



How can the way we use language influence our communication and social skills: working with autistic adults and children

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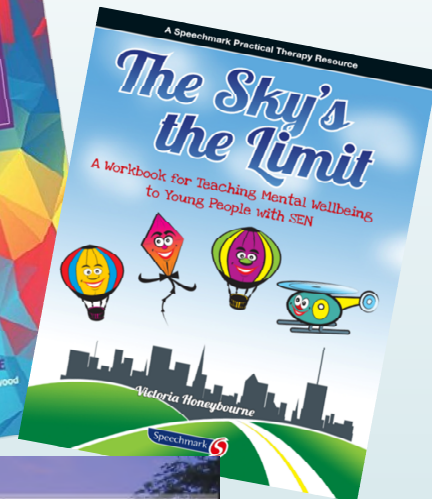
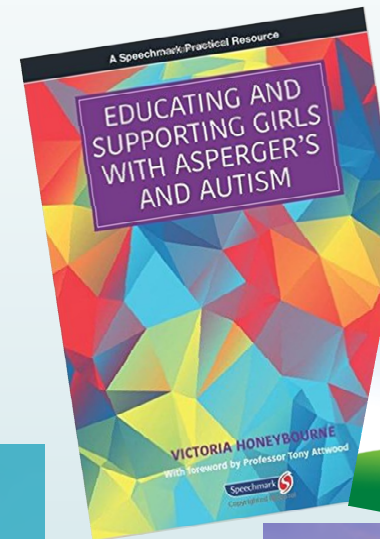
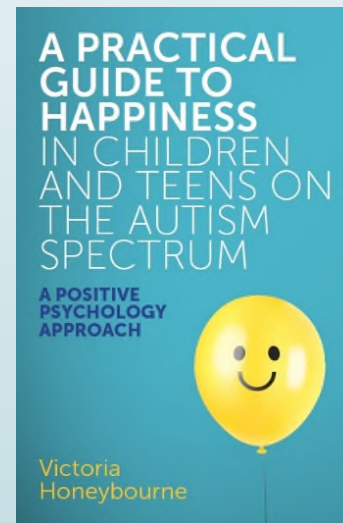


Aims of this session

- To understand how speech, language and communication works
- To identify differences that autistic individuals can experience when communicating
- To explore some Very Confusing Things about communication
- To suggest helpful strategies to support social communication

About me

- ❖ Professional background
- ❖ Personal experiences – diagnosis of Asperger Syndrome
- ❖ Books





What are we talking about?

- Speech
- Language
- Communication



Communication

- Is a very complex process!
- Can be face-to-face, on the telephone, written or mixed media
- We usually communicate for a reason
 - To make a request ('Can you open the door?')
 - To greet ('Hello, Mike')
 - To give a warning ('Look out!')
 - To direct ('Put the books on the table')
 - To inform ('The bathrooms are down the corridor')
 - To share our thoughts or feelings ('I'm very excited today')
 - To maintain social ties

Communicating with others requires many skills

- Hear the words
- *Maintain attention*
- Listen to the words
 - *Process the information*
- Understand the words
- *Understand the sentence structure*

- Use your working memory
- *Link to what you already know*
- Think about the context

- Formulate your response
- *Use the correct words*
 - Use correct sentence structure
- *Think about what the speaker needs to know*
 - Speak



Vocabulary isn't as simple as it seems!



Christmas



Home



Football



How we say something can alter the meaning

- ➡ Did you take my bag?
- ➡ Did you take my bag?
- ➡ Did you take my bag?
- ➡ Did you take my bag?
- ➡ Did you take my bag?



It's all about the context

- Who we are speaking to / relationship between speakers
- Level of formality / politeness
- Social status / power
- Physical environment
- What has already taken place
- Shared knowledge



Language and communication
influence every aspect of our life

Communication is complex;
sometimes it's amazing we manage
to communicate at all



Very Confusing Things about... Communication



People are often vague or use language imprecisely.

I'll be back in
five minutes.

I'm so
depressed.



