

**What are social/pragmatic differences?**

Students that have autism or ADHD are called neurodivergent. They may have difficulty with expressing themselves and interpreting social situations.

The double empathy problem is when neurotypical staff and students have trouble communicating with neurodivergent students, but neurodivergent students do not have difficulty communicating with each other (Mitchell, 2021),

The challenge is then making sure that neurodivergent students are able to participate and access the school environment, and also to educate neurotypical students and staff about differences they may have.

Students who are neurotypical may also have difficulty expressing themselves and in social situations. They may also benefit from speech therapy if they are not able to fully participate in the school environment.

**Example challenges in the school environment:**

- Identifying emotions
- Perspective taking
- Making friends and having long term friendships
- Difficulty with comprehension, especially with characters' perspectives in stories

Research has shown that when people pretend to be like their neurotypical peers (masking), it can negatively affect their mental health (Hull et. al., 2019),

**What can we do?**

Use a strengths based approach, where we modify the environment and situations to support the student.

**What does therapy look like?**

Sessions will focus on increasing participation in the educational environment and access to academic curriculum. Students might practice perspective taking skills, self regulation skills, or identifying emotions. For example: Working on narrative skills such as identifying character perspectives using a book or video is a common goal for students with challenges in this area.

Hull, L., Mandy, W., Lai, M.-C., Baron-Cohen, S., Allison, C., Smith, P., & Petrides, K. V. (2019). Development and Validation of the Camouflaging Autistic Traits Questionnaire (CAT-Q). *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 49(3), 819–833. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-018-3792-6>  
 Mitchell, P., Sheppard, E., & Cassidy, S. (2021). Autism and the double empathy problem: Implications for development and mental health. *British Journal of Developmental Psychology*, 39(1), 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.1111/bjdp.12350>

**WHAT CAN WE DO?****AT HOME**

Talk about where they feel their feelings in their body and what emotions go with that feeling.

Have a plan for self-regulation when your student is feeling overwhelmed.

Work on perspective taking skills by talking about what they are thinking and what other people are thinking.

Plan ahead and have clear expectations for new situations.

**IN THE CLASSROOM**

Have clear expectations and rules ahead of time.

Don't force students to be social during down times such as recess, if the student would like alone time.

Explain both perspectives in a social situation and model solutions for the student.

Have opportunities for self regulation.

**SUPPORTS**

Goals for self advocacy and self regulation

Accommodations for breaks if needed

Involving the student in decisions about treatment such as selection of goals