

# Autism and Social Skills

Wed 28th July

6-8pm



# A little about me

- Autistic since 2014!
- AUsome Training: Elevating Autistic Voices, education and removing stigma
- Konnect Classes
- Konnect Books
- Get Konnected Course
- How Autistic is your autism training?



# What is AUsome Training

- Autistic-led
- Pro-Autistic and Pro-Neurodiversity
- Challenging Assumptions with inside knowledge
- Challenging the negative narrative and deficit model
- Dedicated to changing lives





**Konfident  
KIDZ**

**Konfident  
KIDZ**

**Konfident  
KIDZ**

**Konnect**  
My Activity Book

**Konnect**  
My Activity Book

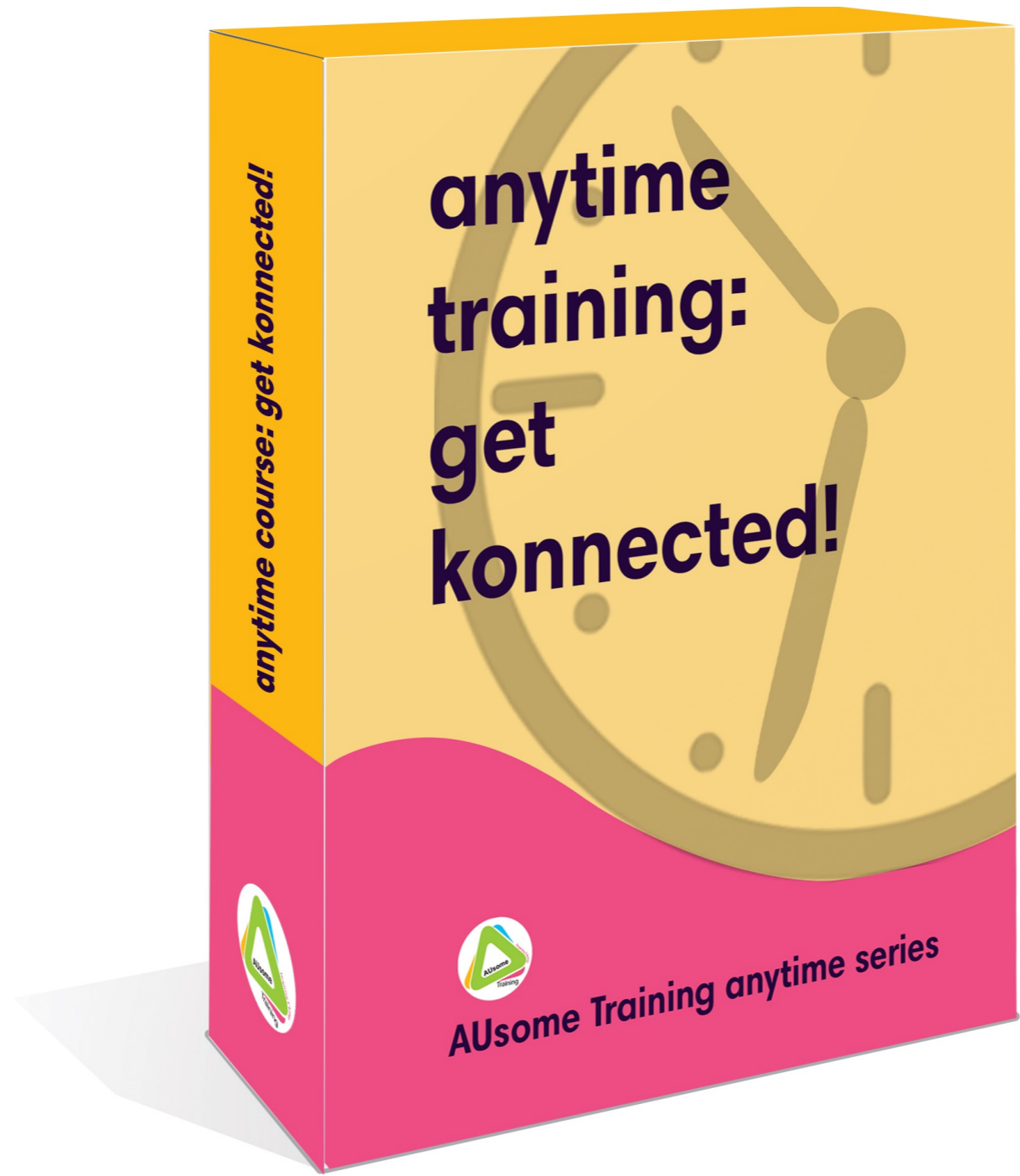
**Konnect**  
My Activity Book



Communication Activities for Neurodiverse kids  
written by a Neurodiverse teacher

