

# Communication between autistic and non-autistic people

## What We Found

*Autistic people can share information with other autistic people as well as non-autistic people do with other non-autistic people*

We replicated a core finding from our previous research<sup>1,2</sup> in a significantly larger and more diverse sample. Our results showed that autistic people share information with other autistic people as well as non-autistic people do with other non-autistic people<sup>3</sup>.

However, in contrast to our previous research<sup>1,2</sup>, we found that mixed groups of autistic and non-autistic people shared information just as well as autistic and non-autistic groups<sup>3</sup>. This difference in findings was likely a result of the increased diversity of the sample in our new study in terms of age, nationality, and gender. These individual differences can influence how people share information with one another and may be important factors to consider in addition to whether or not someone is autistic.

We also found that people preferred learning from others of the same neurotype - autistic people had higher rapport with autistic people and non-autistic people had higher rapport with non-autistic people<sup>3</sup>. All groups enjoyed interacting more when they knew whether or not the person they were interacting with was autistic.

## What We Suggest

*Autistic people enjoy learning from other autistic people and may benefit from opportunities to spend time with one another*

Our research shows that while autistic and non-autistic people communicate differently, no one group is better, or more successful at interacting than the other. It may be useful for workplaces to provide autistic-led training (see our project website: <https://salvesen-research.ed.ac.uk/our-projects/diversity-in-social-intelligence-replication>) for non-autistic adults on the communicative strengths and diversity in communication styles of autistic adults.

We also found that autistic people preferred learning from other autistic people, which suggests that spaces for autistic people to spend time together may be beneficial. This is particularly important for autistic people who have an increased risk of loneliness<sup>4</sup> and mental health difficulties<sup>5,6</sup>.

## What We Did

*Autistic and non-autistic participants were asked to share information, and were then asked how well they felt they had got on with the other person in the interaction*

54 groups of six people were recruited across three research sites (Scotland, England, and the USA). In 18 of the groups, everyone was autistic; in 18, everyone was non-autistic; and 18 of the groups were mixed groups in which half of participants were autistic and half were non-autistic. Additionally, two-thirds of the groups were informed about whether they were interacting with an autistic or non-autistic person, and one-third were uninformed. We told one person in each group a story and asked them to share it with another person, and for that person to share it again and so on, until everyone in the group had heard the story. We then looked at how many details of the story had been shared at each stage. Participants were also asked how well they felt they had got on with the other person in the interaction.

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## Why We Did It

*Autistic people are considered to have poor social communication skills and may be expected to share information less effectively than non-autistic people. Research had started to challenge this assumption, but this needed to be replicated and expanded into a larger population before firm conclusions could be drawn*

## Thank you

*This research could not have happened without the generosity of all the people who took part*

Autistic communication differences have historically been considered something which need to be fixed<sup>7</sup>. However, recent research examining non-autistic to autistic, and autistic to autistic, social interaction has begun to challenge this, suggesting that social and communication difficulties experienced by autistic people may be the result of a mismatch between autistic and non-autistic communication styles.

Previous work, however, included a relatively small sample of people from one geographical area. It is important that scientific findings are generalisable and can be reproduced therefore we conducted our research study again, this time with a larger sample taken from three geographical locations. We also investigated whether knowing if the person you are interacting with is autistic or not affects communication and rapport. This is important because autistic people do not always disclose the fact that they are autistic.

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