A Family Services Guide

Processing Information Time

Why autistic people may need longer to process and respond

Supporting autistic children, young people, adults and their families across Barking and Dagenham, Havering and Redbridge

Processing Information Time

A difference, not a difficulty

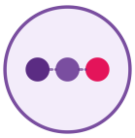
Many autistic people need longer to process spoken and written information than is typically allowed for in everyday conversation.

This is not a difficulty with understanding – it is a difference in the time the brain needs to receive, interpret, and formulate a response to information.

Why extra time is needed

Auditory information can take longer to translate into meaning

Especially in busy or noisy environments.



Separate steps, each taking time

Processing language, formulating a response, and then producing speech are separate steps that can each take extra time.

Anxiety, sensory input, or unfamiliar language

Can all add to processing time.

Visual or spoken information

Some autistic people process visual information more easily than spoken information, or vice versa.

Signs someone may need more processing time

A delay before answering

Or answering an earlier question.

Repeating the question back

Before responding.

Appearing not to have heard

Or needing the question repeated.

Becoming overwhelmed

When questions come quickly or in succession.

What can unintentionally make this harder

Rephrasing or repeating a question too quickly

This restarts the processing from the beginning.

Asking multiple questions at once

Filling silence with more talking

Expecting an instant response

In group or time-pressured settings.

Strategies that help

Give the gift of time

Ask once, then pause

Ask the question once, then pause – count silently to at least ten before saying anything else.

Use clear, concrete, and literal language

Support spoken information with visuals

Symbols, or written words.

Allow extra time in group settings

Or ask questions in advance where possible.

Accept a written, typed, or later response

As valid.

Remember

Slower processing time is not a lack of understanding, ability, or engagement. Allowing enough time – and resisting the urge to fill silence – helps the person show what they really know and think.