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*anytime course: get connected!*

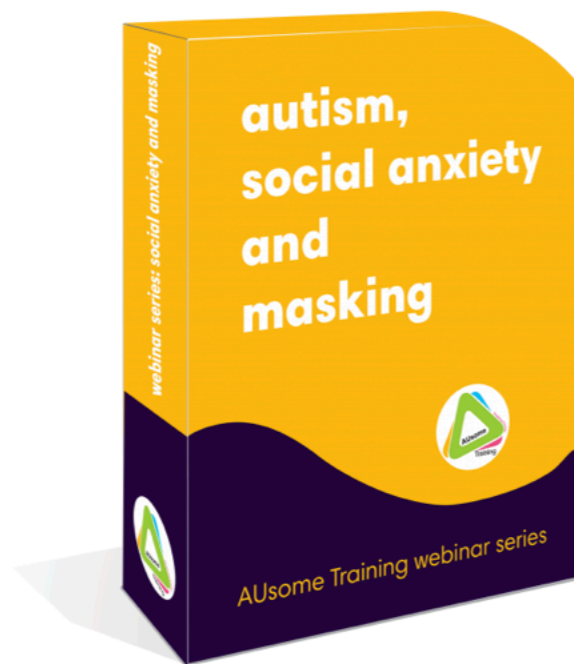
**anytime  
training:  
get  
konected!**



**AUsume Training anytime series**

**AUTISM**

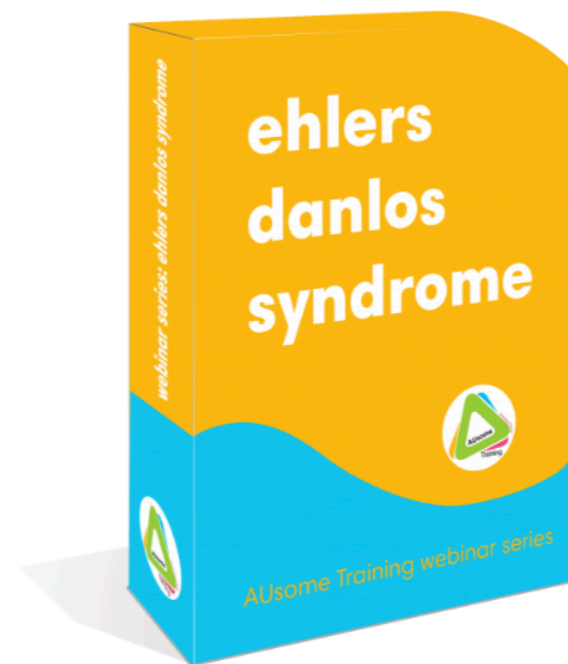
# SHORT COURSES



**Autism, Social Anxiety and Masking**

**€25.00**

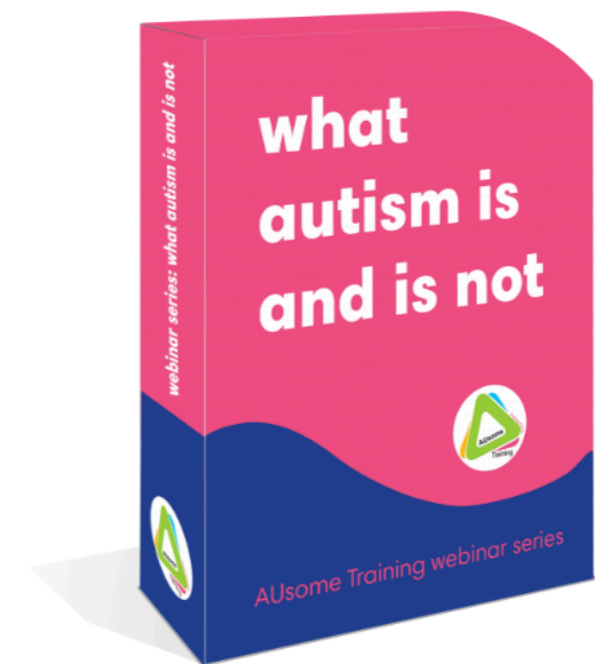
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**Ehlers Danlos Syndrome**

