

DOUBLE EMPATHY

An explortation for
Autistic and Neurodivergent Families
2025

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DOUBLE EMPATHY PROBLEM

Why communication between Autistic and non-Autistic people
can sometimes feel so confusing or exhausting

Exploring

Why misunderstandings happen on both sides
Challenges when advocating for yourself or your child
Ways to grow understanding, empathy, and connection across differences

Milton, D. E. (2012). On the ontological status of autism: the 'double empathy problem.' Disability & Society, 27(6), 883–887.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09687599.2012.710008>



WHAT IS THE DOUBLE EMPATHY PROBLEM?

Everyone struggles to understand others sometimes
Autistic and non-Autistic people often communicate differently
This can lead to both sides not fully understanding each other
It's not about Autistic people lacking empathy

It's a mismatch in communication and expectations – it goes both ways!

“People with different life experiences can find it harder to understand each other.”

Reflection prompt

How does it feel to think of misunderstandings as shared, not one-sided?



HOME LIFE

When communication styles don't match, everyone can feel upset or confused

With understanding and small changes, moments of disconnection
can become chances to connect

Reflection prompt

Where do communication mix-ups happen most at home?

What usually helps?

What would you want to change?



SCHOOL & SOCIAL SITUATIONS

Neurotypical society and school systems often rely on hidden rules:
being able to navigate small talk, quick changes, group discussion, loud busy places

Autistic children may not know those rules — or may find them uncomfortable

This isn't a "skill problem" — it's an environmental problem to address

Many Autistic people find connection easier with other Autistic people —
proof we can communicate well when understood

We need better understanding of AAC needs and access
(augmentative and alternate communication)

Reflection prompt

Can you think of a school or social moment where expectations weren't clear?
What might have helped?



FAMILY & FRIENDS

Mismatched communication can affect friendships and family relationships
Others may misread an Autistic person as “rude,” “shy,” or “not caring”
This can hurt confidence and mental health

Reflection prompt:

Are there certain situations that are always much harder for you or your child –
may be phone or in person or email?

What one small change might improve those interactions?



SOME WAYS TO BUILD UNDERSTANDING

Advocacy

- "This is how I like you to communicate with me..."
 - "This helps me feel included..."
- "These are the accommodations that will help me ..."

Use clear, direct language, support with AAC as needed
Encourage others to learn about yours and your child's needs too

Reflection prompt:

Would a communication passport help you or your child?
What else may help your family?



SIGNPOSTING

Reframing Autism — “Milton’s Double Empathy Problem: A Summary for Non-Academics”

<https://reframingautism.org.au/miltons-double-empathy-problem-a-summary-for-non-academics/>

Embrace Autism — “Autism and the Double Empathy Problem”

<https://embrace-autism.com/autism-and-the-double-empathy-problem/>

Autism Understood — Double Empathy overview

<https://autismunderstood.co.uk/social-stuff/double-empathy/>

Neurodivergent Insights — The Double Empathy Problem

<https://neurodivergentinsights.com/the-double-empathy-problem/>

Thriving Autistic: Communication Adaptations.

<https://www.thrivingautistic.org/workplace-resources/#online-courses>



THANK YOU

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