hand, and a sarcastic and hurtful laugh on the other, even with someone he has known for quite some time.

bldn 33

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

### hyperrealism

...!? 60

### hypersensitivity

a&e 32

The reason that people with autism react so extremely to stimuli (auditory, tactile, visual, etc.) 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 a 'hypersensitive and immature nervous system'.

It seems that feeling and thinking at the same time is difficult for people with autism. Either they feel (and become overwhelmed by their emotions because they cannot put them into perspective), or they think (and have no space to experience the feelings that come with them).

a&e 31

It is not uncommon for someone with autism to have abnormal tolerance thresholds for different sensory sensations.

For example, it is known that certain people with autism plug their ears or react very extremely when there is (certain) sound. It is suspected that they do this because the sound attracts them pain do. From the autobiographies and experience stories of people with autism, we have learned that a striking number of people with autism have sensory problems: they are undersensitive or (and this is much more common) oversensitive to certain sensory sensations.

Brain 67-68

More than we expect, gifted people with autism, just like those with an additional intellectual disability, are bothered by certain stimuli, especially sounds and tactile stimuli, but also sometimes by certain colors and light.

This problem is seriously underestimated in normally gifted people with autism, despite the many testimonies from people with autism themselves. "My mother, my teachers and my governess did all the right things for me, but 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 and tactile stimuli can be really painful for people with autism and - this is only human - they jealously avoid situations and things associated with these unpleasant sensations.

For example, a child can suddenly have a tantrum or better yet a panic attack when the car turns in a certain direction, because last time there was roadwork in that street where a jackhammer was used.

The unpredictable nature of these sounds is especially tiring and unbearable for people with autism. You would develop less resistance to change if every new situation carries a risk of unpleasant and painful sensations.

### **hypochondria**

In the context of 'illogical fears' in 'autistic logic' Some degree of hypochondria may occur in people with autism.

### **idiosyncratic**

*communicate*

*language use*

### **illogical fears**

*hypochondria*

### **illumination**

a&e 128-129

Clarification and clarity 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 provide 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 have a 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 detecting and deciphering nuances in the communication of others. That is why they ask



longer and more questions until they 'get' the nuance in the message from the others. Often gifted people with autism are well aware that there is a nuance but they can't quite get it. It is important to slow down the communication, give them time and answer their questions as best as possible until they get the nuance.

However, people often find this disturbing and annoying or even uncomfortable. Precisely because nuances are nuances for a reason; people sometimes want to add subtle nuances to a message that is sometimes sensitive or annoying in the context of the context or in the presence of certain conversation partners.

To avoid problems, 'nuances' are added to the message. And the problem with people with autism is that they have just as much difficulty 'grasping' and 'deciphering' those nuances. Which can lead to uncomfortable situations.

Therefore: be as clear and as clear as possible (and as understandable as possible for people with autism) in your communication with people with autism.

**imagination**

*social*

**immaturity**

*emotional*

*social naivety*

**impose reception pattern**

...!? 106

See: pushy

**impulscontrole**

**independence**

bldn 248-249

Despite being aware of their difficulties, adolescents with autism rated their general social skills significantly more positively than parents and teachers. Parents rate social functioning lower than participants do for themselves.

In the assessment of the social functioning of gifted adults with autism, questions about the quality of implementation and the degree of support in the performance of daily activities may be more important than the question of whether or not to perform those activities. The

qualitative analysis shows that the majority of the people with autism studied require help from their parents to carry out most activities.

bldn 253

A detailed inquiry into the quality of the performance of social tasks by parents or other people in the environment offers a more realistic view of the possibilities and limitations of adults with an ASD than self-reporting on whether or not they perform those tasks. All participants are supported and guided in their functioning, either by their parents (or partner) or by care providers.

bldn 254

The assessment of social functioning in adulthood is more favorable for normally to highly gifted individuals with an ASD than for the entire spectrum, but relatively unfavorable compared to non-disabled peers. Only a small minority manages to live independently, work a regular job or enter into a partner relationship.

The people perform many household and social tasks, such as preparing meals, cleaning, managing finances, leisure activities and going out, but they only do this thanks to the support of parents and care providers. The specific limitations of gifted people with an ASD only come to light through an intensive (detailed) questioning of the way in which they fulfill social tasks.

bldn 296

A remarkable observation concerns the difference in assessment between the participants and the parents. The adults studied with autism with a late diagnosis rate their own social functioning significantly higher than their parents, while adults with an early autism diagnosis hardly differ from their parents in their assessment. Most adolescents with autism have an unrealistic view of their own functioning and deficits. Current research indicates that this is especially 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 with their social functioning. We suspect that participants with a late diagnosis do not notice the many help that parents provide or do not experience it as help.

The finding that people with a late diagnosis in particular rate their functioning higher than their parents or others from their environment has important implications for diagnostic practice. Especially in the case of a late diagnosis in adolescents and (young) adults, self-reporting is used to a large extent to collect information about (social) functioning. When questioning a (young) adult with a suspected ASD, the reliability of the self-report should be viewed with the 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-report on (social) functioning in people with a late diagnosis is lower than in those with an early diagnosis. It is possible that the self-image of late diagnoses is more unrealistic because their parents do a lot on their behalf or provide support behind the scenes and they therefore have less insight into their deficits and difficulties.

### 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 problems with transfer. This is done through repetition, using different methods and approaches to the problem, and frequently checking whether the information has been recorded correctly. The confidant or mentor plays an important role in helping the person to apply new knowledge and skills in the daily situation.

### inertia

...!? 58

...!? 99

...!? 110

### information overload

a&e 128

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

### information shortage

#### *interlocutor*

### I-other differentiation

a&e 21

According to Delfos, autism is the result of a delayed development of the socioscheme. That socio-schema is the knowledge and experience of the 'I' placed in the world. In a physical sense, the socio-schema contains the body schema (the awareness of one's own body) and in a psychological sense something that Delfos calls the 'I-other differentiation': the distinction

between the 'I' and 'the other'. The separation of the 'I' from 'the other' is said to be delayed and/or defective in children with autism. "An underdeveloped socio-schema causes little awareness of the environment and a limited focus on people. Due to 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 estimate social interaction," Delfos writes. Delfos' model is closer to cognitive theories than Hobson's theory (after all, a schema is 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 experienced the world differently. One of the hardest things for them to understand is their own experiences. Many people with autism have difficulty processing physical sensations and how they may or may not relate to their feelings.

Sometimes someone with autism knows that he is feeling something, but not what he is feeling. The brain cannot give meaning to the physical experience. For people with autism, it is just as difficult to understand their own emotions as it is to understand those of others. In one study, normally gifted individuals with autism had difficulty 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 giftedness, are able to recognize and name the expressions of other people's feelings, at least when their attention is drawn to it. But it remains a superficial contact. Superficial because it only concerns the outside, the surface of the other person.

When I see someone crying and I say, "Hey, you're sad," do I really understand what that means for that person? Do I also know what that sadness means for that person? Do I even know what sadness is?

Just because I can name the outside correctly doesn't mean I know what's on the inside. However, the inside is the most important. If I want to be understood by the other person in my sadness, it is not enough for me that the other person names my feelings. I want my insides 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 on the inside remains 'hollow' for me."

People with autism do distinguish between themselves and others, but mainly on the outside, too much in an objective way and not enough in a subjective way. It follows that people with autism will make mistakes if the outside is the same, but the inside is different.

For example, children with autism appear to have difficulty recognizing surprise on someone's face. Surprise (open eyes, open mouth) is similar in appearance to yawning. The difference with an open mouth yawning lies inside the person: something happens that the 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 that have to do with what someone expects, it turned out that children with autism especially had difficulty with the latter type of photos. They often confused photos of surprised facial expressions with yawning or being hungry. You also have an open mouth there...

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 in understanding and dealing with the feelings of others are related to a problem of meaning 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 that lies behind the open mouth. You have to be able to depict that feeling, or by extension the inside of people, their experience.

Michèle, a gifted woman with autism, explains it as follows in the video Autimatic: "Adding meaning is very difficult, for example facial expressions. So I see the changes in people's faces, but I don't know what that means. I can't read that, I can't give meaning to what it means." People with autism are sometimes surprisingly observant observers 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 go beyond that observation. The inside of people, the experience behind the behavior or facial expression remain a mystery to them. It is that inside that makes the difference between outward identical expressions, the difference between surprise and yawning, the difference between weeping and crying....

!? 106

They lack the skills to choose appropriate information, adapted to what the recipient knows or does not know. For example, they can give too much information and tell you something they already told you recently or something about what you experienced together. Even more often, they provide too little information to properly understand their message 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 spontaneously do not say anything at home about what they experience at school or at camp. They think their parents already know everything

...!? 108

## integrative intelligence

see 'central coherence'

## interrogations

*police interrogations etc.*

## jammer

...!? 108

## lack

*to communication*

## learn

*NLD*

*learn differently*

## limited range of communication styles

...!? 41

Someone with autism has few varied communication options to convey the same message in different ways to different people; he is unable to adapt the 'language' of the message to the other; if not understood, he is more likely to repeat the message several times in the same way rather than trying different ways.

Moreover, the language used is often idiosyncratic and echolical.

As a result, often only trusted people, such as parents or classmates, can understand the child.

...!? 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 happens even in normally gifted people with autism, and they usually have a wide vocabulary and abstract language forms at their disposal. During a course for gifted young people with autism, it is striking how some apparently find it easier to get a bottle of water in the kitchen than to ask for one at another table. Or they go around the table to take the plate of toppings at the other end instead of asking for it.

...!? 106-107

They do not adapt their communication style enough to others. In fact, they often impose a certain 'reception pattern' on others, e.g. they constantly steer the conversation back in the direction of their topic or theme.

They may not adapt their language to the recipient. For example, they are not polite in a context where this 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 quietly depending on the context. Like many younger children, some children, young people and adults with autism continue to formulate their thoughts out loud, even in situations where this can be disruptive, such as in the classroom.

They especially have difficulty adapting their communication style smoothly to the context. People without autism do this intuitively. You talk differently at home than during a job interview. You speak differently in a café than in an important meeting. In a conversation with the 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. For example, some are very formal, even in informal situations. There are also those who do adapt their style, but it feels artificial, because they are literal imitations of the behavior of others. It doesn't come across as real, but feels impersonal or even clumsy.

## listen

*listen differently to understand people with autism*

## lists

a&e 126

Show more than talk

One of the most important hands-on activities in conversations about social-emotional themes is visualization: through drawings, photos, diagrams, diagrams, etc. The rule of visualization also applies to conversations about feelings. Make abstract meanings as concrete as possible by making them visible. A simple drawing can clarify a lot.

All kinds of lists are also a useful tool. People with autism really like to classify, label and place things in boxes and lists. Only then does the world become clear. That is why all kinds of lists can be drawn up together. A list of what they can do well and what they cannot do well, a list of situations that provoke fear and situations in which they feel safe, a list of problems and solutions...

logic

*autistic logic*

make explicit

@ 42

make transitions

...!? 80

Making transitions is difficult for all individuals with autism. They have difficulty with the concept of 'stop'. It can sometimes be difficult for them to stop doing something and then switch to something else. Especially when they are busy with their favorite or stereotypical activities, or when they are busy with something that they find very important.

maladaptive

*behavior*

*communication*

*emotion*

*expression*

*response*

manipulation

*by others*

meaning

*mistakes*

'meaning 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 they are metaphorical or symbolic, where they use imagery). Read between the lines, hear something not is said, etc.: people with autism have a hard time with that. Often that deeper meaning contextgebonden or requires the far-reaching integration from different sources of information (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: contextblindness.

## memory

*'bad memory'*

*autobiographical*

*episodisch*

*fragmentary*

## mental resistance

bldn 125-126

The resistance to change in gifted individuals with an ASD manifests itself at a different, less concrete level and in small details that are barely noticeable. Their resistance is mainly a 'mental' resistance. Things and events should be as they imagine them, according to their ideas and expectations. They try to find support in the world by collecting or drawing up rules and scripts themselves. Due to their intelligence, they can even be very complex. As long as nothing happens that contradicts those rules, an outsider will not notice this roughness. This only becomes noticeable if the rule is violated or not fully followed.

Ritual behaviors also occur in normally gifted individuals with an ASD. These are most intensive during childhood, but they decrease from adolescence and are often no longer easy to recognize in adulthood. In adults we often notice 'mental' rituals, sometimes even quite complex: for example, they have to complete a certain train of thought or complete a mental collection before they can start something new. However, mental rituals cannot be observed by definition.