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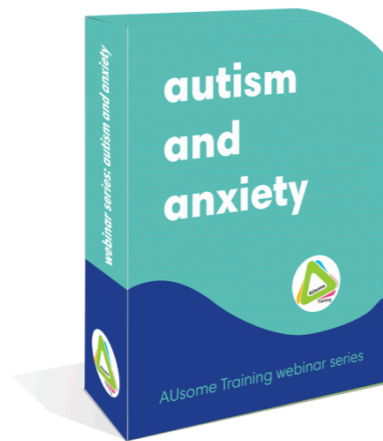


**What autism is and isn't**

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**Autism and Anxiety**

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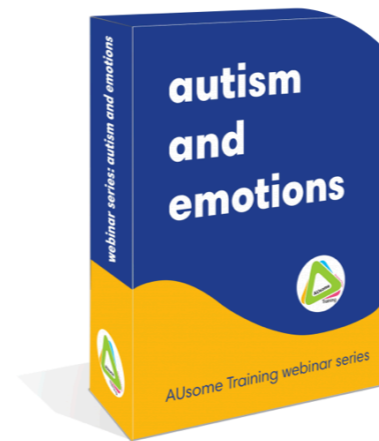
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**Autism and Communication**

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**Autism and Emotions**

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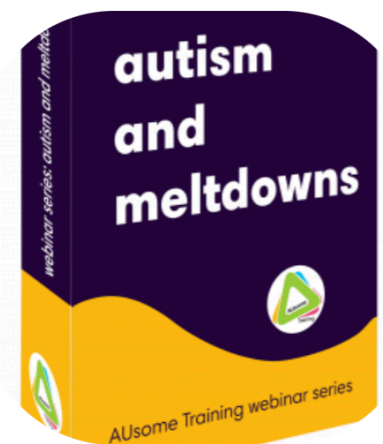
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**Autism and Masking**

€35.00

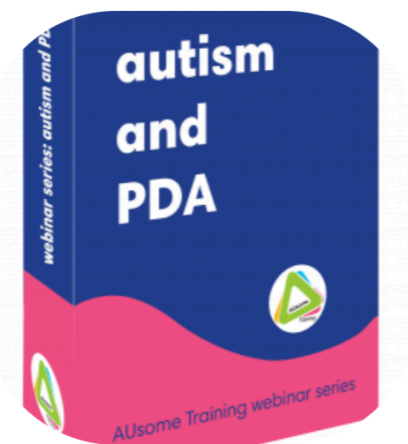
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**Autism and Meltdowns**

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**Autism and PDA course**

€25.00

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**Autism and Sensory Processing**

€25.00

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**Autism and Stimming**

€20.00

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# This talk...

- Will be different to average autism training
- Will challenge your thinking
- Will ask you to look at Autistic people from a new perspective
- Will ask you to be part of positive change





