

Autistic ways of making friends might be different to the rituals surrounding neurotypical friendships. However, autistic people's friendships are still built on mutual respect, shared interests and enjoyment. Autistic people are often more motivated and at ease when interacting with other autistic people, and may experience a greater sense of belonging. Every autistic person is different and will have their own communication style, preferences and needs.



## Setting boundaries

Friendships are a two-way interaction, and managing expectations in friendships can help to clarify boundaries. Learn to feel comfortable with making your own needs known (when it is safe to do so), eg by being direct and honest about not always being available as a friend if you need to look after your own mental health.



## Get to know your friend

Autistic people tend to prefer to skip the small talk about the weather or local sporting teams, and instead get straight into deeper conversations. Ask if you are unsure of the way a person is feeling, eg "You seem quiet, are you okay?".



## Sensory needs

Autistic people have different sensory needs and considerations. Experiencing a sensory overload can result in anxiety or a meltdown. Ask each autistic person which strategies help them to self-regulate, eg going to a quiet space, a tight hug, reduced language. Every autistic person has their own specific strategies.



### **Focus on your connection rather than the rituals of socialising**

The messages you receive about friendship whilst growing up are often based on neurotypical norms. Autistic ways of constructing friendship may be different but are just as valid, eg not giving eye contact when talking.



### **Be ready for some honesty**

Autistic people will generally give positive comments if they genuinely believe them. They may also give a correction when it is warranted. This is because of a drive for truth over social niceties and because they value doing the right thing over sticking to social conventions.



### **Be open to different ways of connecting**

Some autistic people may choose not to verbalise, but not speaking doesn't mean a person can't communicate. So, while you might feel that texting is more prone to misunderstandings than a phone call or an in-person conversation, for many autistic people, the experience is quite the opposite.



### **If you're unsure about something, don't be afraid to ask**

Rather than assume everyone is the same based on your own preferences, ask people directly what their preferences are. By doing this, you can avoid misunderstandings. Questions you could ask people include: "How much notice do you like to have when planning social catch ups?"; "How often would you like to meet?"; "What's the best way to contact you?"; "Would it be easier for you to talk to me on the phone, or would you prefer text messaging or email?"; "Are you okay with meeting at this café/bar/library, or is there another place where you might feel more comfortable?"; "Can you hear what I am saying easily over this background noise?".