## mental rituals

bldn 125-126

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### 'message behind the message'

...!? 113-115

People with autism literally respond to what they hear, not to the question behind the question. Words are, as it were, data in their own right and not reflections of ideas.

People with autism may hear the bell ringing, but they almost never hear the clapper hanging. They hear sounds and can name the musical instruments, but they do not hear the melody...

Communication is not just about sending and receiving messages. Smooth communication also assumes that the messages are sent and understood as intended. The latter in particular is the biggest problem for people with autism and normal giftedness.

Tips for communicating with gifted people with autism:  
don't be too quick to assume that they understand the message.

Gifted people with autism are very easily overestimated, especially in their ability to understand common human language. Precisely because they are so verbal themselves, we quickly fall into the trap of just talking to them. Due to their intelligence, they also know how to compensate and camouflage their deficits in understanding.

Gifted people with autism can understand the words, but often miss the unspoken meaning behind the words.

It is better not to take anything for granted when communicating with a gifted person with autism.

Avoid asking vague questions

Precisely because they have difficulty with 'open endings' and grasping the intentions behind the 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?', he may answer 'yes', but just continue doing what he was doing. If you take the question literally, you are only asked if he can help. And if he can do that, then the answer on 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 assignment (to help).

When communicating with people with autism, it is best to immediately ask the question behind the question.

Facial expressions and other social cues often don't work

Most individuals with autism have difficulty understanding facial expressions and body language. They do not pick up enough on the messages contained in it. Furrowing their eyebrows, sighing, looking angry, raising their voice, smiling... the meaning behind this body language often escapes them. Or they misunderstand that language.

Ex: 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 hints usually don't work; Expressions such as: 'Say!', 'Come on...', 'Come on!', 'Now look at that!', 'Well, well, well' actually mean nothing...

## metavision

A person with autism has a lack of imagination and a lack of overview of all the information and stimuli that he/she has to process. As a result, he/she has no ability to critically analyze whether the way in which he/she sees things is correct and corresponds to reality.

Because the person with autism cannot create clarity, he also has no insight into his own view, no insight into his own vision.

He/she has difficulty critically reflecting on or 'seeing' how he/she sees things.

## miscommunicating

## misdiagnosed

bldn 81-84

An accurate diagnosis is very important. It helps in understanding the cause of a person's problems, choosing the right approach and treatment and formulating appropriate expectations for the future. In that respect, a correct diagnosis can 'save lives'.

Individuals with an ASD often remain unclassified or misclassified.

In this chapter we describe what complicates classificatory diagnostics:

Autism is a 'subjective' diagnosis

the qualitative deficits typical of autism are not easily translated into quantitative diagnostic instruments

there is great phenotypic variability in the expression of autism and symptoms vary with age and developmental level

the differentiation of autism from other disorders is complicated by a diagnostic overlap of isolated symptoms and the occurrence of comorbidities.

For example, certain diagnosticians are aware of the essential characteristics of autism, but in the concrete practice of classification they seem to interpret these characteristics quite narrowly - especially in normally gifted persons - resulting in autism.

Autism is a developmental disorder. The diagnostician must therefore have the necessary developmental psychological knowledge to correctly translate the criteria from DSM-IV, e.g.: "inability to enter into relationships with peers that are appropriate to the developmental level".

The DSM-IV and ICD-10 criteria are useful because they list the relevant symptoms, but they are inadequate.

bldn 124

Gifted people with autism especially lack social imagination: the ability to predict events based on past experiences. However, many diagnosticians do not immediately think of the social imagination when considering the diagnostic criterion of an absent or disturbed imagination. A lack of this is also difficult to detect in an interview or a test.

bldn 89

The large phenotypic variability also causes many problems.

Autism spectrum disorders manifest themselves differently not only between individuals but also within the same person. The autism picture manifests itself differently depending on the environment and especially age.

bldn 49-50

In the pompous or stiffly formalistic type, the social problems are very stupid. The persons belonging to this type are excessively polite or formal. They are aware of others and the importance of appropriate interactions and are therefore very adhering to social conventions. As children, they usually had significant problems with social interactions, and usually fell into one of the other social subtypes above. Thanks to their good intellectual capabilities, they gradually manage to compensate and camouflage many of these difficulties. In the literature this is often described as 'progress', but it does not concern real progress in social development, but rather learning all kinds of alternative strategies to appear as normal as possible and survive optimally.

It is striking that these people try to grasp social events intellectually: they learn certain social rules by heart and 'survive' social activities on the basis of learned or acquired

'scripts' ('scenarios', 'scripts'). However, they lack the intuition necessary to understand the subtleties of interpersonal interactions. They are very adhering to social rules and have difficulty adapting to situations where the expected behavior differs from the known scenario. Lack of empathy and social naivety characterize this group the most.

We find this subtype most often in gifted adults with autism and many of them are diagnosed with Asperger's Disorder. The social problems of people of the pompous/stiffly formalistic type cannot be identified with a few casual contacts, conversations or tests, because their intellectual change allows them to respond quite appropriately in those situations. Their social problems only become noticeable 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 as a function of age: a child who is clearly active as an adolescent but bizarre in social interactions may still have been passive or even aloof as a toddler. Depending on the context, the same person can also exhibit behavior from a different subtype: children, young people and adults can function differently at home than at work and, for example, make contact quite actively at home, but are more passive at school or work.

## misunderstand

## misunderstandings

...!? 112-114

Don't be too quick to assume that the message will be understood by people with autism, including gifted people. People with autism have particular difficulty with meanings that change depending on the context. Often people with autism 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 meaning behind the question or the words. That's because they don't see the 'reality behind the reality': they miss the 'bigger picture'. Because they do not perceive the connection between your words and the larger context.

People have a very difficult time 'seeing' the context and seeing the connection with what is happening around them and the wider context. They have a hard time distinguishing the important from the unimportant. They have difficulty distinguishing 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 easily distracted (by sounds, or by striking visual elements), or let their attention be captured by unimportant details in the story, message or question.

Also, their understanding of words is often idiosyncratisch. That is, they give it a meaning that only they give to it, and that does not correspond to the normal meaning of the word or expression.

So be redundant and make sure (several times) whether they understood what you wanted to say, whether they understood the message correctly, whether they understood the essence of it, whether they were able to distinguish between what was relevant and what was not relevant.

People with autism are often aware of their disability and will repeat the message or information several times. Then be patient and repeat.

Make sure that they have understood the meaning of your message. People with autism (even highly gifted ones) have a lot of difficulty with pragmatics.

Visualize and concretize. Create a text, main points list or diagram. Speak about concrete situations, literally say what you mean.

Make the information clear and unambiguous. Create an overview. Be patient.

Be redundant; repeat a lot and repeat where necessary. Provide feedback to the person with autism often enough to see if he/she has understood everything correctly.

...!? 63-65, 110-111

To avoid as many communication disorders as possible, we must adapt not only the way we 'speak', 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 among normally gifted people with autism, we see that they prefer to make strenuous efforts to solve a problem themselves over 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 yourself.

Furthermore, a person with autism, even a highly gifted one, has difficulty shaping communication correctly and conveying it so that the listener also understands what is meant:

Communication from a person with autism can be misleading. Maybe he can't find the right words and says it differently than intended, or his communication is lacking echolalisch or idiosyncratisch.

Emotions can also be confused and/or miscommunicated. Facial expressions and body language may not match the real content of a message.

The communication style may be confusing and/or inappropriate.

So it is very important to be redundant and to ensure that the message that the person with autism is sending is also correctly understood by us, if necessary by repeating and asking

whether the message you have understood is actually the message that the person with autism intended.

Give people time and space and to support in their communication (helping to find words and being patient) is therefore essential.

## naivety

a&e 156

Due to their lack of empathy, people with autism, no matter how gifted they are, remain naive and vulnerable. That is why people with autism must be able to count on our support. We live in a world of manipulation. People with autism lack the empathy to avoid being manipulated themselves. We can teach them a number of scenarios, but fundamentally they are left with an inability to notice the pitfalls for themselves in time in the many and rapidly changing interactions between people. People with autism sometimes need to be protected from the less good intentions of others. They all too often become victims of others because they do not see the evil intentions.

a&e 108

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

## narcissism

### *overconfidence*

## 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 a lot more frustrations than we do. People with autism are under more stress.

## neologism

bldn 280

## network

### *build and maintain social network*

## neurotypical projections

a&e 107

Do not project your own experience and feelings 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 has little or no meaning. People with autism live in a different world.

Therefore, be careful when interpreting so-called emotional experiences in people with autism. Just because you experience a situation in a certain way does not mean that someone with autism will feel the same in the same situation. For example, don't 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 it. Accept their different experience and certainly don't prescribe feelings.

a&e 124

When assessing the experience of people with autism, projection is the biggest pitfall for those who want 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. It is not autistic thinking but our thinking that is the main obstacle... The challenge for the therapist lies mainly in putting aside one's own 'neurotypical projections': avoiding problems with projecting a 'normal', non-autistic experience onto a person who perceives and experiences fundamentally differently. Because of their different perception, people with autism sometimes think and experience situations very differently than people without autism. We should not be too quick to conclude that we accurately know the experience of people with autism. Psychological guidance is the interface where the theory of mind of the client and the therapist meet or do not meet.

## nld

@ 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



In many cases, the diagnosis depends on who makes the diagnosis: an educationalist may quickly diagnose autism, a speech therapist will focus more on language and perhaps decide on a semantic-pragmatic syndrome, a psychologist with an interest in neuropsychology will be more likely to see indications for NLD and a psychiatrist may be more likely to see a schizoid personality disorder. The diagnosis of autism must therefore be multidisciplinary.

bldn 33-34

Characteristic are deficits in tactile and visual perception, psychomotor coordination, visuo-spatial organization, non-verbal problem solving and memory for more complex and new material. There are shortages with regard to strategic skills and establishing cause-and-effect relationships.

Individuals with an NLD profile are strong in verbal abilities such as memory, auditory perception, vocabulary and production, but have 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 adapting to new situations and with social perception and adaptation. There are difficulties in recognizing facial expressions and understanding non-verbal communication. They often lack social insight. There is little physical exploration of the environment: exploration is done by asking a lot of questions rather than by viewing and manipulating. Rourke and his colleagues hypothesize that deficits in central processing processes in the right hemisphere are the cause of these problems.

Many of these clinical features have previously been described in the literature under headings such as right hemisphere deficit syndrome (Voeller, 1986) and social-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 is widely applied in clinical practice.

In particular, the clinical consequences of NLD with regard to psychosocial and communicative functioning show a striking similarity to the picture we see in gifted people with a pervasive developmental disorder. While it was originally thought that their language abnormalities were mainly verbal, it is striking that in normally gifted people it is mainly the non-verbal and social aspects of communication that are disturbed. That increases the 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 comparing the neuropsychological profile of Asperger's Disorder with the profile of 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 of Asperger's Disorder: 18 of 21 subjects with Asperger's Disorder showed the NLD profile. (operationalized in the 22 NLD items of Rourke, 1989), and only one of 19 subjects with high-functioning autism (HFA).

Based on these and other studies (including Lincoln, Courchesne, Kilman, Elmasian & Allen, 1988), it appears that the neuropsychological profile of people with Asperger's Disorder is very similar to the NLD profile. Recently, Rourke himself stated that persons 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, psychiatric (behavioral) and neuropsychological diagnosis respectively.

Verté et al. (2001) compared children with NLD, children with Asperger's Disorder and children with high-functioning autism (HFA) on a number of neuro-psychological tests that test specific skills and deficits from the NLD profile, and found significant differences between the three groups on only 5 of the 23 variables. They conclude that the NLD profile is not only consistent 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 believed that approximately 10% of all children with learning and behavioral disorders exhibit an NLD profile (Hellingman-Fernhout, 2000). The diagnosis of NLD has not been sufficiently validated to date and its relationship with a number of child psychiatric syndromes, including those in the Pervasive Developmental Disorders section, still requires further investigation.

## non-verbal

a&e 47

Human communication occurs through two channels. On the one hand, through words and language: verbal communication. On the other hand, through the body and posture, gestures, facial expressions, the sound and strength of the voice, etc.: non-verbal communication.

Normally, verbal and non-verbal communication are an extension of each other and express the same thing. It is then said that communication is congruent. For example, if I am angry, I say so, and at the same time I put on an angry face and clench my fist. However, human communication is often not so clear and is rather incongruent: what is said and how it is said are not always in line with each other. At such a moment, when it comes to emotions, people mainly rely on non-verbal communication from the other person.