# The lens through which we view Autistic people

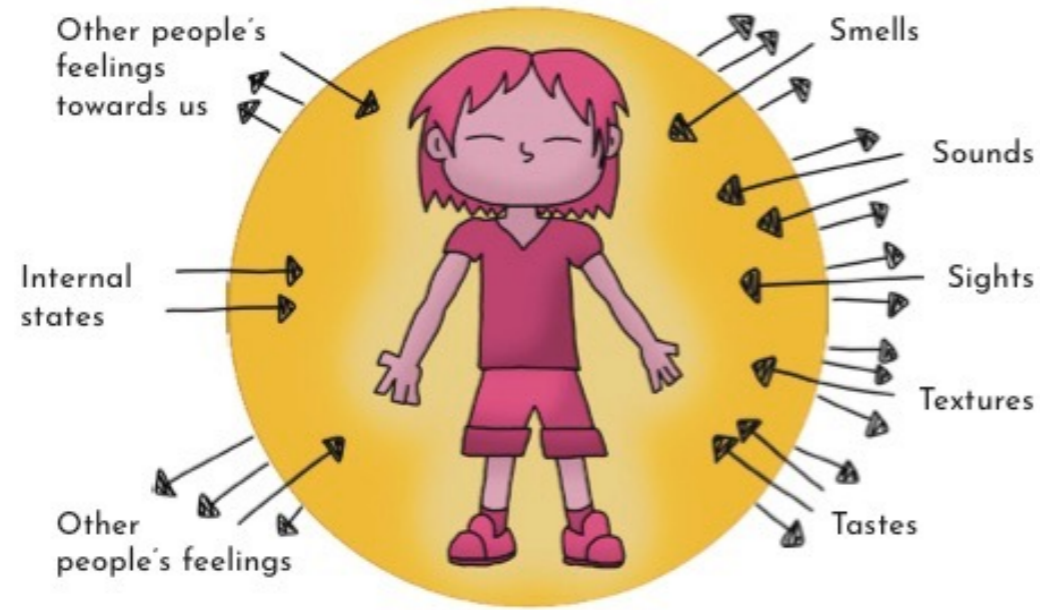
- Medical Model
- Social Model
- Human Rights Model
- Minority Stress Model
- Munster Model of Autistic Living



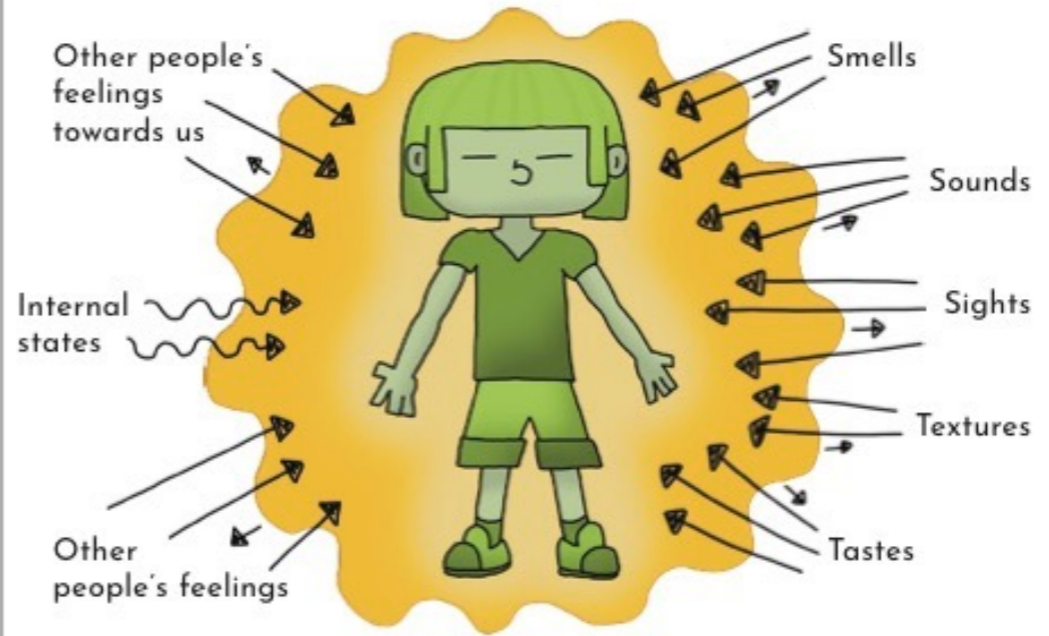
# What is autism?



