

IS THAT CLEAR?

2.3

Including everyone

Ever felt like you couldn't join in a conversation? Maybe you missed the beginning or you just weren't ready. Perhaps you were a bit tired or weren't concentrating. Maybe there was just too much going on around you. It can happen to any of us.

Most of the time we find a way of contributing or just catching up with what's been said. It's all part of the natural flow of dialogue. But when an autistic person has to do that, it's more difficult and much more demanding.

Many factors can cause this: the number of speakers, background noise, the speed of the conversation, the topic being discussed and the processing time required for decoding the language being used.

Autistic people sometimes find themselves unable to formulate responses quickly enough as it is difficult to recall the words they need or to put thoughts into words. Whilst mentally processing what they want to say, some autistic people might not hear what others are saying as their focus is on retaining the point they want to make. They may try to interrupt abruptly as it is the only way to join in before the conversation moves on. If they wait until they feel able to join in, the conversation may have progressed away from the original topic.

As a result, some autistic people may feel forced into a passive role, which can be frustrating, especially if this is mistaken for lack of interest or opinion.

Autistic people can experience daily or even constant high levels of anxiety when trying to understand and fit in with how allistic people communicate. They may therefore sometimes try to make social communication more predictable and accessible by unintentionally dominating or appearing to control the interaction.



ACTION ITEMS

- Discreetly prepare or cue the autistic person that it's a time for them to talk or for active listening, particularly after less-important, social small talk.
- Use a person's name to get their attention and indicate that you are talking to them.
- Recognise who may be finding it difficult to contribute and invite them into the conversation. Where appropriate, agree strategies for joining in, eg raising a hand.