Understanding non-verbal communication (and especially the incongruity with verbal language) is extremely difficult for people with autism. The way ordinary people express their feelings is usually not literal and straightforward. There are no dictionaries available for non-verbal communication in which you can quickly look up the meaning of a facial expression or gesture. And what's more, the meanings often change from context to context.

Understanding non-verbal communication is rather a matter of intuition, of 'guessing' about the meaning and of emotions. These are all things that people with autism are not very good at.

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

a&e 32

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

a&e 73-74

People with autism need a relatively long time to think about how to empathize with someone else. In real life, that time to think is not given. Real life is not a video tape that you can pause with a pause key to look up something in your encyclopedia of scenarios or your dictionary of facial expressions.

The shortage of empathy cannot therefore be reduced to just a cognitive deficit, a shortage of knowledge. Many normally gifted people with autism know many emotional terms and they have an extensive collection of scenarios. They do not lack theoretical knowledge. The problems they have in understanding the emotional world are related to difficulties in several areas at the same time: 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 fast for the slow processing of social information in people with autism. It is not just a matter of a theory of mind deficit. On the contrary, given the efforts that people with autism make to 'reason' inside others, you could even say that 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 enough in their perspective-taking.

a&e 32

A possible explanation for the absence of emotional responses 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 things. .... We often see that only when the understanding for the purely intellectual side of the matter has been achieved, do the emotions then become released. People with autism often have a delayed emotional response to events. ...

It seems that feeling and thinking at the same time is difficult for people with autism. Either they feel (and become overwhelmed by their emotions because they cannot put them into

perspective), or they think (and have no space to experience the feelings that come with them).

a&e 97

With gifted people with autism, we can often put events into perspective 'afterwards' and thus teach them to 'put things into perspective', but there is a good chance that they will be overwhelmed by their emotions the next time.

## nuance

a&e 128-129

Clarification and clarity 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 provide 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 have a 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 detecting and deciphering nuances in the communication of others. That is why they ask longer and more questions until they 'get' the nuance in the message from the others.

Often gifted people with autism are well aware that there is a nuance but they can't quite get it. It is important to slow down the communication, give them time and answer their questions as best as possible until they get the nuance.

However, people often find this disturbing and annoying or even uncomfortable. Precisely because nuances are nuances for a reason; people sometimes want to add subtle nuances to a message that is sometimes sensitive or annoying in the context of the context or in the presence of certain conversation partners.

To avoid problems, 'nuances' are added to the message. And the problem with people with autism is that they have just as much difficulty 'grasping' and 'deciphering' those nuances. Which can lead to uncomfortable situations.

Therefore: be as clear and as clear as possible (and as understandable as possible for people with autism) in your communication with people with autism

...!? 110

Words and sentences do not always have a fixed meaning. A dictionary is not enough to understand them. Gifted people with autism usually know only dictionary definitions, but lack the ability to discern 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 allow people without autism to intuitively deal with meanings smoothly. Because gifted people with autism have particular difficulty with those subtle non-verbal signals, they often miss the nuances in messages. We create these nuances, for example, through our intonation.

own comments

The nuance that gifted people with autism miss is often not in verbal communication (language), but rather in communication style (the non-verbal aspects of communication). While they often have a sufficiently nuanced verbal vocabulary, they have difficulty adapting their communication style to the circumstances or context, nuancing their communication style sufficiently so that it is adapted to the context and that the conversation partner is also clear about what (and for what purpose) the person with autism is trying to communicate.

For example, a (gifted) person with autism can often appear 'angry', while he/she is not angry at all (but rather 'anxious' or 'worried' or 'happy' or 'insecure' or 'enthusiastic').

obsessive interests

*sexuality*

of misinterpretation

order

...!? 108

...!? 121

organizational aspects of

*communication*

*information processing*

others

*influence*

*to estimate*

'otherwise'

*learn*

overconfidence

bldn 248-249

Despite being aware of their difficulties, adolescents with autism rated their general social skills significantly more positively than parents and teachers. Parents rate social functioning lower than participants do for themselves.

In the assessment of the social functioning of gifted adults with autism, questions about the quality of implementation and the degree of support in the performance of daily activities may be more important than the question of whether or not to perform those activities. The qualitative analysis shows that the majority of the people with autism studied require help from their parents to carry out most activities.

bldn 253

A detailed inquiry into the quality of the performance of social tasks by parents or other people in the environment offers a more realistic view of the possibilities and limitations of adults with an ASD than self-reporting on whether or not they perform those tasks. All participants are supported and guided in their functioning, either by their parents (or partner) or by care providers.

bldn 254

The assessment of social functioning in adulthood is more favorable for normally to highly gifted individuals with an ASD than for the entire spectrum, but relatively unfavorable

compared to non-disabled peers. Only a small minority manages to live independently, work a regular job or enter into a partner relationship.

The people perform many household and social tasks, such as preparing meals, cleaning, managing finances, leisure activities and going out, but they only do this thanks to the support of parents and care providers. The specific limitations of gifted people with an ASD only come to light through an intensive (detailed) questioning of the way in which they fulfill social tasks.

bldn 296

A remarkable observation concerns the difference in assessment between the participants and the parents. The adults studied with autism with a late diagnosis rate their own social functioning significantly higher than their parents, while adults with an early autism diagnosis hardly differ from their parents in their assessment. Most adolescents with autism have an unrealistic view of their own functioning and deficits. Current research indicates that this is especially 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 with their social functioning. We suspect that participants with a late diagnosis do not notice the many help that parents provide or do not experience it as help.

The finding that people with a late diagnosis in particular rate their functioning higher than their parents or others from their environment has important implications for diagnostic practice. Especially in the case of a late diagnosis in adolescents and (young) adults, self-reporting is used to a large extent to collect information about (social) functioning. When questioning a (young) adult with a suspected ASD, the reliability of the self-report should be viewed with the 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-report on (social) functioning in people with a late diagnosis is lower than in those with an early diagnosis. It is possible that the self-image of late diagnoses is more unrealistic because their parents do a lot on their behalf or provide support behind the scenes and they therefore have less insight into their deficits and difficulties.

**overestimation**

*by others*

*overconfidence*

**overselectivity**

...!? 110-111

## overstimulation

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

a&e 32

The reason that people with autism react so extremely to stimuli (auditory, tactile, visual, etc.) 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 a 'hypersensitive and immature nervous system'.

It seems that feeling and thinking at the same time is difficult for people with autism. Either they feel (and become overwhelmed by their emotions because they cannot put them into perspective), or they think (and have no space to experience the feelings that come with them).

## overview

*need*

## own choices

*to make*

*to support*

## own emotions

see: feelings/own emotions

## pain

*emotional suffering*

*sensory hypersensitivity*

*unbearable suffering*

## peak skills

bldn 56

bldn 284



bldn 123-124

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

### pedantic

...!? 110

The language used by normally gifted people with autism is often formal and pedantic. It is sometimes reminiscent of the stiff language of legal texts or notarial deeds. Children with autism often talk too maturely. The design of the language appears unnatural or strange.

bldn 48-49

### 'performance deficit'

When people with autism cannot do something or do it wrong, it is not always because they do not know how to do it. But often it is a 'performance deficit' that holds them back: they know how to do it, but they fail to translate theory into practice.

This has to do with, among other things,

their serial thinking: not being able to do two things at the same time

their slow thinking: in the ever-changing context and in interaction with others, they are not fast enough to process information appropriately and respond appropriately and quickly enough

their detail thinking: not 'seeing' the main issues, but getting 'stuck' in details

### performance deficit

a&e 73-74

In real life, things often go wrong for people with autism during social interactions, because they need a relatively large amount of thinking time to empathize with someone else.

Their problems in terms of empathy cannot be reduced to just a cognitive deficit, a lack of knowledge. Many normally gifted people with autism know a lot of emotions and emotional terms and they have an extensive collection of scenarios. They do not lack theoretical knowledge. The problems they have in understanding the (emotional) world are related to

difficulties in several areas at the same time: 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 fast for the slow processing of social information in people with autism. They are not fast enough and not quick enough in their social perspective-taking. They lack social intuition: the direct, rapid and implicit retrieval of mental states such as ideas and feelings in others through focused but unconscious perception of information arising from facial expressions, tone of voice, body movements, etc.

Due to their slowness and context blindness, they have a very difficult time in practice, even though they have a lot of theoretical knowledge.

a&e 106

The improvements demonstrated by training are sometimes also false 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, it could be that in Sally-Anne tasks they learn that they have to take the box or container "that doesn't have the ball in it". Based on that strategy, they do give the correct answer, but this does not mean that 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 test leader. When he had some doubts about a certain question (for which answer "A" was the correct answer) and the test leader prodded him, the boy replied: "I think B is the correct answer, but it will probably be A." When the test leader asked why he said that, the boy replied: "Look, I've had to do many of those experiments, and each time it turned out that I gave the wrong answer. That's why I now always say the opposite of what I think." The test leader 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 training the children were able to apply what they had learned in identical scenarios, but with different material, but not in scenarios in which they were not trained.

Perhaps the biggest limitation of the training lies in the fact that, just like in the measurements and experiments for perspective taking, the problems are stated explicitly. As a test subject or participant in a training course, you know that you have to look for what others think and feel, because you are asked explicitly and emphatically. Therein lies the transfer problem of all kinds of training in 'emotional intelligence' and social skills. In real life, the problems do not present themselves explicitly: you have to recognize and sense that you have to look for the emotions and thoughts of others. Teaching perspective taking may be feasible, to a certain extent, but the problem with autism is not so much in competence (ability and knowledge) but in the spontaneous activation and application of that ability and

knowledge, the so-called performance. And that difficulty cannot be easily overcome, for two reasons.

Firstly, because of the well-known paradox 'act spontaneously'. If people with autism remain highly dependent on 'cues' that activate perspective taking, is there 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 concerns a core problem, remediation or treatment is far from simple and may be very limited. We will discuss the relationship between emotional intelligence and 'autistic thinking' later.

All kinds of training in learning to recognize, name, deduce and predict the emotions of others appear to be useful, but their effect on functioning in real life appears to be extremely limited. An improvement in performance on various perspective-taking tasks does not in any way imply an improvement in the underlying, fundamental deficits related to emotion recognition and perspective taking. Just because we have been able to teach a blind person to travel a certain distance without bumping into something or walking wrong does not mean that he can see. The training in emotion recognition and perspective taking does not lead to fundamental changes. 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 especially difficult for young people with autism to gain insight into their own role in interpersonal problems. Young people also have difficulty figuring out why other people find them strange. What appears to be especially difficult is the awareness and knowledge of what consequences autism has in concrete daily situations. These difficulties are in line with the limitations that these adolescents have on a social-emotional level. Normally gifted adolescents and young adults often have good abstract knowledge of emotions, relationships and social behavior, but mainly lack practical skills in the social-emotional field. The same often applies to their knowledge of autism. Sometimes their theoretical knowledge of autism is even impressive, but knowing what autism means to them in concrete terms and in everyday situations is a lot more difficult.

## perseveration

bldn 63

The concept of executive functions also helps explain the attention problems in people with an autistic disorder. According to a number of studies, focusing and maintaining attention would not immediately pose a major problem for people with an autistic disorder, but switching attention, the so-called 'attention shifting', does. These problems occur when the person with autism is already engaged in a certain activity. So it concerns difficulties in letting go of a point of attention.

The problem with attention shifting would therefore fit within a more general deficit in cognitive flexibility, which is an important predictor of social adjustment.

## personality

## perspective taking

### *second order*

## 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 of action, preferably indicated by a previously drawn up agenda.

## positive atmosphere

a&e 130

## pragmatic

...!? 48

Communication always has a function. Anyone who communicates sends out a message and sends information with a specific intention. Without intentions, communication remains a meaningless affair. What does one want to achieve with the communication? In people with autism we often see very limited functionality. They often do not sufficiently understand the power, power and possibilities of communication and therefore their communication is limited to a limited number of functions.

...!? 109

It is not so much the words that normally gifted people with autism have difficulty 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

The use of language to achieve a certain goal is called pragmatic of the language. These are the pragmatic aspects of what (even gifted) people with autism have the most difficulty with. Why does anyone say something? What are his underlying intentions? Pragmatics is much less a 'linguistic' problem than an intuitive or social-emotional problem. It is a very dynamic and changeable (context-related) thing. 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? For what purpose, with what intentions?

How do you best say something to someone, with a specific goal in mind? What information do you provide? Not too little? Not too much?