# NON-AUTISTIC



# AUTISTIC



“**Autistics** are human beings who have a different sensory system to non-autistic human beings. We interact with our environment differently to non-autistic people. We have our own language and culture which we are only beginning to explore as a community. We communicate in our own language with other Autistics but our language is often misinterpreted by non-autistics. Autistics have an ability to hyper focus and to become experts on a subject because learning for us is an emotional experience. ”





## **What are social skills?**

*Interactive.* You cannot be social on your own but yet we look at Autistic social skills in isolation without assessing how others respond to us!

**How do others respond to us?**



We cannot look at Autistic social skills in isolation.



# Double Empathy

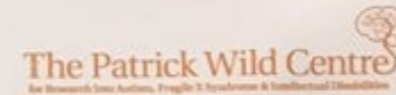
Damian Milton



# Efficiency during information transfer between autistic and neurotypical people



Catherine J Crompton & Sue Fletcher-Watson



## Background

- Social cognition refers to behaviours thought to be necessary for successful interactions with others.
- Most social cognition research in autism focuses on apparent deficits on traditional laboratory tasks, which in theory underpin difficulties in real world interactions with others.
- If social cognition is impaired in autism, interactions between two autistic people should be especially challenging.
- Despite this, autistic people often highlight feelings of comfort and unique ways of engaging with others in exclusively autistic company.

## This research

- In this research, we investigate whether performance on information transmission tasks varies depending on the diagnostic status of a social partner.
- We address the possibility that autistic people might have strengths in social interactive behaviours that are particularly beneficial when interacting with other autistic people.
- We adapted a cultural learning paradigm used widely in comparative psychology to explore transmission of information between individuals, contrasting autistic, neurotypical, and mixed neurotypical/autistic pairs.

## Method

- 9 Research Days each involving 8 participants, that were either all autistic (n=24), all neurotypical (n=24), or mixed autistic/neurotypical (n=24), matched for age and gender.
- Information was shared using a diffusion chain technique, a controlled, experimental form of "telephone" - the researcher initially told a story with 30 details to the first person in the chain, who was then paired with the next person in the chain and instructed to tell the story to them, who then passed it on to the next individual, and

We found that both autistic and neurotypical people benefit from having an interaction partner with the same diagnostic status when performing an information transfer task.

1. Autistic people share information with other autistic people as effectively as non-autistic people do
2. Information sharing breaks down when pairs are mis-matched: from different neurotype

## Results

Chains of autistic and neurotypical people shared similar amounts of information, but mixed chains alternating between autistic and non-autistic people shared and passed on less information (Fig 1). Multiple regression analysis tested whether type of chain and position in chain predicted the amount of information passed on, and found these two variables account for 88% of the variance ( $R^2 = 0.88$ ,  $F(5,66) = 77.05$ ,  $p < 0.0001$ ). Being in a mixed chain significantly predicted score ( $B = -6.04$ ,  $p < 0.0001$ ) though being in either the autistic or neurotypical did not ( $B = 0.13$ ,  $p = 0.93$ ), indicating that these groups shared a similar amount of information.

Crucially, an interaction between chain type and chain position indicates that the mixed chain followed a significantly steeper decline in number of details remembered ( $B = -0.57$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Even when controlling for the amount of information shared by the first person in each chain and therefore partialling out the effect of the first person in the mixed chain sharing less information, the mixed chain still shared proportionally less information than the autistic and neurotypical chains (Fig 2). Regression of chain type and score ( $R^2 = 0.87$ ,  $F(5,66) = 94.50$ ,  $p < 0.0001$ ) showed being in the mixed group significantly predicted the proportion of details recalled ( $B = -11.41$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), though no significant effect of being in the neurotypical or autistic groups ( $B = 5.66$ ,  $p = 0.32$ ).

