Misunderstanding *goes both ways.*

When autistic and non-autistic people misread each other, it's a two-way mismatch between styles, not a flaw in the autistic person. Research suggests autistic people often communicate well with each other.

Idea from Damian Milton's "double empathy problem" · Source: Milton (2012). Research is still growing; everyone's style is their own.

A Two languages, one conversation

OFTEN AUTISTIC
"I said exactly what I meant."

THE GAP HAS TWO SIDES

OFTEN NON-AUTISTIC
"I thought you'd pick up on it."

Says it plainly: "That won't work."	DIRECTNESS	Hints: "Hmm, maybe we could…"
May look away to listen better	EYE CONTACT	May read that as "not listening"
Often skips to the real topic	SMALL TALK	Warms up with chit-chat first
A flat tone isn't upset or bored	TONE	Tone carries much of the meaning
Deep detail as a way to connect	INFO-DUMPING	May wonder, "Why so much?"

B It's not a one-sided problem

OLD VIEW
~~*"Autistic people lack empathy."*~~
Puts the whole problem inside one person.

→

BETTER VIEW
"Different styles. Both sides can bridge."
Empathy gaps run in both directions.

- **Autistic + autistic:** often flows well
- **Non-autistic + non-autistic:** often flows well
- **Across styles:** both sides miss cues

C Building the bridge

IF YOU'RE ND

1. **Name your style, if it feels safe.** "I'm direct. It isn't rudeness."
2. **Ask when it's unclear.** "Is that a hint, or a request?"
3. **Ask for what helps.** You don't have to do all the bridging.

IF YOU'RE NT

1. **Say what you mean.** Plain words land better than hints.
2. **Look past the surface.** A flat tone can still mean "I care."
3. **Get curious.** An info-dump is often an invitation.

Continued on back: go deeper →

Meet in *the middle.*

Use these questions on your own, in session, or with someone you trust. Answer in words, lists or doodles. There's no wrong way in.

1 *Think of a conversation that went sideways. What might each person have meant, and heard?*

2 *Who do you feel most easily understood by? What makes talking with them feel easy?*

3 *Which parts of your communication style would you like others to understand, not change?*

4 *Have you ever been told you "lack empathy"? How does the two-way view change that story for you?*

5 *Where do you do most of the bridging? Where could someone else meet you halfway?*

6 *What is one sentence you could say to explain your style to someone new?*

TRY THIS WEEK

Next time something feels off, ask one clarifying question instead of guessing. What happened?