When is it best to say something to a specific person, and when not? When is it best to remain silent? Has my conversation partner given me all the information, or is he hiding 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 was intended? How do I ensure that I 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 are you allowed to use and which are you not? How loud can your voice volume be? What tonality should you adopt? What 'accent' do you use, do you speak AN or in dialect form? Are you allowed to gesture? ...

Human communication involves much more than language. To discover the correct meaning, intention and function of a message, vocabulary and grammar alone do not help!

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 addition to technical language, emotional, cognitive and motivational factors also play a determining role in the exchange of information.

predictability

*need*

*sensory hypersensitivity / sensory hypersensitivity*

*the same every day*

preoccupations

preparation

*make preparation*

'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 means expressing your feelings 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 towards others. They share their feelings much less.

Parents sometimes think that the child is communicating feelings, while there is no communication at all. After all, they see their child crying, laughing, roaring angrily. However, what they see is only an expression of feelings, not a real communication. After all, there is a good chance that the child will cry if he has fallen and is in pain, but will not go to someone to express that pain to a person.

And sometimes parents may see feelings that the child does not even have, because people with autism express their feelings differently: idiosyncratic (assigns meanings to words, expressions, gestures, etc.) and/or echolical (literally repeats sentences that he or she has ever heard or does exact imitations of what he or she has ever seen without adapting it to the context). A child with autism who laughs is not necessarily happy.

a&e 107

Do not project your own experience and feelings 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 has little or no meaning. People with autism live in a different world.

Therefore, be careful when interpreting so-called emotional experiences in people with autism. Just because you experience a situation in a certain way does not mean that someone with autism will feel the same in the same situation. For example, don't 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 it. Accept their different experience and certainly don't prescribe feelings.

a&e 124-125

When assessing the experience of people with autism, projection is the biggest pitfall for those who want 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. It is not autistic thinking but our thinking that is the main obstacle... The challenge for the therapist lies mainly in putting aside one's own 'neurotypical projections': avoiding problems with projecting a 'normal', non-autistic experience onto a person who perceives and experiences fundamentally differently. Because of their different perception, people with autism sometimes think and experience situations very differently than people without autism. We should not be too quick to conclude that we accurately know the experience of people with autism. Psychological guidance is the interface where the theory of mind of the client and the therapist meet or not.

## psychiatric testing

### unreliability

## psychoeducation

@ 60

Talking about feelings is one of the most difficult things for people with autism. A 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 couldn't handle my own processing of them. Their interventions mainly consisted of guiding me to name things that I was not feeling. When I said that this was not what I was feeling, mainly because I didn't know how to describe how I felt, I was told that I was resisting the therapy and that I was not being 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 the psychoeducation or training of people with an ASD. Talking about feelings can be delicate. Feelings must be discussed, but for them it is a matter that is not very concrete and, above all, not very tangible. Experience shows that talking about feelings for too long and too much only leads to derailment. They then become entangled in abstract terms. They become overwhelmed by emotions because they are unable to distinguish sufficiently between talking about feelings and feeling themselves. And sometimes they lose themselves in all those words.

We should not conclude from this that feelings should not be discussed at all. But the way we discuss these issues is different for people with autism. Talking to someone with autism – also about feelings – is mainly about clarifying and clarifying. People with autism are often in trouble with their feelings. For them they are an inextricable tangle of impressions. We can best help them by first and foremost listening to the problems they are having. Once we have found the solution, we can clearly describe the problem and neatly arrange all the factual data surrounding it to create clarity and clarity. 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 it.

Talking about the feelings themselves can be very 'sensitive'. People with autism need more or less some protection from themselves. Peer pressure and the lack of assertive communication or lack of impulse control cause someone with autism to talk about something that he or she would rather not talk about. Communication is very fast for them and within that whirlwind of questions and answers, quickly finding an appropriate wording to indicate that you do not want to answer a question is not always easy for people with autism. Perhaps that's why it's better to have slow and gentle individual talk therapies rather than dynamic group conversations.

### psychological guidance

see: psychotherapy

### psychological structural stability

see: rigidity, need for predictability, resistance to change

### psychopathy

a&e 75

The empathy deficits in people with autism regularly lead to the question of whether people with autism are not a bit of a psychopath after all? However, there is a fundamental difference between psychopathy and autism.



Psychopaths, unlike autistics, can usually take the perspective of others. They understand (cognitively) that they are causing their victim suffering, but it does not or hardly affect them emotionally. In people with autism there is no problem with emotional responsiveness, but there is a problem with understanding. Once they understand that their own behavior provokes negative emotions in someone else (and that usually only happens after someone has explained it to them), they usually express their regret and really 'feel' for the person. A psychopath is not ignorant, but he is insensitive. An autistic person is not insensitive, but above all ignorant.

But also often just clumsy. After all, autism is largely one performance problem. People with autism often have theoretical knowledge, but are unable to apply it in practice. They do look for a solution, a possible response, when they are confronted with someone else's painful situation, especially if they are encouraged to do so. But their problem solving has an 'autistic' look.

a&e 67-69

Normally gifted people with autism often give the impression that they are capable of normal empathy, but this can be very misleading. It's not normal empathy, it's very self-centered. They do not emotionally put themselves in the other person's shoes, but recognize a scenario that they have experienced themselves: 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 they felt in a given situation, they will respond appropriately and appear to be truly empathetic. Their lack of empathy only becomes noticeable when their own experience does not completely match how the other person experiences a similar situation.

Normally gifted people with autism not only fall back on their own experiences, they sometimes 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 feel.

For people with autism, empathy is a matter of work, of 'calculating' and 'deciphering'. They also need more time and 'hints'. People without autism don't 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 a lot of praise and admiration: probably no one makes such great efforts to empathize with others as people with autism. Because it is not obvious to them, they have to make a lot of effort.

Blaming people with autism for not having enough empathy is therefore not fair. You don't blame a partially sighted or blind person for not seeing. On the contrary, we must accommodate people with autism in their disabilities and not 'catch' them for their shortcomings. We must give them the time and space, and support if necessary, to be able to take up a full place in society and live a full life, despite their social limitations.

a&e 120

Depression in people with autism can result in an increase in problematic behaviors. Social withdrawal may increase and all kinds of 'psychotic' behavior may occur. Relatively new is the insight 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 his or her movements, resulting in decline or regression in self-care skills.

bldn 129

Gifted people are particularly vulnerable to additional psychiatric disorders, especially beginning in adolescence. They then become more aware of their problems and they have to deal with more stress, which is the result of too high expectations from the environment. These can mainly result in additional depression, but can also give rise to anxiety and obsessive disorders. In addition, undifferentiated psychoses with delusions and hallucinations may occasionally occur. Most problems resolve 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 an 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 phrases in a sentence and have difficulty switching to the next word. The conversations of gifted individuals with autism are often superficial, repetitive and lacking in concrete content (they 'theorize' a lot). They take unexpected and unclear turns in a conversation and because of their associative thinking there is often little logical line in their story. These features can lead to misclassifications of schizophrenia or psychosis.

A classic psychiatric interview or a chat during a test, with its predictable and structured question-and-answer pattern, does not sufficiently reveal these communication problems. Classical language tests are also too limited.

Problems with imagination also manifest themselves differently in normally gifted individuals with autism. Many gifted children with an ASD, in contrast to developmentally delayed children, do, for example, engage in some kind of symbolic play. Their pretend play often seems very normal at first glance, but it is actually a stereotypical but sophisticated form of imitation and not a 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 wrongly lead a diagnostician to suspect psychosis.

Gifted people with autism especially lack social imagination: the ability to predict events based on past experiences. However, many diagnosticians do not immediately think of the

social imagination when considering the diagnostic criterion of an absent or disturbed imagination. A lack of this is also difficult to detect in an interview or a test.

Normally gifted individuals with autism show significant deficits in conceptual problem-solving thinking. They make more perseveration errors, find it difficult to integrate information, make inferences and selectively focus on relevant details.

Adult gifted individuals with autism also exhibit concrete thinking (inability 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 misclassification.

## psychotherapy

*concretize and visualize - show more than talk - people talk as they go*

*depression*

*factors that determine effectiveness/success*

## public reference

a&e 79

People with autism seem to have little awareness of the influence they can exert on the thoughts and feelings 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 one public reference. They hardly or never spontaneously wonder how the other person will feel when they do or say certain things.

## punish

a&e 135

@ 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

Supervisors and parents believe that unwanted behavior must be 'unlearned'. However, from our view of autism, there should be 'learning' of behavior rather than 'unlearning'.

We examine whether and to what extent the environment constitutes an obstacle for the person with autism.

We clarify, make explicit and concretize how the person with autism can behave in a more 'efficient' and socially acceptable way. We teach behavioral strategies and techniques.

We provide clarity and specify the time and place for activities, conversations, asking questions, carrying out activities and handling tasks.

Enabling and clarifying where, when and in what way pursuing personal goals should be possible should lead to a greater awareness of what is socially acceptable and more socially acceptable behavior for the person with autism.

It is important that the needs of the person with autism as well as the norms and possibilities of the environment and society are taken into account.

@ 22

The difficulties that 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 form the starting point to support them in self-development in social interaction.

However, some people with autism cross the line of what is socially acceptable due to a lack of social insight and poor 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 provide them with alternatives to meet their needs for social life.

pushy

...!? 106

They do not adapt their communication style enough to others. In fact, they often impose a certain 'reception pattern' on others, e.g. they constantly steer the conversation back in the direction of their topic or theme.

Young children do not adapt their language to the recipient. For example, they are not polite in a context where this 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 quietly depending on the context. Like many younger children, a number of children, young people and adults with autism continue to formulate their thoughts out loud, even in situations where this can be disruptive, such as in the classroom.

They especially have difficulty adapting their communication style smoothly to the context. People without autism do this intuitively. You talk differently at home than during a job

interview. You speak differently in a café than in an important meeting. In a conversation with the 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. For example, some are very formal, even in informal situations. There are also those who do adapt their style, but it feels artificial, because they are literal imitations of the behavior of others. It doesn't come across as real, but feels impersonal or even clumsy. Young children often imitate a communication style from television programs. It is not unusual for a child with autism to speak 'Walt Disney' Dutch, as in the cartoons.

## realism

*social empathy*

*social imagination*

## reality behind reality

a&e 153

bldn 53

## reason

a&e 74

a&e 154

## reciprocity

*in social interaction*

## relationships

*build and maintain*

## relativize

a&e 29

People with autism often express their feelings in a very extreme way. Or their emotional expressions come across as extreme. At all ages, extreme fits of laughter, panic reactions or tantrums can be seen in them. There are often major mood swings: one moment they are having a major tantrum, a few moments later they are laughing happily. A young adult with

autism told me this way: "It's like a barrier turning over. One moment I feel happy, the next angry or sad. It can all change so quickly for me." It seems as if people with autism have no inhibitions about expressing their feelings. Or is it perhaps the case that people with autism are oversensitive and therefore react in such an extreme way?

People with autism have difficulty regulating and modulating. Because they are less able to oversee stimuli and understand them in their context, they appear much more absolute.

This applies not only to stimuli that come from outside, but also to what comes from within. People with autism have difficulty distancing themselves from stimuli and processing them from a broader perspective, the coherence. That distance is necessary to put things into perspective: to relate is to put things into perspective. People with autism cannot put things into perspective very well. They are 'caught' by the things they experience, including by their own feelings. When they're angry, they're angry. They are overwhelmed, preoccupied with 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 context and could therefore put it into perspective. People with autism generally have difficulty suppressing responses to immediate context. As a result, they have much less control over their feelings. An explosive expression is the result of an explosion of feeling within.

a&e 97

With gifted people with autism, we can often put events into perspective 'afterwards' and thus teach them to 'put things into perspective', but there is a good chance that they will be overwhelmed by their emotions the next time.

## repetition

...!? 41

Someone with autism does not have enough varied communication options to convey the same message in different ways to different people; he is unable to adapt the 'language' of the message to the other; if not understood, he is more likely to repeat the message several times in the same way rather than trying different ways. One of the consequences of this is that often only trusted people, such as the parents, can understand the child.

repetitive

*behaviors*

*thoughts*

resistance to change

*Difficulty letting go of tasks once I've started them*

reversal of personal pronouns

Bldn 15

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

reward

*reward vs. punish*

right hemisphere deficit

bldn 33

bldn 119

right of self-determination

a&e 129

Because (social-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. If you want to help them with this, it is best to make a concrete offer 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 (social-emotional) problems is therefore a fairly directive thing for people with autism. However, this does not mean that we will impose (our) solutions. Especially for gifted people with autism, it is recommended to let them choose their own solutions.

rigidity

a&e 117

...!? 124-125

bldn 125-126

The resistance to change in gifted individuals with an ASD manifests itself at a different, less concrete level and in small details that are barely noticeable. Their resistance is mainly a 'mental' resistance. Things and events should be as they imagine them, according to their ideas and expectations. They try to find support in the world by collecting or drawing up rules and scripts themselves. Due to their intelligence, they can even be very complex. As long as nothing happens that contradicts those rules, an outsider will not notice this roughness. This only becomes noticeable if the rule is violated or not fully followed.

