

Tips for Making Communication Smoother for Neurodiverse Individuals

It can be frustrating when neurotypicals don't understand or appreciate non-verbal communication. However, there are strategies you can use to make communication smoother while still respecting your own needs. Here are a few ideas:

1. Explain Your Communication Style

- **Why:** Some people may not understand why you prefer non-verbal communication. A simple explanation can help.
- **How:** You could say, "Sometimes I find it easier to communicate through writing or texting when I'm feeling overwhelmed. It helps me express myself better."
- **Benefit:** This helps others understand that non-verbal communication is a thoughtful choice, not avoidance or rudeness.

2. Offer Alternatives

- **Why:** People might be used to verbal communication, but offering a compromise shows you're still interested in connecting.
- **How:** If someone insists on a verbal conversation, you can suggest a middle ground: "I prefer texting right now, but we can talk later if that works for you."
- **Benefit:** This keeps communication open without forcing yourself into situations that feel uncomfortable or draining.

3. Use Non-Verbal Cues During Verbal Interactions

- **Why:** Incorporating small non-verbal signals can make others feel more comfortable while you stick to what works for you.
- **How:** Try using gestures like nodding, thumbs up, or even facial expressions (if comfortable) during a conversation to show engagement, even if you're not speaking much.
- **Benefit:** This helps bridge the gap between verbal and non-verbal communication styles, showing others that you're still participating.

4. Set Boundaries Politely

- **Why:** Sometimes, people push for verbal responses because they're unaware of how draining it can be for you.
- **How:** Use a polite script, such as "I'm feeling really overwhelmed right now and find it hard to talk. Can we communicate through writing or text for now?"

- **Benefit:** Setting boundaries makes it clear you're protecting your energy without making the other person feel rejected.

5. Educate Them About Non-Verbal Communication

- **Why:** Some neurotypicals may not realize how powerful non-verbal communication can be.
- **How:** You can share resources, articles, or examples of how non-verbal communication works for you, showing it's just as valid as verbal speech.
- **Benefit:** Educating others helps them become more flexible and understanding of different communication methods.

6. Reinforce Positives When They Adapt

- **Why:** People are more likely to embrace change when they see it's appreciated.
- **How:** When someone responds positively to your non-verbal cues or written communication, acknowledge it. You could say, "Thank you for being flexible with my communication style—it makes things a lot easier for me."
- **Benefit:** Positive reinforcement encourages others to continue being open to non-verbal communication.

7. Prepare Scripts for Hard Conversations

- **Why:** If someone expresses frustration about non-verbal communication, having a calm, prepared response can help reduce tension.
- **How:** You could say, "I understand it might feel different to communicate this way, but it really helps me focus and express myself better. I want to make sure I understand you, too."
- **Benefit:** Using a prepared script shows you respect their feelings while also advocating for your needs.

Addressing "You Used to Be Able to Talk"

It can be hurtful and frustrating when someone says, "You used to be able to talk," especially when you're trying to communicate in a way that feels more comfortable and manageable. Here are a few strategies to address this situation:

1. Acknowledge the Change

- **Why:** Acknowledging their observation can make them feel heard without invalidating your own experience.

- **How:** You might say, "You're right, I did talk more before. But right now, I find non-verbal communication works better for me."
- **Benefit:** This recognizes their perspective without dismissing your current needs, opening up space for further understanding.

2. Explain the Impact of Burnout or Overwhelm

- **Why:** People might not understand that changes in how you communicate can be related to overwhelm, burnout, or just personal growth.
- **How:** You can say, "I've been feeling more overwhelmed lately, and talking takes more energy than it used to. Writing or texting helps me communicate more clearly right now."
- **Benefit:** This shifts the conversation to focus on your current needs and shows that communication style can change based on what you're going through.

3. Emphasize That Both Methods Are Valid

- **Why:** Some people see verbal communication as more valid, so reminding them that communication is about understanding, not the method, can help shift their perspective.
- **How:** You can say, "I know it feels different, but communicating through text or writing doesn't mean I'm not engaged. It just helps me express myself in a way that's clearer right now."
- **Benefit:** This reinforces that your communication style is still effective and meaningful, even if it looks different.

4. Explain the Energy Cost

- **Why:** Verbal communication can be more draining for some people, especially if they're managing sensory overload or burnout.
- **How:** You might say, "Talking takes a lot more energy for me than it used to, and when I'm already feeling overwhelmed, it's harder to find the right words. Writing lets me take my time to express what I need to say."
- **Benefit:** This helps them understand that it's not about choosing not to talk, but about managing your energy effectively.

5. Set Firm Boundaries

- **Why:** If they continue pushing, it may be necessary to set a clear boundary.
- **How:** You can say, "I understand you want to talk like before, but this is how I need to communicate right now. Pushing me to talk when I'm not comfortable makes it harder for me."
- **Benefit:** Establishing a firm boundary helps protect your needs and communicates that pushing won't change the way you need to communicate at this time.

6. Reassure Them About Your Engagement

- **Why:** They may feel that the shift in communication means you're withdrawing or less engaged.
- **How:** You could say, "Even though I'm communicating differently, I'm still fully engaged in our conversations. It's just a different way of expressing myself."
- **Benefit:** This reassures them that your connection hasn't changed, even if the method of communication has.

7. Redirect the Focus

- **Why:** People sometimes fixate on the method of communication instead of focusing on the content or the quality of the interaction.
- **How:** You could say, "I'd rather focus on what we're talking about than how we're talking. Let's focus on understanding each other rather than the way we communicate."
- **Benefit:** This shifts the focus to the message itself and can help refocus the conversation on what really matters.

8. Ask for Compassion and Flexibility

- **Why:** Sometimes, people need to be reminded that adapting to others' needs is part of a healthy relationship.
- **How:** You might say, "I'm asking for a bit of compassion and flexibility. Just like people change, the way I communicate has changed, and it's what I need right now."
- **Benefit:** Asking directly for understanding can help the person realize that you're not rejecting them but are instead trying to protect your own well-being.

If the person still pushes back after these approaches, it may be helpful to reassess how important it is to maintain a relationship where your communication needs aren't respected. Ultimately, your well-being comes first, and it's okay to prioritize that, even if others struggle to adapt.

By blending explanation, compromise, and boundary-setting, you can help neurotypicals better understand and respect your need for non-verbal communication. It's okay to advocate for what helps you communicate most effectively.