**Talking about interests**

Many people with Asperger Syndrome or High Functioning Autism have ‘special interests’. These are highly consuming and enjoyable interests that we can spend a great deal of time pursuing and very much enjoy talking about.

Although non-autistic people also have interests, they may not necessarily be as specific or as focussed as those of people on the autism spectrum, although they are still important and valid.

Everyone has different interests, regardless of whether or not they are on the autism spectrum. What interest’s one person may be very boring to another.

It is fine to talk to other people about your special interest, but it is important to make sure that you give your conversation partner an opportunity to talk too, and that you don’t dominate the conversation. Try to only say a few sentences at a time about your special interest and allow your conversation partner the opportunity to ask questions about it rather than just delivering a monologue.

After you’ve said a few sentences about your special interest, try finishing with an open question to your conversation partner, thus bringing them into the conversation rather than talking ‘at’ them.

For example,

Leanne is very interested in the music of Vivaldi. She is having a conversation with Susan.

S: Hi Leanne, what have you been up to today?

L: I’ve been listening to Vivaldi’s *Four Seasons*. My favourite movement is the first movement of *Winter* as it is very fast and dramatic. I think the best version is the one by Nigel Kennedy. I like to listen to it a lot. Do you like music?

S: Yes, I like music a lot, although I prefer Mozart.

L: That’s interesting, what are your favourite pieces by Mozart?

Here, although Leanne has talked about her special interest and given Susan some information about it, she has restricted herself to a few sentences, before asking Susan an open question to bring her into the conversation. By asking whether Susan also likes music, rather than just talking ‘at’ her, Leanne is showing that she cares about Susan’s interests too.

When Susan responds that she likes Mozart, notice that rather than turning the conversation back to Vivaldi, Leanne uses active listening, saying “that’s interesting” and then proceeds to ask Susan a question about Mozart.

Asking someone about their interests is a good way to build a conversation and show that you want to get to know them. It is important to give your conversation partner an equal chance to talk about their interests rather than trying to steer the conversation back to your own interests, especially as these might not be shared by your conversation partner.

If you are worried that you might not know whether or not your conversation partner is bored, try looking out for the following indicators of boredom from them:

* not asking questions back
* looking around the room
* yawning
* saying they have something else to do
* looking at their watch
* fidgeting a lot

If you notice any of these signs from your conversation partner, do not be offended or try to challenge them. Simply smile and say “it was nice talking to you” and move away from them.

Some people with Asperger Syndrome or High Functioning Autism find that if they don’t have an opportunity to talk about their special interest, they can feel very uncomfortable. It is as though they feel compelled to share their knowledge and have a safe outlet to do this. If you find that you feel this way, it can help to agree with someone that they will allow you to talk about your special interest for a set amount of time each day or week. For example you could make an agreement with a friend or relative that they will listen to you talking about Vivaldi’s music for 10 minutes from 7-7.10pm each Monday, Wednesday and Friday, but outside of these dedicated times, that you will try to follow the conversation guidelines given above.

It can also help to keep a diary or a blog where you can write about your special interest. This can be a good outlet and also a valuable resource for other people who may share your interest, while also leaving you free to resist discussing the topic with people who might not share your special interest.