Ritual behaviors also occur in normally gifted individuals with an ASD. These are most intensive during childhood, but they decrease from adolescence and are often no longer easy to recognize in adulthood. In adults we often notice 'mental' rituals, sometimes even quite complex: for example, they have to complete a certain train of thought or complete a mental collection before they can start something new. However, mental rituals cannot be observed by definition.

#### [routines/rituals](#)

a&e 108

bldn 125-126

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## safety

*security – certainty – predictability – clarity – clarity*

## say 'no'

a&e 96

Expressing their intentions, feelings and expectations is not always easy for people with autism. Conveying their intentions to the other person so that the message is received in the right way is therefore not self-evident. This also means: it is difficult for people with autism to (verbally) stand up for themselves.

Learning vocabulary, expressions, scripts and scenarios to express themselves in this area can help. But it is also not self-evident for the person with autism to transfer skills learned in one situation and apply them to another situation. Something learned in a learning situation is not automatically applied in daily life.

People with autism therefore sometimes have difficulty saying 'no'.

For example: During a course for young adults with autism we had a structured learning moment. Tom learned in a role play how to say that he did not feel like having busy visitors in his room. After the practice situations, he was able to perfectly indicate how he could stand up for himself by expressing his feelings. That same evening, he was resting in bed when another participant busily entered his room and asked him to go to the bar. Tom went to the bar, against his will, as he later informed his supervisor. Apparently he could not apply what he had learned in the role play in the completely different context of his room.

## say 'stop'

...!? 80

Making transitions is difficult for all individuals with autism. They have difficulty with the concept of 'stop'. It can sometimes be difficult for them to stop doing something and then switch to something else. Especially when they are busy with their favorite or stereotypical activities, or when they are busy with something that they find very important.

## school career

bldn 254 285

a&e 67-69

Normally gifted people with autism in particular often give the impression that they are capable of empathy, but that can be very misleading. It's not real empathy, it's very self-centered. They do not emotionally put themselves in the other person's shoes, but recognize a scenario that they have experienced themselves: 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 they felt in a given situation, they will respond appropriately and appear to be truly empathetic. Their lack of empathy only becomes noticeable when their own experience does not completely match how the other person experiences a similar situation.

Normally gifted people with autism not only fall back on their own experiences, they sometimes 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 feel.

The empathy of people with autism is very technical and very egocentric. It is limited to the encyclopedia of scenarios that they have built up from their own experiences or from other information sources, such as television.

...!? 108

bldn 125-126

The resistance to change in gifted individuals with an ASD manifests itself at a different, less concrete level and in small details that are barely noticeable. Their resistance is mainly a 'mental' resistance. Things and events should be as they imagine them, according to their ideas and expectations. They try to find support in the world by collecting or drawing up rules and scripts themselves. Due to their intelligence, they can even be very complex. As long as nothing happens that contradicts those rules, an outsider will not notice this roughness. This only becomes noticeable if the rule is violated or not fully followed.

## second-order perspective taking

a&e 23-24

For example, the difficulties of people with autism in recognizing the feelings of others are not the result of a lack of kinship, sensitivity or affection, but the result of a deficit in their thinking.

That deficit is located in the area of meta-representation or second-order representation.

When I imagine that a banana is a gun, that is an idea or representation of the first order. Such a first-order representation seems easy, but many people with autism – especially if they also have an intellectual disability – are hardly able to do so. They lack the imagination to make pistols from bananas, cars from blocks and father's horses. But people with autism and reasonable intelligence can do that, albeit sometimes in a limited and strange way.

If I imagine that you imagine that a banana is a gun, then that is a step up: a second-order representation. A step higher, and therefore more difficult. This thinking operation is very difficult even for gifted people with autism. However, it is the basis of understanding others, the foundation of empathy. Metarepresentation is a necessary condition to recognize and understand the inner life (thinking and feeling) of others. Building on this ability, children in normal development around the age of four or five begin to understand the feelings, wishes and thoughts of others. They have developed what is called thinking about thinking, or a 'theory of mind'. The development of such a theory of mind starts 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, he looks at his mother and back at the rattle to share his pleasure with the mother: "Look, how nice." The child shares his pleasure with the toy with his mother. Normal babies can do that very quickly. When they grow a little bigger, they will let others share their attention not only through eye contact, but also in other ways: they will point to something or they will show something. Children not only share their attention, they also share the attention of others. When you look somewhere, very young children follow your gaze. And they share your pleasure, your interest.

Research shows that children with autism spectrum disorders show much less shared attention. Not only do they point much less to objects to share their attention, children with autism are also less likely to show anything. Shared attention includes not only cognitive elements, but also emotional ones. Children look at the faces of others not only to obtain information (as in the experiment with the abyss) but also to share feelings. And that also happens much less often in children with autism. Compared to normal children and even children with intellectual disabilities, children with autism express much less positive feelings when sharing 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 those thoughts and feelings, they have 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.

## security

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

## Brain 67-68

The unpredictable nature of sounds, for example, can be very tiring and unbearable for people with autism. You would develop less resistance to change if every new situation carries a risk of unpleasant and painful sensations.

For example, a child can suddenly have a tantrum or better yet a panic attack when the car turns in a certain direction, because last time there was roadwork in that street where a jackhammer was used.

More than we expect, gifted people with autism, just like those with an additional intellectual disability, are bothered by certain stimuli, especially sounds and tactile stimuli, but also sometimes by certain colors and light.

This problem is seriously underestimated in normally gifted people with autism, despite the many testimonies from people with autism themselves. "My mother, my teachers and my governess did all the right things for me, but 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 and tactile stimuli can be really painful for people with autism and - this is only human - they jealously avoid situations and things associated with these unpleasant sensations. That is why people with autism have a great need for certainty and predictability.

## ...!? 124-125

Offering the same program to someone with autism every day makes life extremely predictable and therefore meets the needs of the person with autism. But life isn't such that you can do the same thing every day. Things come up every now and then: unexpected visitors, the TV is broken, going to the doctor, the potatoes are burnt.

Moreover, if you do the same thing every day for a while, someone with autism will eventually expect the same and any change will become not just a frustration, but a complete disaster.

We must adapt to the disability of autism. But on the other hand, we help people with autism if we give them the tools to adapt to living together. And that life simply 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, that change becomes a little easier to accept. Predictability is important, but that does not mean that we cannot incorporate changes. Doing the same thing over and over again does not help someone with autism progress in the long term, on the contrary. Giving them the resources to cope with changes is.

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 to announce changes and modifications. Not only how you communicate, but also what you communicate makes flexible or rigid.

By creating daily schedules and work schedules, and by clarifying meanings in the environment, we try to teach someone with autism to deal with changes. With adapted communication we aim to clarify new matters that the person had previously not understood or could not express. Precisely by adapting to the disability (rigidity in thinking and acting), we teach someone with autism to adapt to our existence as much as possible (suppleness, flexibility).

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 maybe something different can be presented than the usual activity. If we make the broad outlines of existence clear to someone with autism through our adjustments, then details that are unimportant to us but that the person with autism attaches great importance to or continues to 'hang on' to, also become less important to the person with autism.

By the way, through our adjustments we can make many variations and changes in the life of someone with autism. It is precisely through daily schedules, work schedules and the like that we make their lives much less monotonous. And that is quite liberating for most people with autism. Essentially, they like doing something different, not having to do the same activities over and over again. The 'urge' to keep everything the same is just a survival reaction of someone who lacks any support in the environment.

## self-awareness

a&e 34-35

People with autism experienced the world differently. One of the hardest things for them to understand is their own experiences. Many people with autism have difficulty processing physical sensations and how they may or may not relate to their feelings.

Sometimes someone with autism knows that he is feeling something, but not what he is feeling. The brain cannot give meaning to the physical experience. For people with autism, it is just as difficult to understand their own emotions as it is to understand those of others. In one study, normally gifted individuals with autism had difficulty 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-evaluation

### self-image

bldn 248-249

Despite being aware of their difficulties, adolescents with autism rated their general social skills significantly more positively than parents and teachers. Parents rate social functioning lower than participants do for themselves.

In the assessment of the social functioning of gifted adults with autism, questions about the quality of implementation and the degree of support in the performance of daily activities may be more important than the question of whether or not to perform those activities. The qualitative analysis shows that the majority of the people with autism studied require help from their parents to carry out most activities.

bldn 253

A detailed inquiry into the quality of the performance of social tasks by parents or other people in the environment offers a more realistic view of the possibilities and limitations of adults with an ASD than self-reporting on whether or not they perform those tasks. All participants are supported and guided in their functioning, either by their parents (or partner) or by care providers.

bldn 254

The assessment of social functioning in adulthood is more favorable for normally to highly gifted individuals with an ASD than for the entire spectrum, but relatively unfavorable compared to non-disabled peers. Only a small minority manages to live independently, work a regular job or enter into a partner relationship.

The people perform many household and social tasks, such as preparing meals, cleaning, managing finances, leisure activities and going out, but they only do this thanks to the support of parents and care providers. The specific limitations of gifted people with an ASD only come to light through an intensive (detailed) questioning of the way in which they fulfill social tasks.

bldn 296

A remarkable observation concerns the difference in assessment between the participants and the parents. The adults studied with autism with a late diagnosis rate their own social functioning significantly higher than their parents, while adults with an early autism diagnosis hardly differ from their parents in their assessment. Most adolescents with autism have an unrealistic view of their own functioning and deficits. Current research indicates that this is especially 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 with their social functioning. We suspect that participants with a late diagnosis do not notice the many help that parents provide or do not experience it as help.

The finding that people with a late diagnosis in particular rate their functioning higher than their parents or others from their environment has important implications for diagnostic practice. Especially in the case of a late diagnosis in adolescents and (young) adults, self-reporting is used to a large extent to collect information about (social) functioning. When questioning a (young) adult with a suspected ASD, the reliability of the self-report should be viewed with the 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-report on (social) functioning in people with a late diagnosis is lower than in those with an early diagnosis. It is possible that the self-image of late diagnoses is more unrealistic because their parents do a lot on their behalf or provide support behind the scenes and they therefore have less insight into their deficits and difficulties.

### self-insight

a&e 116

Research shows that it is especially difficult for young people with autism to gain insight into their own role in interpersonal problems. Young people also have difficulty figuring out why other people find them strange. What appears to be especially difficult is the awareness and knowledge of what consequences autism has in concrete daily situations. These difficulties are in line with the limitations that these adolescents have on a social-emotional level. Normally gifted adolescents and young adults often have good abstract knowledge of emotions, relationships and social behavior, but mainly lack practical skills in the social-emotional field. The same often applies to their knowledge of autism. Sometimes their theoretical knowledge of autism is even impressive, but knowing what autism means to them in concrete terms and in everyday situations is a lot more difficult.

### self-reflection

### self-reporting

### *depression*

### sense of justice

email Dr. Dear Dams, psychiatrist with experience in autism:

"People often do not get the opportunity to tell their story during the hearing of the CBM, which usually happens very quickly. I can imagine that it is difficult for someone with ASD, within such a field of tension, to convey the message with the right words and attitude. This too, if this is a problem, must be conveyed in the report. The committee also attaches great importance to having gone through the crime scenario and confessing that you have actually committed the crime. For For ASD people who strive for truth, who cannot tolerate injustice, this is often difficult, as the statements in a file are not always equally nuanced."

"I have fought for years with and for the internees, and you will also know that people with ASD were also interned, with the diagnosis of 'psychopath', as clinically in a short interview this often 'seems' to give the same symptoms. In fact, people who have ASD should not be interned, as through clear diagnosis and guidance, the risk of recidivism can really be greatly reduced. But that is within forensic psychiatry, and certainly in the Judiciary Power on, still a long way."

### sensory hypersensitivity

a&e 31

It is not uncommon for someone with autism to have abnormal tolerance thresholds for different sensory sensations.