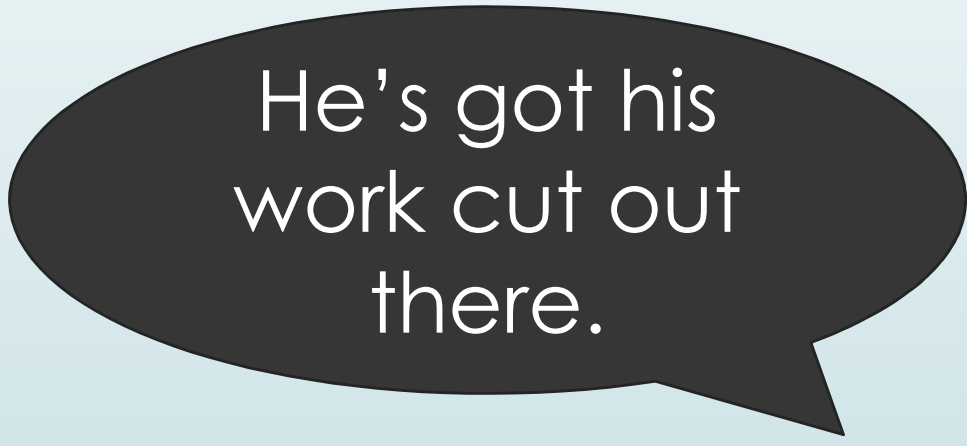
How do you know when people are just being polite?

Let's meet for coffee sometime.

That sounds really interesting. You must tell me about it sometime.

A dark grey arrow points right from the left edge. Several thin, curved lines in shades of blue and grey originate from the left and sweep across the slide.

People use idioms, metaphors, figurative language and phrases that make no sense at all.

A dark grey speech bubble with a tail pointing towards the bottom right.

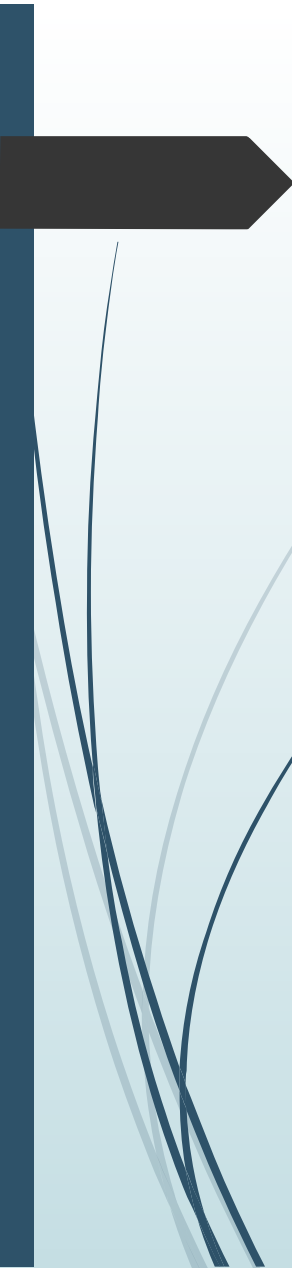
He's got his
work cut out
there.



People don't always say exactly what they mean so it's left to you to guess.

It's very cold in here.

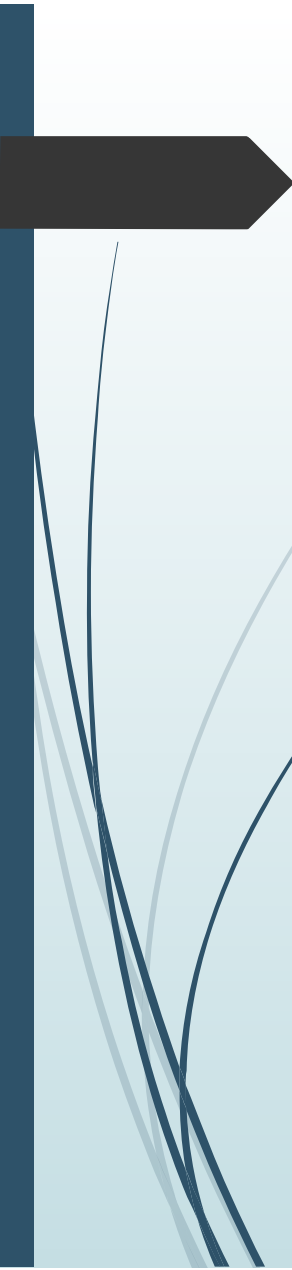
It's getting very noisy in here.



People forget what they have said, or change their mind. This can be very frustrating, especially for those who remember everything!

We'll have a
test on this next
week.

A test? No, we're
moving on to the
next topic this
week.