Figure 1 Mean number of story details passed through the diffusion chain by autistic, neurotypical, and mixed groups

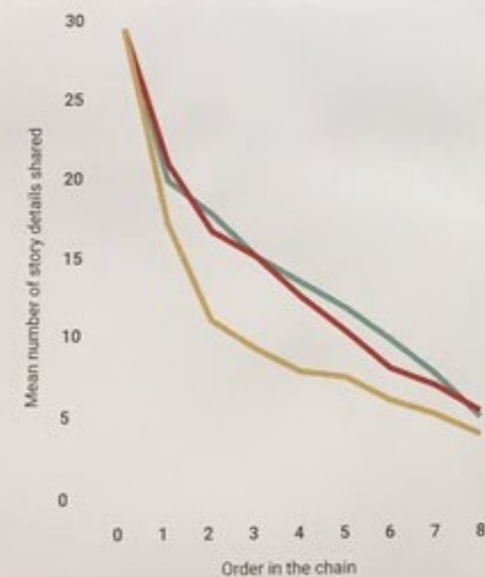
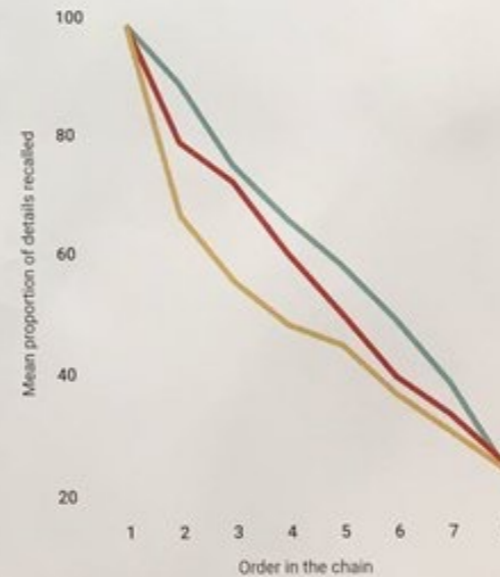


Figure 2 Mean proportion of the first person in each chain details recalled by autistic, neurotypical and mixed groups



## Participants

Groups were matched by age, gender, years of education and IQ as assessed by the Wechsler Abbreviated Scale of Intelligence (1) (Table 1). Chains were ordered by increasing age, and had minimal gender switches. All neurotypical participants scored below 32 on the AQ (2). All autistic participants had a clinical diagnosis, or self-identified and scored above 72 on the RAADS-R (3).

Table 1 Mean (SD) of key demographic variables for each of the groups

|             | Autistic        | Neurotypical   | Mixed         |
|-------------|-----------------|----------------|---------------|
| Age         | 37.33(13.13)    | 37.92(14.39)   | 35.25(10.76)  |
| Gender      | F=18, M=3, NB=3 | F=21, M=3      | F=18, M=6     |
| Y/Education | 17.44 (2.8)     | 17.83 (1.52)   | 17.12 (1.98)  |
| WASI IQ     | 114.42(16.89)   | 115.04 (11.78) | 117.79(13.62) |

## Theorised explanations

This finding provides some support to the Double Empathy Theory: a theoretical framework which emphasises a mismatch between autistic and non-autistic social partners, rather than a social cognitive deficit within the autistic person (4).

## Implications & Future work

In essence, what we are demonstrating for the first time is that autistic people's social behaviour includes effective communication in direct violation of the diagnostic criteria for autism.

- We are in the process of coding performance on two other tasks using the diffusion chain method to explore whether a similar pattern of findings emerge.
  - Participants rated rapport with their diffusion chain partners, so we are coding that to explore whether self-rated interactional rapport differs depending on matched/mismatched diagnostic status.
  - Videos are also being coded to investigate objective markers of interactional rapport.
- Future work may work on replicating this finding in other tasks and with other groups (e.g. with children), and on related questions, such as:
- How do autistic people from different cultures (nationalities, ethnicities) relate to each other?
  - Does autistic identity transcend international borders?
  - What are the implications of this research for other psychiatric and neurodevelopmental conditions?

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## References

- 1) Wechsler, D. (2017) Wechsler Abbreviated Scale of Intelligence. (3rd Edition). New York, NY: The Psychological Corp.
- 2) Baron-Cohen, S. (2011) The Autism Spectrum Quotient (AQ): Evidence from genetic, cognitive and functional studies. *Autism*, 15(1), 1-12.
- 3) Gillberg, C. (2015) The Edinburgh Autism Diagnostic Scale (EADS): A valid and reliable measure of autism spectrum disorder in adults. *International Journal of Psychiatry and Clinical Neuroscience*, 15(1), 1-12.
- 4) Baron-Cohen, S. (2015) The Double Empathy Problem. *Autism*, 19(1), 1-12.



