

## Social Based vs Object Based Conversations

The below is a summary of this article: <https://neurodivergentinsights.com/blog/object-based-vs-social-based-conversations>

For many autistic people, the way they prefer to communicate can differ from what is often expected in social settings. Recognising these differences can lead to more meaningful and comfortable interactions for everyone involved.

### What Are Social-Based Conversations?

Social-based conversations revolve around personal experiences, emotions, and relational dynamics. These conversations often have unspoken rules and are commonly used to build or maintain social bonds.

#### Examples of Social-Based Questions:

- "How are you feeling today?"
- "What's been going on in your life?"
- "Tell me about your weekend."

These questions often aim to explore emotions, share personal stories, and maintain a sense of connection. While they are familiar and comfortable for some people, they can be challenging for autistic people for several reasons:

- **Ambiguity:** Questions like "How are you?" can feel too open-ended, requiring complex thought about personal experiences and emotions.
- **Pressure:** There's often an expectation to respond quickly or in a socially "appropriate" way, which can be overwhelming.
- **Emphasis on Emotion:** Processing and expressing emotions can be more effortful for autistic people, making these conversations feel draining.

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### What Are Object-Based Conversations?

Object-based conversations, on the other hand, focus on external topics, specific subjects, or tangible ideas. These conversations prioritise facts, concepts, or shared interests rather than personal or emotional content.

#### Examples of Object-Based Topics:

- "How does this machine work?"
- "Did you see the latest updates about [specific interest]?"
- "You had [event] coming up last time we spoke and you were excited about that"

These conversations often align with autistic communication preferences because they are:

- **Specific:** There's a clear topic to focus on, which reduces ambiguity and makes the conversation more structured.
- **Less Emotionally Demanding:** They don't require the same level of emotional processing or self-disclosure, which can feel intrusive.

- **Aligned with Interests:** Many autistic people have deep, specific interests (sometimes referred to as "special interests"), and talking about these topics can be energising and enjoyable.

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## Why Autistic People May Prefer Object-Based Conversations

### 1. Clarity and Structure

Social-based conversations can feel unpredictable, with vague or broad questions like "How's your day going?" In contrast, object-based conversations provide a clear framework, focusing on specific, external topics. This clarity removes the pressure of guessing what the other person expects from the conversation.

### 2. Reduced Emotional Labor

Sharing personal feelings or experiences often involves interpreting and articulating emotions, which may be challenging for autistic people. Object-based conversations avoid this by shifting the focus to neutral or external topics.

### 3. Passion and Knowledge

Many autistic people find great joy in sharing their knowledge about topics they are passionate about. These conversations allow them to engage fully and authentically without the need to navigate social expectations or norms.

### 4. Comfort in Focus

Conversations that focus on objects, ideas, or shared interests can feel more predictable and safe. They allow for deeper engagement without the unspoken pressure to conform to social communication styles.

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## How to Adapt Your Communication Style

If you want to support autistic people in conversations, here are some practical tips:

### Ask Specific Questions

Instead of open-ended social questions like "How are you?", try asking about a topic they are interested in or offer an invitation to discuss a specific event they have told you about before e.g.

- "Did you see the latest updates about [specific interest]?"
- "You had [event] coming up last time we spoke and you were excited about that"

### Be Genuine

Show authentic interest in the topics they care about. Autistic people often value depth and sincerity in discussions.

### Respect Boundaries

If someone prefers object-based conversations, don't push them into sharing personal details. Respect their comfort level and let them guide the conversation.

### Celebrate Passion

If an autistic individual is excited to talk about a specific topic, embrace it! Sharing their passions is a way they connect with others.

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## **Why This Matters**

Understanding and respecting these communication preferences isn't just about making conversations easier, it's about having meaningful relationships where autistic people feel seen, heard, and valued. By embracing object-based conversations, you can create a space for connection that feels natural and affirming.

For many autistic people, this distinction can be the key to thriving in social settings and maintaining positive relationships. By adapting your approach, you're not just improving communication, you're showing empathy and respect for their way of experiencing the world.