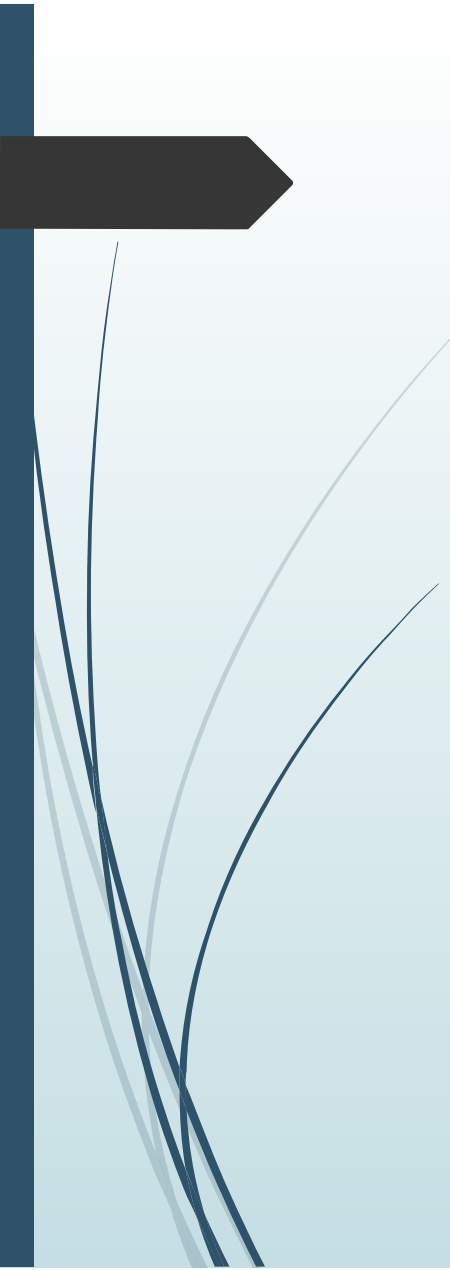


People don't always tell the truth. They use social conventions or phrases out of habit.


Hi! How are you?

Good, thanks.
How about you?


Good, thanks.



Some people are uncomfortable with silence. They talk just to fill in the gaps, often about unimportant things. They just 'make conversation'. This takes a lot of energy.



Blah... blah...
blah... blah...
blah...blah....



People say one thing, then, in a different context, might say the complete opposite. What is the truth?

Sophie always
looks such a
mess.


Sophie, I love
your dress!



People change their mind to go along with the group, or 'lie' / exaggerate to impress / belong.



I love art, too.



People often try to be understanding / empathetic. This doesn't always help.

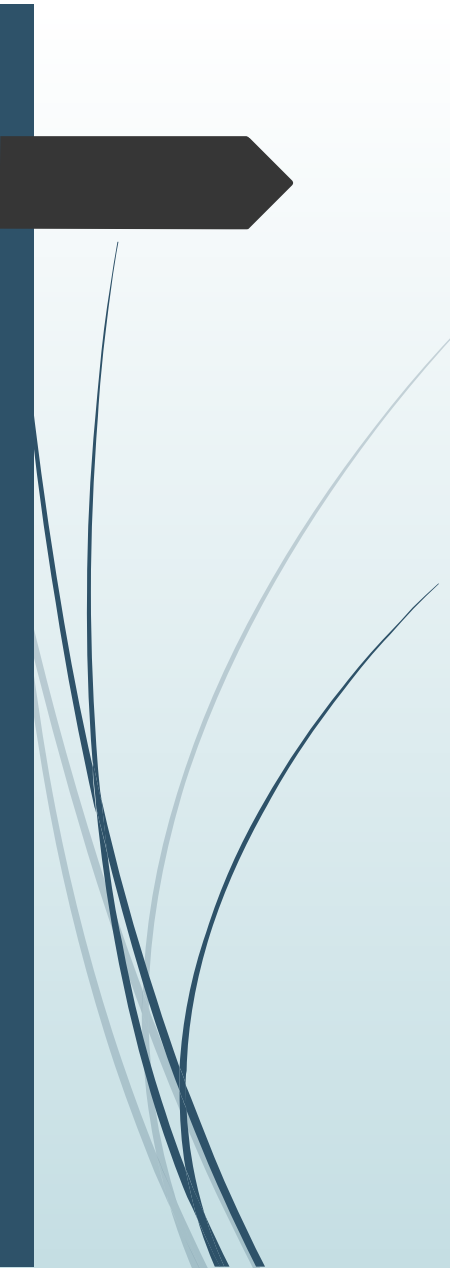
I know just how
you feel.

We're all on
the spectrum.

