

Communication differences in autistic people

The misconception we need to address here, first, is that “autistic people can’t communicate”.

Autistic people can and do communicate, we just sometimes do it in ways perceived as different to what society expects or sees as “typical” communication.

Communication is often placed in two categories: **expressive communication** which relates to how you send messages to other people, and **comprehension** which is about how you receive and decode messages which you are sent from others.

We know that for autistic people there may be differences in both the way they receive and in the way messages are expressed. This doesn’t mean that it is the wrong way to communicate, it just means it is different.

Common differences may include differences in:

- how a person receives and makes sense of non-verbal communication such as gesturing and facial expressions
- how a person receives and understands verbal language such as humour, sarcasm and abstract language
- the speed, intonation and pitch of speech
- using other ways to communicate rather than speech

Things to consider about communication:

- Think about the way you are communicating; don’t assume the way you are doing it is right and therefore, the autistic person is wrong. You may need to adapt what you do.
- Check you are making sense. For example, the English language uses lots of slang words and phrases that don’t really make sense if you think about them. For example, what does ‘hang on a minute’ actually mean?
- Allow time and space for the person to process what you are communicating. Try not to be overwhelming by continually repeating yourself.
- Don’t make presumptions. Just because someone doesn’t use verbal language doesn’t mean that they don’t understand what you are saying, and vice versa.