

## Small talk

Autistic people may view small talk as unnecessary and prefer conversations to be more about 'content' than 'social connection'.

Try and find common ground - learn about your autistic employee's interests and hobbies. When they feel safe and are more confident they may engage in small talk.

## Saying they understand when they don't

Some reasons for this:

- They think that they do understand
- Without context they do not know that they do not know
- Don't want to be seen as incapable
- Reflex – say yes automatically

Checking for understanding is a **CRUCIAL** part of supporting your autistic employee.

## Tips to avoid confusion

- Clearly explain expectations of the job
- Regularly review performance
- Provide sensitive but direct feedback
- Provide reassurance in stressful situations
- Say what you mean and mean what you say
- Be understanding. If your autistic employee says the wrong thing understand that it is not meant to offend
- Make time to check-in with your autistic employee and ask if they are connecting with the team. If not, see if you can help facilitate this
- **REMEMBER**, the words you use can make all the difference



# Autism Communication Tips



**Providing training in expected social and communication skills is an important aspect of onboarding an autistic employee.**

## Communication

Communication is made up of:

1. The words we use
2. The tone we use (how we say the words)
3. The rhythm of speech (the rise, fall and energy of our words)
4. Humour, sarcasm and idioms (not literal meanings)
5. Facial expressions, eye contact and body language.

Items 2, 3, 4 and 5 can be difficult for autistic individuals to pick up on.

## Autistic communication styles

Autistic communication styles can be less socially driven and based more around exchanging thoughts, ideas and areas of interest.

An autistic employee may find it difficult to determine essential information and filter out less important information.

If there is too much information being presented at once, it can lead to 'overload', making it difficult for any information to be processed.

Noisy and crowded work environments can also affect how much information can be processed.



## Helpful communication tips

- Avoid slang, sarcasm and humour until you get to know your autistic employee better.
- Be literal, clear and concise.
- If you have expectations and rules around communication at your workplace, make sure you let your autistic employee know. For example, tell them if there is an expectation that they say good morning to customers or staff
- Ask your autistic employee to write instructions down and check their understanding by asking them to tell you what they understood.
- Have an agreed signal for when they might talk too loud/too long/about an inappropriate topic.
- Kindly let them know if they are talking too much and you are busy.
- Be honest: honesty and kindness goes a long way!



## More helpful communication tips

- **Use their name:** if you need their attention
- If you ask a question, **pause** for the response. They may need a little more time to absorb and process information before giving their response.
- **Be patient:** autistic employees can find it hard to find the words to express their feelings
- **Take time to listen:** active listening demonstrates your support.
- **Think before you speak:** your autistic employee processes communication on the words spoken.
- **Treat them equal:** as you would any other adult. Don't assume they have limited cognitive skills. They probably understand every word you say, but may have difficulty responding verbally.
- **Focus on optimism:** reassurance, and encouraging comments.
- **Provide meaningful and specific feedback:** If your autistic employee unintentionally communicates inappropriately, provide feedback on what was inappropriate in a non-judgmental and clear way to assist in developing their communication skills.
- **Give positive feedback:** specify what they did well and why you are praising them for it.