For example, it is known that certain people with autism plug their ears or react very extremely when there is (certain) sound. It is suspected that they do this because the sound attracts them pain do. From the autobiographies and experience stories of people with autism, we have learned that a striking number of people with autism have sensory problems: they are undersensitive or (and this is much more common) oversensitive to certain sensory sensations.

brain 67-68

More than we expect, gifted people with autism, just like those with an additional intellectual disability, are bothered by certain stimuli, especially sounds and tactile stimuli, but also sometimes by certain colors and light.

This problem is seriously underestimated in normally gifted people with autism, despite the many testimonies from people with autism themselves. "My mother, my teachers and my governess did all the right things for me, but 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 and tactile stimuli can be really painful for people with autism and - this is only human - they jealously avoid situations and things associated with these unpleasant sensations.



For example, a child can suddenly have a tantrum or better yet a panic attack when the car turns in a certain direction, because last time there was roadwork in that street where a jackhammer was used.

The unpredictable nature of these sounds is especially tiring and unbearable for people with autism. You would develop less resistance to change if every new situation carries a risk of unpleasant and painful sensations.

### **serial thinking**

People with autism are serial thinkers, i.e. they tackle problem by problem, they cannot work on multiple tracks at the same time, on multiple problems at the same time or on multiple topics at the same time. Everything happens one after the other, one by one. So not parallel. Not on multiple tracks at the same time.

### **sexuality**

*abuse*

*autistic preoccupation*

*difficulties*

*experiment*

### **shaping**

*communication . errand*

### **'shared' attention**

a&e 22-23

Shared attention is the foundation of sharing feelings with others. If a child likes a rattle, he looks at his mother and back at the rattle to share his pleasure with the mother: "Look, how nice". The child shares his pleasure with the toy with his mother. Normal babies can do that very quickly. When they grow a little bigger, they will let others share their attention not only through eye contact, but also in other ways: they will point to something or they will show something. Children not only share their attention, they also share the attention of others. When you look somewhere, very young children follow your gaze. And they share your pleasure, your interest.

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elements, but also emotional ones. Children look at the faces of others not only to obtain information, but also to share feelings.

### short fuse

a&e 29

People with autism often express their feelings in a very extreme way. Or their emotional expressions come across as extreme. At all ages, extreme fits of laughter, panic reactions or tantrums can be seen in them. There are often major mood swings: one moment they are having a major tantrum, a few moments later they are laughing happily. A young adult with autism told me this way: "It's like a barrier turning over. One moment I feel happy, the next angry or sad. It can all change so quickly for me." It seems as if people with autism have no inhibitions about expressing their feelings. Or is it perhaps the case that people with autism are oversensitive and therefore react in such an extreme way?

People with autism have difficulty regulating and modulating. Because they are less able to oversee stimuli and understand them in their context, they appear much more absolute.

This applies not only to stimuli that come from outside, but also to what comes from within. People with autism have difficulty distancing themselves from stimuli and processing them from a broader perspective, the coherence. That distance is necessary to put things into perspective: to relate is to put things into perspective. People with autism cannot put things into perspective very well. They are 'caught' by the things they experience, including by their own feelings. When they're angry, they're angry. They are overwhelmed, preoccupied with 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 context and could therefore put it into perspective. People with autism generally have difficulty suppressing responses to immediate context. As a result, they have much less control over their feelings. An explosive expression is the result of an explosion of feeling within.

### simultaneously

*thinking and feeling*

*two things*

### social imagination

bldn 124

Gifted people with autism especially lack social imagination: the ability to predict events based on past experiences. However, many diagnosticians do not immediately think of the

social imagination when considering the diagnostic criterion of an absent or disturbed imagination. A lack of this is also difficult to detect in an interview or a 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 social-emotional point of view. Emotional and social aspects of a situation appeal to them much less than non-emotional aspects. People with autism often focus their perception on (for us) irrelevant details. They often do not see the emotional information in a situation, because other matters and details come more to the fore in their perception.

a&e 73

People with autism only develop emotional perspective taking when someone else points out the right information to them or when the context for interpretation is clear. The perspective must be learned or clarified from outside.

People with autism spontaneously choose business and intellectually logical solutions rather than emotionally logical solutions. In real life, someone else's emotional expressions are often not taken into account in their meaning (their understanding of the situation). They often don't even notice them or other stimuli attract more of their attention at that moment.

People with autism are not spontaneously focused enough 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 a relatively large amount of thinking time to empathize with someone else.

Their problems in terms of empathy cannot be reduced to just a cognitive deficit, a lack of knowledge. Many normally gifted people with autism know a lot of emotions and emotional terms and they have an extensive collection of scenarios. They do not lack theoretical knowledge. The problems they have in understanding the (emotional) world are related to difficulties in several areas at the same time: 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 fast for the slow processing of social information in people with autism. They are not fast enough and not quick enough in their social perspective-taking. They lack social intuition: the direct, rapid and implicit retrieval of mental states such as ideas and feelings in others through focused but unconscious

perception of information arising from facial expressions, tone of voice, body movements, etc.

Due to their slowness and context blindness, they have a very difficult time in practice, even though they have a lot of theoretical knowledge.

## social interaction

### *interpersonal problems*

## social interaction disorder

## social naivety

### *'bad' intentions*

## social network

### *build and maintain*

## social relationships

### *interpersonal problems*

## social skills

### *the social aspects of language*

## speed

...!? 58

We must not forget that people with autism have a lot of 'work' to decipher a message and extract the essence from it. People with autism process information piece by piece. People with autism are mainly visual thinkers and have difficulty with auditory processing of spoken language and with abstract terms.

Our communication is often too fast for people with autism. It is often sufficient to wait a little longer and give them time to process the information. Then you see that someone with autism responds correctly to the message.

a&e 73-74

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a&e 69

For people with autism, empathy is a matter of work, of 'calculating' and 'deciphering'. They also need more time and 'hints'. People without autism don't 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 a lot of praise and admiration: probably no one makes such great efforts to empathize with others as people with autism. Because it is not obvious to them, they have to make a lot of effort.

Blaming people with autism for not having enough empathy is therefore not fair. You don't blame a partially sighted or blind person for not seeing. On the contrary, we must accommodate people with autism in their disabilities and not 'catch' them for their shortcomings. We must give them the time and space, and support if necessary, to be able to take up 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 are less likely to see the essence of a message, but have to process more details.

a&e 154

Real empathy, authentic empathy, is not achieved by researching in an encyclopedia or a dictionary about feelings, not by applying learned rules and not by calculating algorithms. These strategies are not enough in real life. It goes too fast and has too many distracting stimuli, which means that actual knowledge of the emotional world is inadequate. Normal and 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 focus attention on what is really relevant in a given (emotional) context, the ability to be witty and quick-witted, is lacking in even the most gifted people with autism. The deficit in empathy in people with autism runs much deeper than the deficits in recognizing and naming feelings or theoretical perspective taking in the point of view of another. Social skills are much more than just understanding. For social skills, speed and flexibility in responding to others are much more decisive than

knowledge. What people with autism miss is much more fundamental than some thinking operation. They lack intuition, they miss feeling.

...!? 110

People with autism lack the flexibility and speed expected to understand a message. Communication is a process that happens terribly quickly. It is strange if our conversation partner only responds to our message after a few minutes or even hours. We expect an immediate response. That speed is sometimes too high for people with autism and then they do not respond, or only respond much later. Or they camouflage and compensate with an answer that is usually appreciated by the other person: 'Yes'.

...!? 116

...!? 99

'standing on one's own two feet'

See: independence

## Stereotypes

### *Motor stereotypes*

## stereotypical interests

@ 30-32

bldn 126

Stereotypical handling of objects makes way for specific interests in gifted individuals with ASD during the transition from childhood to adulthood. When they are young, these interests may lead to unusual play activities, such as repeating parts of radio broadcasts over and over again, but as they grow, the activities focused on the stereotypical interests become less strange and deviant.

When it comes to 'autism', many parents and service providers think of 'limited' interests. However, the interests of gifted people with an ASD are 'limiting' but not necessarily limited. In contrast to less gifted people, gifted people with autism can even have broad interests

because of their intelligence. This can be so impressive that it may tempt the parent or diagnostician not to even consider the terms disorder or handicap.

#### stimulus sensitivity

##### *classification of patients per*

#### '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 a lot more frustrations than we do. People with autism are under more stress.

...!? 43

It is also good to know that someone with autism, just as someone without autism, usually uses not one but different forms of communication depending on the situation and/or the 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 questions, you have still not been able to make it clear to the door-to-door seller of completely useless goods that you are not interested, you may also resort to a more primitive and concrete form of communication: slamming the door...

bldn 115

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

#### style of communication

...!? 107

...!? 41

Someone with autism does not have enough varied communication options to convey the same message in different ways to different people, adapted to different contexts. He is unable to adapt the 'language' of the message to the other person. If he is not understood, he is more likely to repeat the message several times in the same way rather than trying different ways.

#### surveillance

#### *otherwise*

#### switching attention

bldn 63

The concept of executive functions also helps explain the attention problems in people with an autistic disorder. According to a number of studies, focusing and maintaining attention would not immediately pose a major problem for people with an autistic disorder, but switching attention, the so-called 'attention shifting' well. These problems occur when the person with autism is already engaged in a certain activity. So it concerns difficulties in letting go of a point of attention.

The problem with attention shifting would therefore fit within a more general deficit in cognitive flexibility, which is an important predictor of social adjustment.

#### switching costs

...!? 80

Making transitions is difficult for all individuals with autism. They have difficulty with the concept of 'stop'. It can sometimes be difficult for them to stop doing something and then switch to something else. Especially when they are busy with their favorite or stereotypical activities, or when they are busy with something that they find very important.

...!? 108-109

Due to their overselectivity, people with autism often focus their attention on something other than what the conversation partner expects or finds important. Switching attention to a new conversation topic or to new conversation partners is also not so obvious for them.

bldn 63

The concept of executive function helps explain the attention problems in people with ASD. According to a number of studies, focusing and maintaining attention would not immediately pose a major problem for people with an ASD, but switching attention, the so-called 'attention shifting', does. These problems are confirmed by studies with the WCST. The problem with switching attention is not general but mainly occurs when a child with



autism is already engaged in a certain activity. So it would mainly be about difficulties in letting go of a point of interest.

#### taking initiative / initiating contact

bldn 48-50

#### talk

a&e 127

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

Clarify and provide solutions

Talking to someone with autism – also about feelings – is mainly about clarifying and clarifying. People with autism are often confused with their own feelings. For them it is an inextricable tangle of impressions. Letting them talk about it freely only makes the tangle more inextricable. We can best help by first and foremost listening to the knots they are dealing with. Very targeted and concrete questions can help with this. Once the knot has been found, it comes down to providing clarity, for example by clearly explaining words and concepts.

#### 'tall' girls

a&e 128

Peter, although a big man himself, is afraid of large, heavily built men. He has the delusion that only in Ghent are the girls bigger than the 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 in words that that thought is nonsensical is not possible, because you cannot show him and in Ghent he sees that the girls are grown up. The mentor, who is a lot smaller than Peter, asks him to stand up and stands opposite him. Peter now sees that she is smaller than him. The mentor then builds 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 big or small. Only now does Peter's 'euro' fall because he can see it: all the girls in Ghent look tall, because he is sitting down on the train and they are standing or walking upright.

## tantrums

a&e 29

People with autism often express their feelings in a very extreme way. Or their emotional expressions come across as extreme. At all ages, extreme fits of laughter, panic reactions or tantrums can be seen in them. There are often major mood swings: one moment they are having a major tantrum, a few moments later they are laughing happily. A young adult with autism told me this way: "It's like a barrier turning over. One moment I feel happy, the next angry or sad. It can all change so quickly for me." It seems as if people with autism have no inhibitions about expressing their feelings. Or is it perhaps the case that people with autism are oversensitive and therefore react in such an extreme way?

People with autism have difficulty regulating and modulating. Because they are less able to oversee stimuli and understand them in their context, they appear much more absolute.

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They are, as it were, blinded by the feeling: blind to other elements in their environment that situate what they feel in a broader context and could therefore put it into perspective. People with autism generally have difficulty suppressing responses to immediate context. As a result, they have much less control over their feelings. An explosive expression is the result of an explosion of feeling within.

a&e 97

With gifted people with autism, we can often put events into perspective 'afterwards' and thus teach them to 'put things into perspective', but there is a good chance that they will be overwhelmed by their emotions the next time.

teach

*'learning' or 'unlearning'*

*teach explicitly*

teach explicitly

@ 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. On the one hand, this concerns learning the skills themselves, which are necessary for social development. On the other hand, this is also about the how, when, where and why of applying those skills, depending on and in function of the right context.

