

Imagine yourself . . . autism spectrum

Imagine that all your senses are ten times more heightened than they are now - everything is very bright or very noisy, the smells are very pungent and it physically hurts when anything touches you. All while trying to remember a list of ten things that need to be done.

What would need to happen for you to feel understood?



Communication tips: autism spectrum

In general

- Remember, emotions are like gatekeepers for information. The person won't hear your message unless they feel safe and can trust you.
- Be aware that trauma can sit behind apparently irrational or disengaged behaviour.
- Ensure a quiet, calm environment where possible to minimise stress.
- Try to assess the person's communication needs at the outset and adjust your communication style accordingly.
- Check if the person needs a support person or companion with them.
- Speak to the person not their companion.
- Speak normally. Don't exaggerate your speech or movements.
- Introduce yourself by name.
- Address the person by name
- Be patient and give your undivided attention.
- Listen carefully and avoid assuming too much.
- Don't patronise or talk down to the person.
- Inform the person of what you are about to do; say why; and say what you need them to do for you.
- Stop and check comprehension from time to time.
- Be considerate of the extra time it might take for a person to do or say something.
- Relax. Anyone can make mistakes. Offer an apology if you feel you've caused embarrassment. Keep a sense of humour and be willing to communicate.

Specifically:

- Keep the conversation focussed and relevant.
- Write things down and allow the person to write, too.
- Some people may have trouble picking up on social cues, so be clear and direct about what you are saying.
- Verbalise relevant thoughts or feelings if you think that your non-verbal cues have been missed.
- Don't exaggerate your speech or movements.
- Never pretend to understand what the person is saying if you don't. Ask the person to repeat or rephrase, or offer them an alternative means of communication, such as pen and paper or iPad.