



What is autism?

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'Autism is a **neurotype** that leads to:

➤ a **cognition** that is **qualitatively different** from that of the predominant neurotype in the way that information specific to **communication, social interpretation** and **interaction** is **processed** and **understood**; and

➤ a **perceptual reality** of the **sensory environment** that **differs considerably** from one individual to the next.'

Dr Luke Beardon, 2017



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A different way of being

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- **Neurodiversity** refers to the variety of all brains
- **Neurodivergency** differs from the *neuromajority*
- Autistic people are not 'wrong', just different
- Society is set up to suit the majority
- Those in a minority are at a disadvantage

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Picture from *An Introduction To The Double Empathy Problem*, written and narrated by Kieran Rose and animated by Josh Knowles Animation
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qpXwYD9bGyU>

The Double Empathy Problem

'A breakdown in reciprocity and mutual understanding that can happen between people with very differing ways of experiencing the world.'



Dr Damian Milton, 2012

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Thinking, processing, understanding

Autistic people experience differences in . . .

- **Attention** – distributing and shifting focus
- **Communication** – sharing/receiving information
- **Interaction** – having an effect on someone
- **Social imagination** – reading a situation

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Differences in attention

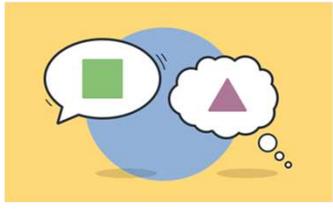
- Attention is drawn to a smaller number of interests
- Intense interest pulls focus into an 'attention tunnel'
- Everything outside the tunnel ceases to exist
- Shifting attention elsewhere is hard and takes time
- Abrupt exit from tunnel scrambles sensory balance



What do we mean by 'communication'?

“The sharing of information, ideas or feelings between two or more people.”

- Requires Sender, Message and Recipient
- Can take many forms
- Can be intentional or accidental
- Sender / Recipient roles equally important



Differences in communication

- Problems occur when messages cannot be received, interpreted or understood
- Leads to misunderstandings on *both* sides
- Non-autistic people make no sense! Can lead to confusion, frustration, anxiety, feeling unsafe
- Autistic messages are often missed/misinterpreted

Communication differences you might see VS autistic point of view

Take things literally (misses sarcasm, idioms)

Message is hidden, ambiguous or makes no sense

No response to instructions, eg 'can you put your shoes on?'

Questions ability rather than gives information about what to do

Speaks little or not at all

Spoken communication is not prioritised or necessary

Delay in response

It takes time to sort, process and interpret others' messages

Lacks facial expression / gestures, invariable tone of voice

Nonverbal embellishment doesn't make message clearer

Uses behaviour instead of words or gestures

Attempts to be heard and understood are missed, has to up the ante

Interaction differences you might see VS autistic point of view

Lack of to and fro in conversation

Others don't signal whose turn it is to speak or when response required

Talks 'at' you; brings conversation back to favourite topics

Areas of interest are all-compassing and there is so much information to convey

Appears rude or insensitive

Logical approach; what you see is what you say, no offence intended

Annoyed by others wanting to chat

Small talk is irrelevant and meaningless

Ignores or doesn't seem to hear

Engaged within own attention tunnel

Over-reacts or disengages for no apparent reason

Hostile sensory environments derail engagement

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Imagination differences you might see VS autistic point of view

Constant questions about what's going to happen

Lack of explicit info provokes uncertainty and anxiety

Lacks empathy; unaware or uncaring of others' feelings

Codes used by others to convey their state of being are unintelligible

Rigidly sticks to routines; dislikes change

Familiarity is safe; change is destabilising and feels unsafe

Over-reacts if planned events don't happen on time

Reneging on agreement provokes loss of trust and insecurity

Over-familiar with authority figures

Social hierarchy is irrelevant

Imposes own rules in play; appears controlling

Reassuring sense of safety from knowing exactly what is happening

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Supporting communication

- ✓ Remember the Double Empathy Problem!
- ✓ Avoid trying to 'normalise' communication
- ✓ Use simple, clear, explicit language
- ✓ Frame language positively ('do' instead of 'don't')
- ✓ Give one instruction at a time (step-by-step)
- ✓ Allow processing time – 6 second rule
- ✓ Support with visual aids – timetables, checklists
- ✓ Consider alternative methods to speech

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Supporting interaction

- ✓ Help everyone to become 'socially bilingual'
- ✓ Incorporate special interests as much as possible
- ✓ Allow recovery time after the smallest of interactions
- ✓ Avoid assuming knowledge or understanding
- ✓ Be clear about what will happen/what to expect
- ✓ Structure, routines & consistency reduce uncertainty



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