For example:

@ 43

Many words can have multiple meanings and there are often several words or expressions for the same meaning. Children and young people without autism learn to deal with all those double and vague meanings without an explicit learning process, because, unlike people with autism, they are not context blind. They get the right meanings from the context.

The context makes it clear what a particular word or expression refers to and how to understand it. It is difficult for us to teach people with autism this sensitivity to context, as that is precisely the core of their disorder, but we can help them understand and use language correctly by clarifying and explicitly clarifying meanings.

Figurative language in particular can be a source of confusion for people with autism. A session in which all kinds of expressions and sayings around a specific subject are collected and explained in concrete terms can be very illuminating.

We can pay extensive attention to 'definitions'. This is something that people with autism love, with their preference for systems, theoretical knowledge and encyclopedic memory work.

In addition to defining and clarifying words, it can also be useful to familiarize young people and adults with the many proverbs and sayings, which we can discuss per keyword or theme.

A fun way to do this that meets the need of people with autism to visualize everything is to depict the literal meaning of each saying or proverb in a drawing. Please note: these types of pleasantly intended clarifications can cause confusion and stress for people with autism due to their lack of imagination. But especially for more gifted young people with autism, this tension between literal and metaphorical meaning in a drawing is a fun 'game' to experiment with. With less gifted young people with autism, particular care should be taken

to strongly emphasize the distinction between the literal and the actual (transferential) meaning of the proverb or expression, so that the distinction becomes very clear.

testings

*unreliability*

the miscommunicator

the order

*thoughts*

theory of mind

theory of own mind

a&e 34

therapy

@ 60

Talking about feelings is one of the most difficult things for people with autism. A 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 couldn't handle my own processing of them. Their interventions mainly consisted of guiding me to name things that I was not feeling. When I said that this was not what I was feeling, mainly because I didn't know how to describe how I felt, I was told that I was resisting the therapy and that I was not being 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 the psychoeducation or training of people with an ASD. Talking about feelings can be delicate. Feelings must be discussed, but for them it is a matter that is not very concrete and, above all, not very tangible. Experience shows that talking about feelings for too long and too much only leads to derailment. They then become entangled in abstract terms. They become overwhelmed by emotions because they are unable to distinguish sufficiently between talking about feelings and feeling themselves. And sometimes they lose themselves in all those words.

We should not conclude from this that feelings should not be discussed at all. But the way we discuss these issues is different for people with autism. Talking to someone with autism – also about feelings – is mainly about clarifying and clarifying. People with autism are often in trouble with their feelings. For them they are an inextricable tangle of impressions. We

can best help them by first and foremost listening to the problems they are having. Once we have found the solution, we can clearly describe the problem and neatly arrange all the factual data surrounding it to create clarity and clarity. 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 it.

Talking about the feelings themselves can be very 'sensitive'. People with autism need more or less some protection from themselves. Peer pressure and the lack of assertive communication or lack of impulse control cause someone with autism to talk about something that he or she would rather not talk about. Communication is very fast for them and within that whirlwind of questions and answers, quickly finding an appropriate wording to indicate that you do not want to answer a question is not always easy for people with autism. Perhaps that's why it's better to have slow and gentle individual talk therapies rather than dynamic group conversations.

### 'thinking and feeling'

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

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

...!? 105

They lack the skills to choose appropriate information, adapted to what the recipient knows or does not know. For example, they can give too much information and tell you something they already told you recently or something about what you experienced together. It may also happen that children with autism spontaneously do not say anything at home about what they experience at school or at camp. They think their parents already know everything.

This is related to a weak self-other differentiation and the lack of imagination, seeing coherence and metavision, perspective taking and theory of mind.

I've had this happen in my personal case as well:

I expressed my own thoughts, feelings and opinions very little, because I thought it was obvious that others knew what my opinions, thoughts and feelings were.

Also, in particular, about my traumatizing experience when my father attacked me with a gun, I told almost nothing to people who had no way of knowing, because I thought my friends would have told those people a long time ago (to explain my withdrawn behavior and so on) – I thought that was obvious; Unfortunately, my 'friends' apparently didn't tell third parties about this, so that I seemed very strange to the 'friends' of my 'friends' and was

regarded as a person with a serious congenital disorder or a sick character disorder or something like that. I received very little understanding and very little support from those around me at that time.

## thoughts

*can't do two things at the same time*

*repetitive*

*the order*

## timing

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

## to act/react spontaneously, to be spontaneous

People with autism have difficulty spontaneously responding to and interacting with their environment. Their behavior and communication often seems forced and unnatural.

bldn 49-50

At the pompous or stiff-formalistic type the social problems are very unstable. The persons belonging to this type are excessively polite or formal. They are aware of others and the importance of appropriate interactions and are therefore very adhering to social conventions. As children, they usually had significant problems with social interactions, and usually fell into one of the other social subtypes above. Thanks to their good intellectual capabilities, they gradually manage to compensate and camouflage many of these difficulties. In the literature this is often described as 'progress', but it does not concern real progress in social development, but rather learning all kinds of alternative strategies to appear as normal as possible and survive optimally. It is striking that these people try to grasp social events intellectually: they learn certain social rules by heart and 'survive' social activities on the basis of learned or acquired 'scripts' ('scenarios', 'scripts'). However, they lack the intuition necessary to understand the subtleties of interpersonal interactions. They

are very adhering to social rules and have difficulty adapting to situations where the expected behavior differs from the known scenario. Lack of empathy and social naivety characterize this group the most.

We find this subtype most often in gifted adults with autism and many of them are diagnosed with Asperger's Disorder. The social problems of people of the pompous/stiffly formalistic type cannot be identified with a few casual contacts, conversations or tests, because their intellectual change allows them to respond quite appropriately in those situations. Their social problems only become noticeable in more intensive and longer-lasting contacts where spontaneity, empathy and emotional support are required.

to adjust

*adapt 'us'*

Why?

a&e 117

However useful psychoeducation and psychological guidance may be in terms of improving self-image, it is much more important to ensure that people with autism become more successful in their lives. Programs like 'I am special' are little more than a drop in the bucket when the person with autism continually fails in life. "They tell me that I'm 'okay', but nothing works out in my life and it's a mess..." For children and young people with low self-esteem, "I am special" may not bring much relief if their living environment is not simultaneously adjusted in such a way that they experience more success than setbacks.

It is up to the environment to adapt situations and developmental tasks so that people with autism can succeed. Surviving with autism is a great goal, but insufficient. Being successful in life, despite autism, means much more in terms of quality of life. It is no coincidence that the word 'happiness' is related to 'success'...

We can increase self-esteem in people with autism by adapting the environment and expectations to the limitations of people with autism and by making room for their talents.

bloknootje 2015

People with autism have no need for pity. On the other hand, they do wish to belong to society as full persons, not despite but with their autism.

...!? 130

Someone with autism does not stop 'being autistic' at 4 pm. He/she continues to have the disability and the resulting difficulty in understanding, even when it comes home. That is why adjustments are necessary in both the home environment and the work or school situation.

People with autism often function very well in a familiar environment. They have learned a number of routines and rules, and they know them. They function on their memory, on their

trust that their environment functions as it functions every day. But what if routines and habits change? What if the house is redecorated and the TV is placed elsewhere? What if the routine of every day changes during the holidays? What if rules change or people join or leave? What if someone comes along who does not understand or recognize the problems with communication and empathy 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 resources are not available at such times, difficulties arise.

Someone with autism needs aids that make their environment understandable and that help them make themselves understandable to others.

...!? 126

Someone with autism is lost due to their disability in a chaotic environment full of stimuli that cannot be made sense of. Autism is not a behavioral disorder; it is a disorder of understanding. It is not the person with autism who is chaotic, the environment is chaos for someone with autism. Result: it is not the person with autism that needs to be 'addressed' 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 therefore ourselves. Improve the world, start with yourself...

how?

a&e 147

Since emotional intelligence deficits are a consequence of the core problem of autism, they are not easy to overcome and only to a limited extent. 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 will first have to change our communication and make things clear, predictable and well-arranged for them.

...!? 124

Traditional open questions such as 'What's going on?', 'Tell me?' are not so easy for people with autism.

Even normally gifted people with autism have difficulty communicating verbally. They have great difficulty organizing their own thoughts. They have difficulty distinguishing what is relevant and what is incidental in a conversation. It is better to be somewhat directive, without imposing our will. The best we can do is give them the time and space to process our words and find the words they want to send out.

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 reference point. And you don't have to pay attention to speaking and listening at the same time.



*adjust 'them'*

*and some practical tips*

*difficulty adjusting*

communication style

...!? 106

They do not adapt their communication style enough to others.

They have difficulty adapting their communication style to the context. They often impose a certain 'reception pattern' on others, e.g. they constantly steer the conversation towards their favorite topic or theme.

*difficulty adjusting to*

to environment

...!? 126

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a&e 117

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...!? 116

...!? 124-125

to others

a&e 79

People with autism have little insight into what emotions their own behavior causes in others. They seem to have little awareness of the influence they can exert on the thoughts and feelings of others. Their behavior lacks public reference. They hardly wonder how the other person will feel when they do or say certain things. They therefore have great difficulty adapting to the unspoken wishes and expectations of others.

...!? 58

We must not forget that people with autism have a lot of 'work' to decipher a message and extract the essence from it. People with autism process information piece by piece. People with autism are mainly visual thinkers and have difficulty with auditory processing of spoken language and with abstract terms.

Our communication is often too fast for people with autism. It is often sufficient to wait a little longer and give them time to process the information. Then you see that someone with autism responds correctly to the message.

a&e 69

For people with autism, empathy is a matter of work, of 'calculating' and 'deciphering'. They also need more time and 'hints'. People without autism don't 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 a lot of praise and admiration: probably no one makes such great efforts to empathize with others as people with autism. Because it is not obvious to them, they have to make a lot of effort.

Blaming people with autism for not having enough empathy is therefore not fair. You don't blame a partially sighted or blind person for not seeing. On the contrary, we must accommodate people with autism in their disabilities and not 'catch' them for their shortcomings. We must give them the time and space, and support if necessary, to be able to take up a full place in society and live a full life, despite their social limitations.

a&e 154

Real empathy, authentic empathy, is not achieved by researching in an encyclopedia or a dictionary about feelings, not by applying learned rules and not by calculating algorithms. These strategies are not enough in real life. It goes too fast and has too many distracting stimuli, which means that actual knowledge of the emotional world is inadequate. Normal and 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 focus attention on what is really relevant

in a given (emotional) context, the ability to be witty and quick-witted, is lacking in even the most gifted people with autism. The deficit in empathy in people with autism runs much deeper than the deficits in recognizing and naming feelings or theoretical perspective taking in the point of view of another. Social skills are much more than just understanding. For social skills, speed and flexibility in responding to others are much more decisive than knowledge. What people with autism miss is much more fundamental than some thinking operation. They lack intuition, they miss feeling.

a&e 71

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

a&e 73

People with autism only develop emotional perspective taking when someone else points out the right information to them or when the context for interpretation is clear. The perspective must be learned or clarified from outside.

People with autism spontaneously choose business and intellectually logical solutions rather than emotionally logical solutions. In real life, someone else's emotional expressions are often not taken into account in their meaning (their understanding of the situation). They often don't even notice them or other stimuli attract more of their attention at that moment.

People with autism are not spontaneously focused enough 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 a relatively large amount of thinking time to empathize with someone else.

Their problems in terms of empathy cannot be reduced to just a cognitive deficit, a lack of knowledge. Many normally gifted people with autism know a lot of emotions and emotional terms and they have an extensive collection of scenarios. They do not lack theoretical knowledge. The problems they have in understanding the (emotional) world are related to difficulties in several areas at the same time: 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 fast for the slow processing of social information in people with autism. They are not fast enough and not quick enough in their social

perspective-taking. They lack social intuition: the direct, rapid and implicit retrieval of mental states such as ideas and feelings in others through focused but unconscious perception of information arising from facial expressions, tone of voice, body movements, etc.

Due to their slowness and context blindness, they have a very difficult time in practice, even though they have a lot of theoretical knowledge.

to receiver in need of communication

...!? 106

They lack the skills to choose appropriate information, adapted to what the recipient knows or does not know. For example, they can provide too much information to properly understand their message and it sometimes takes a long time before you can understand what they are talking about. On the other hand, it may also happen that children with autism do not spontaneously say anything at home about what they experience at school or at camp. They think their parents already know everything.

