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# EXPERT COMMENT: 10 things every child with autism wishes you knew

Helen Driver, PhD Researcher in Autism, Family and Communication and [Joanna Reynolds](#), Research Psychologist and Senior Lecturer in Child and Family Wellbeing at Northumbria write about autism for The Conversation.

We are often quick to make judgements on what we perceive to be happening when children behave in a way that draws attention – but when a young person with autism is struggling to cope with the world, the last thing they need is our criticism.

These 10 tips reflect our combined experience of research and close engagement with children with autism. And as a proud parent of a boy with autism, I would like everyone to think more about how they respond to children.

Because if we take time to respect and understand people with autism our communities will become more enriching and inclusive for everyone.

## 1. See me for who I am

There is only one of me, just like there is only one of you in the world. Like you, I have lots of different skills and abilities as well as things I find difficult. Just because I have autism [doesn't mean I am the same](#) as everyone else with autism. Love and acceptance from family, friends and everyone around me is the best way to help me to grow and thrive.

## 2. I hear, see and feel the world differently to you

I find some noises, smells, tastes or lights stressful, frightening or even physically painful. Touch can overwhelm me and I might not like hugs. But I

can experience details that you might miss – that I can enjoy and find funny or exciting – so come and share these things with me. Read some of the [books written by people with autism](#) to learn more about how the world can feel.

### **3. I want friends, just like everyone else**

But my social behaviour might seem different from other people's. For me, communication and interaction isn't just through words. Some children with autism don't use spoken [language and communicate in non-verbal ways](#). This can include taking your hand to the object I want, or looking at something of interest – so watch me and learn my language.

### **4. My behaviour is my way of communicating**

If I can't talk or express my thoughts and feelings I can become very frustrated, sad and angry. People see my behaviour as difficult, naughty or deliberately challenging – but it's likely to be [my way of communicating](#). Don't exacerbate these outbursts, help me say what I want to.

### **5. Interact with me in ways I can understand**

Slow down and give me time. Be clear about what you say, and give me the chance to react – it takes up to 10-15 seconds for me to process what you say. Get to know my [interests and my ways of communicating](#). And let my interests inspire [your communication with me](#). Don't try to take over or control our interaction. Give me space and time to respond. When you learn to listen with all your senses you'll realise [how much I have to say](#).

### **6. I live in the here and now**

I don't always understand the bigger picture so understanding things in context may be difficult for me. Show me pictures and let me know what to expect and I can join in so much more easily.

### **7. I am anxious and worry a lot**

This is because I have difficulties understanding the world and communicating my thoughts and needs. The way I see, hear or feel the world can be painful, and the world can be a [frightening and confusing place for me](#). When something happens or changes suddenly, I may panic. People might think I'm being silly but I am really terrified.

### **8. Routine is really important to me**

Because it makes me feel safe and helps me to cope. That doesn't mean I don't want to experience new things. I just need more support to join in with the world. If you help me, I can find activities and sports that I will enjoy and you can enjoy with me. Find out what helps to [calm me](#). If I am less anxious I can cope with more.

## **9. I need your help to access the world and learn**

Every child with autism can learn. You just need to take time to understand how I make sense of the world and make learning relevant to me. Everyone learns in different ways. I might need to move more and use [visual resources](#) but I love to achieve and learn – it's a great way to help me feel more confident.

## **10. Think about what I can do, not what I can't**

I am a clever, sociable, whole person. I may be more interested in certain specific subjects and pick up on the detail more, but this is my interest. My brother may spend hours watching and playing football, my friend might like aliens, and I like talking about my videos and finding out people's names. Love me and work with me and enjoy what I bring to the world.

*This article was originally published on The Conversation. Read the original article [here](#).*

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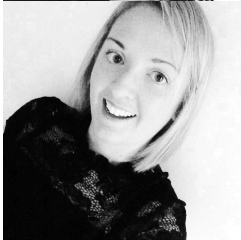
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