Social Skills Training =  
Masking



## FOREWORD

by Dr. Catherine Crompton

“The Konnect series are the first activity books to help neurodiverse young people embrace and harness their individual ways of communicating. The activities allow children to find their own ways to express themselves, and learn more about themselves and others. They support children to develop the skills to communicate what they think and how they feel in diverse ways. They encourage children to build confidence and relationships in a way that works with them, using their diverse strengths. It’s so important to have materials created by neurodivergent members of the community, and Evaleen has combined her experiences as an autistic person with her expertise in speech and drama to create truly unique and valuable resources.”

*Dr. Catherine Crompton is a research neuropsychologist at The Patrick Wild Centre, University of Edinburgh. Her current research explores neurodiverse social interaction, and how autism-specific social behaviours facilitate interactions between Autistic peers. Her research re-conceptualises social intelligence within a neurodiversity framework, challenging the notion that there is only one legitimate form of social intelligence.*

## Mixed Messages

The way **non-Autistic** people communicate is different to our way, so it can be confusing sometimes.

Here are a few guidelines that I find useful when people send me mixed messages:

1. If the **face** says one thing and the **tone** says another then trust the tone because it's harder to hide emotion in our voices than on our faces.

For example, if someone says, 'no stay, you don't have to go', with a smile but their tone sounds like they want you to go, then ignore the smiles and heed the tone. They're just being polite in a way that non-autistics use.



2. If the **body language** or body position says one thing but the voice says another then trust the body language.

For example, someone looking at their watch or to the door but is saying...

*"No, you're fine, stay another while."*





## Mixed Messages

3. If someone **says** something but the **tone** says something else then don't listen to the words but the tone instead. We use language literally in our culture but other people who have a different culture may not.

For example, when someone says 'I'm fine' but they **sound upset**, then they're **not** fine.

Don't take this literally because they do not mean it literally.

If I am **unsure** of someone's meaning I often ask them what they mean so I can be sure.

Sometimes this might confuse someone because they may not know I am Autistic and that means I have my own language and culture. So I may need to explain that to them also.



# Differences in Body Language



## Mixed Signals

When an **Autistic person** is listening to someone we might do these things:

- **Look away** from the person so we can concentrate on what they're saying.
- **Stare** which is a type of stim we do to concentrate.
- **Stim with our hands** as we think about what they say.
- **Stim by pacing up and down** in the room so we can take in what they are saying.

Did you know that an **Autistic person** who is listening really hard actually looks like a **non-Autistic person** who is not listening at all? That can be really confusing!

A person who is **not Autistic** and is listening might do these things:

- Look at the person.
- Make eye contact.
- Nod and smile.
- Give friendly comments and compliments.
- Sit still and not move about.



Because we can look like we are not listening it's important that other people understand **Autistic body language** and that we listen best when we are moving.



## Leaving a Group

Ending a conversation or leaving a group can be difficult when people have different communication styles or language and cultures.

Some people might give us signals with their body language.



They might start to yawn

They might look at their watch

They may start to fidget

They may look away from you



You see this is what some **non-autistic** people do to tell you it's time to go.

However these sort of movements, if done by an **Autistic person**, can mean they are listening to you and don't want the conversation to end.



# Tips for communicating

- Eye contact is not part of Autistic Communication
- Avoid Vague Phrasing, be specific to build the picture
- Some of us are visual, not all of us are
- A Processing Delay is really a translating delay
- We are literal interpreters and communicators.





# Tips for communicating

- Be conscious of our social anxiety
- Get to know their stims and what they communicate
- Communication is two-way and so is miscommunication
- Pauses can mean you need to re-phrase
- We pick up on the emotional energy in a room



# Ways to enhance our communication

- Time with other Autistics
- Access to AAC, ISL etc
- Meeting us half way: Learning, teaching and adapting
- Topics Tables
- Acceptance and Understanding
- Respecting our communication
- A non-hostile sensory environment



# AUsome Training

[www.ausometraining.com](http://www.ausometraining.com)