*support people with autism by adapting our behavior and communication to their disability*

to be/sound demanding

a&e 29

People with autism have difficulty regulating and modulating. They are 'caught' by the things they experience, including by their own emotions. They have difficulty overseeing the stimuli that come in and placing them in context. The feeling that comes over them is absolute. They are swamped, preoccupied. They are, as it were, blinded by the feeling or the many stimuli: they become blind to the context and coherence and have difficulty putting things into perspective. The necessary distance is lacking. The explosive, demanding expression is the result of an 'imperative' explosion of feeling within.

Social motivation is also much lower for them at such moments, because it disappears due to being 'blinded' by the emotion. Stimulating social motivation at such moments, by being understanding, attentive and empathetic, is therefore the best way to respond.

...!? 41-43

Someone with autism does not have enough varied communication options to convey the same message in different ways to different people; he is unable to adapt the 'language' of the message to the other; if not understood, he is more likely to repeat the message several times in the same way rather than trying different ways.

It is also good to know that someone with autism, just as someone without autism, usually uses not one but different forms of communication depending on the situation and/or the 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 questions, you have still not been able to make it clear to the door-to-door seller of completely useless goods that you are not interested, you may also resort to a more primitive and concrete form of communication: slamming the door..

### to organize

People with autism have difficulty keeping an overview and organizing themselves.

Visual aids for information processing and communication can help with this, for the normally gifted, for example: schedules, lists of agenda items and agendas, a notebook, a notice board or white board, a desktop or tablet, to-do lists, shopping lists, scribbles, forget-me-nots, etc., but photos or drawings can also work wonders. Or even video or audio recordings (as a memory aid or means of communication).

### to the point

a&e 74

The flow of human interactions is too fast for the slow processing of social information in people with autism. It is not just a matter of a theory of mind deficit. On the contrary, given the efforts that people with autism make to 'reason' inside others, you could even say that 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 enough in their perspective-taking.

### transfer problems

...!? 122-123

People with autism sometimes function quite well with familiar people in familiar situations. However, functioning is dependent on those familiar people and/or situations. It often happens that a person with autism cannot handle a familiar activity or competency 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 be able to (spontaneously) apply the learned skills in other contexts or circumstances.

a&e 102-103

A major dampener on this optimism are the results regarding the generalization and transfer of what has been learned to real life. Progress is often limited to the material used in the training (usually drawings and stories). A transfer from computer tasks to paper tasks has also been observed in a number of computer programs. 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. This transfer is often not even examined in effect studies, but the few studies that did leave little room for optimism. For example, the study by Hadwin and colleagues showed that despite improved performance on theory of mind tasks, children with autism did not improve in their communication (using mental states in their language and their conversation skills) nor in their spontaneous pretend play after training. Sally Ozonoff and Judith Miller trained normally gifted adolescents with autism in communication and social skills as well as in perspective-taking and social problem-solving strategies. After training, the adolescents performed 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 (finding out what others are thinking) 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 established that a generalization of skills is not assured. This transfer problem appears to be specific to autism, because in his study Swettenham found that, in contrast to the children with autism, the children in a control group did transfer to tasks other than the learned ones.

@ 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 recorded correctly. The confidant or mentor plays an important role in helping the person to apply new knowledge and skills in the daily situation.

## trauma - traumatization

When people with autism grow up in an unfavorable environment, they sometimes become traumatized by being punished for the symptoms of their disorder and the limitations of their disability, rather than receiving help. As a result, they may exhibit maladaptive and even delinquent behavior and/or other maldeveloped character traits. The more they are discriminated against, punished or neglected, the more serious and complex the trauma. It is also very difficult for someone with severe limitations in communication skills, such as people with autism, to express their trauma, talk about it, process it (with the help of others), engage in efficient talk therapy/trauma processing, and so on...

See also the related: depression.

### **treating autism in practice**

a&e 107-109

Some practical tips

- People with autism have a hard enough time dealing with their own feelings. Therefore, do not flood them with expressions of your own feelings when they are upset or react emotionally. Stay calm and collected, no matter how difficult it is. Acting emotionally only makes things more complicated for them.

Do not expect someone with autism to (spontaneously) take other people's feelings into account. Don't expect too much effect from statements like: "Now do this to please me." Or: "If you do that, I will be unhappy or sad." People with autism do not understand enough about the feelings of others to take them into account. They do not realize enough the relationship between their own behavior and the feelings of others.

- Do not project your own experience and feelings 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 has little or no meaning. People with autism live in a different world.

- Therefore, be careful when interpreting so-called emotional experiences in people with autism. Just because you experience a situation in a certain way does not mean that someone with autism will feel the same in the same situation. For example, don't 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 it. Accept their different experience and certainly don't prescribe feelings.

- Be careful with emotionally charged statements from people with autism. For example, if someone with autism says they are depressed, that is not necessarily the case. People with autism have difficulty expressing their feelings adequately. They often imitate the statements of others, echolically, without it being an appropriate representation of their feelings at that moment.

- People with autism do not communicate their feelings so spontaneously. And when they do communicate, they cannot match the wavelength sufficiently with the receiver. Someone can be very depressed even though it is not noticeable to anyone.

If you want someone with autism to feel good, first and foremost, provide 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 how to express their frustrations appropriately. An environment adapted to autism is the prerequisite for a good feeling, both for people with autism and for parents and supervisors.

- Protect them from emotionally difficult situations. Avoid teaching skills that will get them into trouble. Teaching a boy with autism to make contact with a girl is nice, but this opens the door to all kinds of frustrations. An initial, fleeting and superficial contact will be successful, but once the relationship with the girl requires more complex skills (such as empathy), the boy will fail and the girl will drop out. Such experiences will lead to great frustration in the boy: heartbreak, 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 himself puts it: "When I was younger, I was discouraged to discover that some people have bad intentions. This is something all people with autism should learn."
- It is better to teach them too strict or too general rules that they can apply everywhere, rather than expecting them to sense the nuances of the world of feelings. The line "sometimes people don't see what you feel" assumes that the person with autism can infer someone else's ideas about themselves. That is too difficult for most people with autism. Teach them earlier: "Nobody sees what you feel, so you have to keep saying it."
- Teach them all kinds of tricks to compensate for their lack of intuition. A boy with autism was often teased at school about his stereotypical topic of conversation (a certain TV program). We could teach him the difference between well-intentioned interest and teasing questions, but the other children play this game so subtly that he would always realize too late that they are already teasing him. Therefore, it is better to advise him never to talk about his favorite TV program for more than two minutes and to find another child. This way he may miss the well-intentioned interest of other children, but he will also never be teased for more than two minutes.
- Avoid overly abstract conversations about their feelings. Even if they can identify and express their feelings, people with autism often cannot imagine solutions to social-emotional problems. Don't expect that if someone with autism knows what someone else is feeling, he or she will immediately know how to best deal with that feeling. Prefer to talk in terms of situations and (adapted) responses in situations. Give them concrete and practical scripts for tackling social-emotional problems. Make social-emotional concepts concrete and visual and provide them with concrete solutions.

## 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 the (social) imagination

resulting in a lack of flexibility and a limited, repetitive and/or stereotypical pattern of activities.

## understand

### understand literally

### vague word usage

...!? 59

Avoid vague and negative language

To be as clear as possible, we should also avoid any negation in our language use. By saying what is not allowed or not possible, a person with autism does not know what is possible or allowed.

For example: Lies takes her brother's toys. The father says: 'Lies, don't do that!' First of all, 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 quite a challenge. But suppose Lies does understand that father is talking about taking away the toys. It is not clear from father's message what Lies can or even should do. Father says much better: 'Lies, play with your own dolls', then it is clear what Lies can or may do instead.

Negative statements such as 'no', 'stop', 'stop it', 'get rid of it', 'not like that' do not provide clarity for someone with autism.

E.g. When we make it clear to a child that he or she is not allowed to crawl on the cupboard, we do not say 'no' but 'come here'. This is in positive speaking form. People with autism understand positive forms of speech more easily.

Our language is also full of vague expressions such as maybe, later, approximately, later... try to make things more concrete and clearer as much as possible.

a&e 128

## verbalize

a&e 105

visual

*communicate*

*think*

visualize

a&e 126

Show more than talk

One of the most important hands-on activities in conversations is visualization: through drawings, photos, diagrams, etc. The rule of visualization also applies to conversations about feelings. Make abstract meanings as concrete as possible by making them visible. A simple drawing can clarify a lot.

All kinds of lists are also a useful tool. People with autism really like to classify, label and place things in boxes and lists. Only then does the world become clear. That is why all kinds of lists can be drawn up together. A list of what they can do well and what they cannot do well, a list of situations that provoke fear and situations in which they feel safe, a list of problems and solutions...

We can convince people with autism better visually than with words: the strange associations they make, the different meanings they give to things, sometimes even the delusions they have, are best 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 for normally gifted people, drawings and photos can be very meaningful and useful, if not necessary. If a daily schedule says 'work', what does someone with autism imagine? Working outside? Do something on the computer? Working alone or together 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

Visualizing the different steps and rules gives them better guidance.

For example, the following task analysis can be used to teach someone with autism the art of 'asking'.

Learning points 'asking something'

Thinking in your head:

What do you want to ask?

Can you ask now?

Doing

...!? 124-127

...!? 78-79

...!? 57

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Our language is also full of vague expressions such as maybe, later, approximately, later... try to make things more concrete and clearer as much as possible.

Use language that includes a concrete picture: speak in images

Figurative language and proverbs are described as figures of speech. Now there are two types of imagery.

In the first type, a thought or concept is expressed indirectly through an image. Indirectly 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: metaphorical, something that is transferred). Our language is full of metaphors: a camel is the ship of the desert; evening

falls; that woman bluntly says that her husband is an icy type; death comes like a thief in the night.

Due to their literal thinking style, people with autism are easily 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 a ship in reality, the mouth with which the woman complains about her husband is just as moist as in other statements and her husband (we hope so for his sake) probably has a normal body temperature, death is not a person, therefore not a thief.

Children and young people with autism are misled by such statements because they only live in one reality: reality. They therefore understand hyper-realism. And so a boy did not dare to come out after afternoon snack for days, after being urged to put his bicycle inside, because 'night was falling'.

There is also a second kind of imagery. Images are used that are not transferred from another reality but relate to the concrete situation itself. Since people with autism think in pictures ('Thinking in pictures' is even the title of a book by Temple Grandin, about autism: 'Thinking in pictures'), we help them understand our communication when we do just that: speak in PICTURES.

So we don't say: 'Now you have to work'. Because there is no concrete image that goes with work.

But we say: 'Now you must read this text in silence'. Because you say specifically what you mean, and also create a concrete image of what is expected of the person with autism.

In 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 differently than you mean.

You can think of hundreds of images of work: cleaning, writing, digging, hammering, washing dishes, ironing, making beds, driving a truck, sawing...

We don't say, "Get ready to go." We say: 'Put on your coat' (concrete image).

We don't say, "Clean it up." We say: 'Put your duplicate in the box' (concrete image).

We avoid words or expressions that can be completed in multiple ways. Better one specific task. Cleaning up, preparing and working are not connected to a concrete picture but are collective words and abstractions - categorical words - that can be completed in more than one way. 'Reading in silence', 'putting the duplicate in the box' and 'putting on your coat' are concrete images that you can conjure up in your head. That expression clearly belongs to the images and is 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 completed (if the person with autism is already able to do so). A person with autism has difficulty generating images (visualizing, imagining). That is why it is better to immediately place one concrete image in his head (via a sentence/statement that leaves 'little to the

imagination' and conjures up one precise image as concretely and unambiguously as possible).

Make sure the communication gets through

When you speak to someone with autism, the sounds of the spoken language are just one aspect of the many details of the environment. People with autism have difficulty filtering the many stimuli they perceive and selecting the most important ones. A child with autism may be so preoccupied with the reflection of light in the teacher's glasses that he or she cannot 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 communicate anything from a distance or in a noisy room. Make sure that the concentration can go to communication. Make sure 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 for many people with autism it is advisable to exaggerate a bit in communication, to be a bit clearer, to be 'theatrical'. The intention is that the message gets across. The chance of this happening is greater if we exaggerate a bit.

Support communication with visual communication tools

For most people with autism, spoken language alone is insufficient for understanding the message. Even for 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, appointments, inventories, checklists, overviews, and so on.

Pictures, gestures, objects and written text are visual. They not only make communication more concrete (directly perceptible through the senses), they are also less volatile than the spoken word, which disappears once it has been spoken.

### 'what is not said'

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

### word-finding problems

To the extent that 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 have difficulty finding words.

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The word choice of people with ASD is generally less fluent and flexible: words or phrases may 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).

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