Lots of neurotypicals aren't actually very good at communication themselves! This actually just makes everything even more confusing!

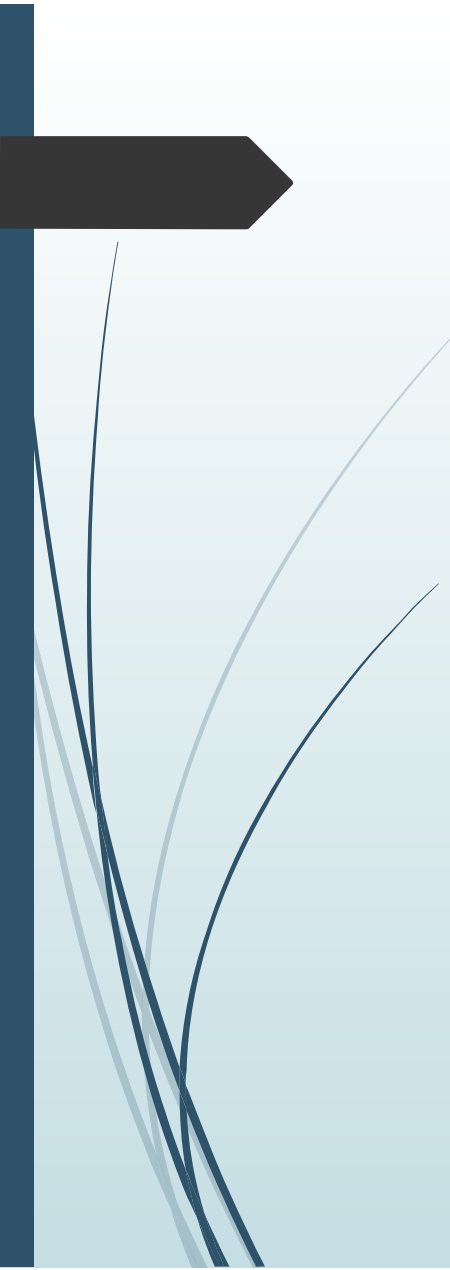
- Impact of mobile devices
- Multi-tasking
- Not really listening
- Wanting to talk about themselves
- Mumbling
- Talking too loudly
- Being inappropriate
- Not helping the conversation along
- Short, or long, answers
- Being argumentative





So, what can you do to support communication with adults and children on the autism spectrum?

- Say what you mean and mean what you say!
- Be as accurate as you can be.
- Be honest if you forget / change your mind, apologise if you make a mistake.
- Follow the rules yourself! (e.g. don't use a loud voice during 'quiet time')
- Think about the 'rules' you are teaching – are they real?



So, what can you do to support communication with adults and children on the autism spectrum?

- Don't be afraid of silence!
- Use fewer words – say only the important things.
- Don't engage in small talk if the other person doesn't want to.
- Explain idioms, metaphors, regional expressions.
- Use a quiet, calm tone of voice.
- Slow down your pace. Give time to respond.
- It may be easier to communicate during an activity.
- Consider anxieties caused by the sensory environment.



Other top tips when communicating with autistic individuals...

- May not really be listening if they are spending so much time in appearing to 'listen' properly ... and may be listening even if they don't look like they are.
- Eye contact may feel uncomfortable.
- Some may prefer to communicate via written means.
- Phone conversations can be confusing.
- One-to-one can be easier than a group.
- Our language and communication ability can decrease when feeling anxious.
- Many communication skills can be taught and improved. Confidence can play a part.



Summary

- Communication is a complex process requiring many different skills.
- This is a key difference / difficulty for individuals on the autism spectrum.
- Communication pervades every aspect of our lives – education, personal, social, employment.
- How people communicate can be very confusing!
- Making small changes to the way that you communicate, and being more accepting, can make a huge difference.
- Many communication skills can also be taught and learned – for both autistic individuals and neurotypicals.

My books

A practical guide to happiness in children and teens on the autism spectrum: a positive psychology approach (JKP, 2017) 10% DISCOUNT CODE (Y17) – ORDER JKP.COM

Teach your digital native to read and write: a guide for parents (2017)

Educating and supporting girls with Asperger's and Autism (Speechmark, 2016)

Your Autism Journey: A self-exploration workbook for young women on the autism spectrum (2016)

The Sky's The Limit: A workbook for teaching mental wellbeing to young people with SEN (Speechmark, 2015)

The Speech, Language and Communication Pocketbook (Teachers' Pocketbooks, 2014)

