

Materials on Power of Visuals remind us of the importance of first voices and lived experiences. One way to be an ally to autistic and neurodivergent individuals is to **center and amplify neurodivergent voices and experiences**.

As you look to gather information from autistic and neurodivergent individuals, please remember that many people who identify as autistic/neurodivergent are willing to answer your questions so that you can understand their experiences, but be aware that **responding to questions can be challenging and can drain energy**.

Some tips that your conversational partner might find helpful when you are posing questions:

- Give **wait time** for the person to process and to prepare a response. Don't feel the need to fill the quiet space.
- Considering your questions might mean that an autistic person has to reflect on traumatic or challenging experiences that they have faced. So, to promote a **safe** and successful conversation, consider the following:
 - Ask if your autistic conversational partner (a friend, a family member) would like to have someone else with them while they talk with you.
 - Meet in a comfortable and familiar environment for your conversational partner but ensure you can respect privacy as well while you talk.
 - Remember that listening and formulating responses will be the focus, so some conversational partners might need to fidget, or look away/not make eye contact in order to focus on the conversation.
 - Let your communication partner know:
 - They don't have to respond to a question that makes them uncomfortable, nor do they have to explain why; consider setting up a signal word like "pass."
 - They can stop the conversation at any time; consider setting up a signal word like "break."
 - They can ask questions of you too (both conversational partners can be vulnerable together)
 - They are welcome to correct you or give you the preferred words and labels they want to use (e.g. person-first versus identity first language)
 - Consider making these agreements **visual** by writing on a piece of paper the signal words you agreed upon. "It's okay to say "pass" if a question is upsetting or hard; It's okay to say break if I need to pause or stop."

- If you know the questions you have in advance, write them down and share them in **advance**. This gives your conversational partner a chance to think about what they want to say. (Perhaps the person will prefer to write or use an assistive technology to write their answer than to talk through their answers with you.)
- Tell your conversational partner **how many questions** you hope to ask if they are able and stick to this.
- Don't ask too many questions in one conversation.
- If your purpose is to learn and understand your communication partner's perspective, don't correct or explain as your communication partner speaks, unless asked to do so.
- For some conversational partners, multi-part questions could be challenging. Consider using **only one-part questions**.
- At the end of your question-asking time:
 - Ask your conversational partner if they want to share anything else.
 - If you know that talking with you was upsetting, try not to leave the person right away. Spend some time with the person doing something they enjoy and remind them you are available to talk if they need to say more about something you asked.
 - Offer to connect the person with supports if they are upset or struggling.
 - Thank your conversational partner for their time and for sharing their experience with you. Let them know what you have learned, or things you want to learn more about, because of their openness. Let them know **how you will be using the information you learned**. Ask permission before you share what you have learned with anyone else.