

## **[www.autismhelp.info](http://www.autismhelp.info)**

### **Facial expression and body language**

#### **Points to note**

- When we communicate, we use a range of non-verbal cues in addition to our words, eg. eye contact, gesture and facial expression. A child with autism will have difficulty reading the meaning of these cues. He may misinterpret them. He may also have difficulty using non-verbal communication in a manner that is spontaneous and natural.
- A child with autism may have difficulty with personal space; standing too close or too far away when speaking. He may turn his body away from someone when communicating, preferring to stand side on or head facing down. Some children lean on others like they are a piece of furniture.

#### **What you can do**

- It may be useful to teach the meaning of gesture in common scenarios. For example if a teacher walked into the classroom, put her hands on her hips and frowned, it would mean she is unhappy about something.
- The child will need help learning to pay attention to and correctly interpret facial expression and body language. This can be achieved by helping the child to understand non-verbal communication. Use role play, find pictures in magazines or watch scenes from TV programs to talk about facial expression and body language. Be expressive in your own emotions, facial cues and voice so there are more cues for the child to pick up on.
- The child may always lack a natural ability to read facial expression and use body language. He can, however, be taught how to respond in various situations, such as teaching him the appropriate personal space to give people when conversing. This needs to be done in a way that illustrates the rule for various social situations, otherwise the child will apply one rule rigidly for all situations.
- If the child is anxious or upset, be particularly aware of your facial expressions, tone of voice and use of gesture as this extra information may get in the way of his understanding.