

COMMUNICATION

Two-way communication means both sharing and understanding ideas, needs, and feelings. People understand the world in different and valuable ways.

It can be tricky to understand what someone is trying to say and how they are feeling. Words, facial expressions, or gestures might not be used in ways the other person expects or understands. Everyone communicates in their own way – it's about getting to know how the other person communicates and taking time to notice and understand their thoughts and feelings

Impact on neurodiverse young people

Neurodiverse young people often face unique communication challenges that affect their social, emotional, and educational experiences. With the right strategies, for example clear language, visual supports and inclusive environments, these challenges can be reduced, helping them to thrive.

- Sometimes it's hard to understand what people mean, especially if they talk too fast or use tricky words.
- Reading body language, facial expressions, or tone of voice can feel confusing.
- Remembering lots of instructions at once can be tough.
- Loud noises or busy places can make it harder to focus on talking or listening.

Communication Challenges

- **Processing differences:** Neurodiverse children (autism, ADHD, dyslexia, dyspraxia, Tourette's, etc.) may process information differently, making spoken language harder to understand.
- **Social interaction difficulties:** Some young people may experience challenges interpreting tone, facial expressions, or body language, which can lead to misunderstandings.
- **Executive functioning issues:** Challenges with working memory and self-regulation can make it difficult to follow multi-step instructions.
- **Sensory sensitivities:** Background noise or crowded environments may overwhelm young people, reducing their ability to communicate effectively or in the same way that they would communicate in less stimulating setting.

How this can feel:

- You might feel frustrated or worried if people don't "get" you.
- School can feel more difficult if teachers or classmates don't explain things clearly.
- Making friends might be harder if conversations feel confusing.

- Sometimes you might feel left out if people don't understand your way of communicating or the impact that different environments have on your communication.

Benefits of supporting

Supporting neurodiverse young people with communication brings **huge benefits** for them, their peers, and the wider community.

- **Confidence boost:** When communication feels easier, young people gain self-belief and are more willing to join in. **When people understand you, it feels good and makes you braver to speak up.**
- **Better learning:** Clearer communication helps young people understand lessons, instructions, and feedback, improving school outcomes. **It makes schoolwork easier to follow and less stressful.**
- **Stronger friendships:** With support, young people can connect more easily with peers, reducing feelings of isolation. **Talking and playing with friends becomes easier, so you don't feel left out.**
- **Emotional wellbeing:** Less frustration and anxiety when expressing themselves or being understood. **You feel calmer and less frustrated when others listen and support you.**
- **Independence:** Communication skills help young people advocate for themselves and make choices confidently. **Good communication skills help you make choices and explain what you want.**

Benefits for Peers and Community

- **Inclusion:** Everyone learns to value different ways of communicating, creating a more accepting environment.
- **Empathy and respect:** Peers gain understanding of diverse needs, which builds kindness and patience.
- **Teamwork:** Classrooms and groups work better when everyone can share ideas in ways that suit them. Having a range of viewpoints shared can improve the quality of the team work completed.

Long-Term Benefits

- **Life skills:** Strong communication support prepares young people for future education, jobs, and healthy relationships.
- **Reduced barriers:** Early support prevents small challenges from becoming bigger obstacles later in life.

- **Positive identity:** Young people grow up seeing their differences as strengths, not limitations.

Supporting communication in neurodiverse young people doesn't just help them "fit in"—it empowers them to thrive, builds inclusive communities, and sets them up for success in life.

STRATEGIES

- **Clear communication:** Use simple, direct language and avoid figurative speech that may be confusing. **Ask people to use clear, simple words**
- **Visual supports:** Pictures, diagrams, or written cues can reinforce spoken instructions. **Using pictures, notes, or diagrams can help you remember things.**
- **Structured environments:** Predictable routines and communication-friendly spaces reduce stress and support engagement. **Stick to routines so you know what's coming next.**
- **Play-based approaches:** Joining in play and modelling interaction helps build social communication skills. **Play and practice conversations with friends or adults you trust.**
- **Active listening:** Give extra time for responses and validate their attempts at communication. **Take your time—pausing before answering is totally fine**
- **Staff training:** Teachers and caregivers benefit from training in neurodiversity-aware communication methods.
- **Inclusive practices:** Encourage peer understanding and acceptance to reduce stigma and foster belonging. **Teach classmates and teachers about different ways of communicating so everyone feels included.**

Communication can be tricky for all, but with the right tools—like clear words, visuals, and supportive friends—you can connect, learn, and feel confident

RESOURCES

[Communication for neurodivergent children and young people](#) - Offers strategies like clear communication, creating communication-friendly spaces, play-based approaches, and visual supports.

[NEST \(NEurodivergent peer Support Toolkit\) | Salvesen Mindroom Research Centre | Salvesen Mindroom Research Centre](#) - A toolkit co-created with neurodivergent young people to build peer support in schools, focusing on communication and inclusion.

[Neurodiversity Resources For Employers — Neurodiversity Hub](#) - A wide-ranging hub with resources for students, families, and educators, including materials on communication, self-expression, and social interaction.

[Helpful resources – Neurodiversity](#) - Lists digital apps and sensory tools to support organisation, communication, and focus. Includes the Dorset App Library for finding communication-friendly apps.

[Words-Matter-Talking-to-neurodivergent-children-and-young-people.pdf](#) - Practical advice on how to talk in ways that support executive functioning, self-regulation, and communication.