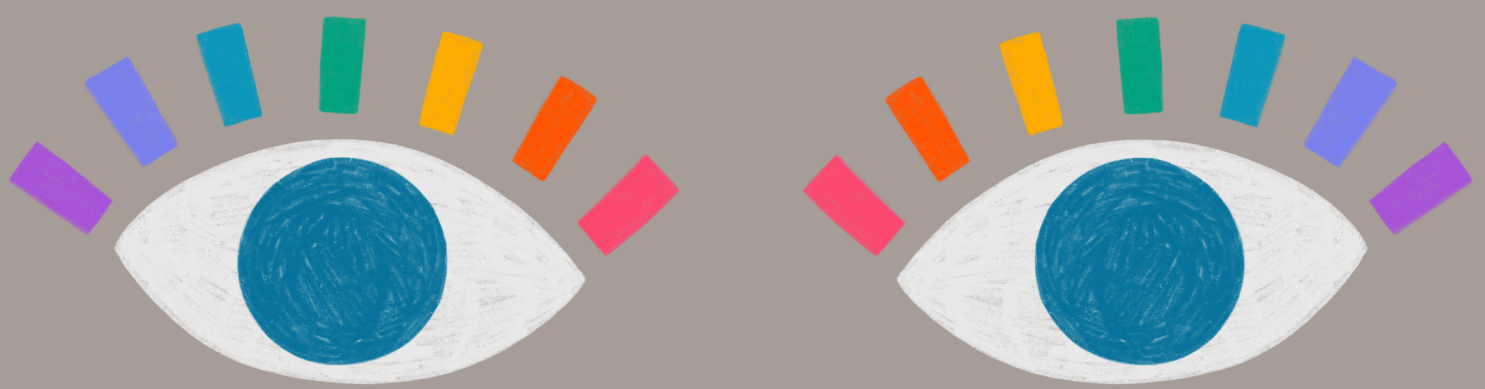


SUPPORTING OUR AUTISTIC SCHOLARS

Eye Contact



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AUTISM & EYE CONTACT

Diagnostic measures, such as the M-CHAT, suggest that a common “red flag” for Autism is lack of eye contact. However, studies report the use of eye contact varies greatly between Autistic individuals, the context of the social situations, and cultural expectations.

RATIONALE

One explanation for reduced eye contact is that Autistic children avoid eye contact because they find it stressful. Another explanation is that Autistic people avoid other’s eyes because the social cues from the eyes are not perceived as particularly meaningful or important.

CONTEXT

Autistic people have difficulty with reading subtle body language, including messages often conveyed through the eyes. The use of eye contact also changes depending on one’s relationships, interest level, and state of regulation.

IMPACT ON EDUCATION

Educators may have been taught that it is essential to get individuals' attention before beginning instruction. You may even see some IEP goals specifically written to target making eye contact as a part of their "compliance”and “direction following" goals.

THE COST

For many Autistic people making eye contact is not an indication of their ability to listen. In fact making eye contact can impede their ability to attend to the rest of their environment, including voices. Others report that eye contact feels awkward, intense, and even painful.

ATTENTION

If you find yourself teaching a student who is unable to make eye contact, first ask yourself if this means they are ignoring you. Explore other ways you could measure their attention. Look for other indications that your scholar is engaged in learning.

COMMUNICATION

Be clear about the times you need your scholars to make eye contact and find creative ways to practice. When eye contact is optional, find other ways to “check in” with one another. Reach out to your SpEd team to learn new strategies for building non-verbal social skills.

HOW CAN WE PRACTICE SEEING FROM OUR SCHOLARS’ POINT OF VIEW?

References

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