

Communication Tips

Getting and Keeping Their Attention

Our quick tips may help you to communicate more effectively with an autistic person, whether it's your child, pupil, colleague, or friend.

Processing Information

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

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

Avoiding Open-Ended Questions

Some autistic people find open-ended questions difficult to process. It may help to:

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

Ways to Ask for Help

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

Being Clear

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

Supporting Distressed Behaviour

- Pause between words and phrases to give the person time to process what you've said, and to give them a chance to think of a response.

- Don't use too many questions.
- Use **less non-verbal communication** (e.g., eye contact, facial expressions, gestures, body language).
- Use **visual supports** (e.g., symbols, timetables, Social Stories) if appropriate.
- Be aware of the **environment** (noisy/crowded) that you are in. Sensory differences may be affecting how much someone can process.

Reactions to “No”

Next Steps

- Offer other ways of expressing ‘no’ or ‘stop.’
- Try using a different word or symbol.
- Autistic people may be confused about why you said no. If it's an activity that they can do later on that day or week, try showing this in a timetable.
- ‘No’ is often used when someone is putting themselves or others in danger. If it's a safety issue, look at ways of explaining danger and safety.
- If you are saying ‘no’ because someone is behaving inappropriately, you may want to **change your reaction** to their behaviour. Try not to shout or give too much attention—a calm reaction may help to decrease this behaviour in time.
- Set **clear boundaries** and explain why and where it is acceptable and not acceptable to behave in certain ways.

Behaviour Tracking

- Use a **behaviour diary** to work out if the behaviour is a way of telling you something.