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Why autistic people can struggle with instructions. - a thread. /1

Being given an instruction instantly doubles my anxiety level. It doesn't matter what it is. It could be really simple. The simple act of my brain registering that an instruction has been given to me and then having to process this is a BIG deal.

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To begin with, most instructions are pretty poor instructions. A lot of the time this is because the person giving the instruction is neurotypical and just assumes I know what to do with a very vague, very brief instruction. Oh how they assume wrong. /3

For instance, recently I was asked to photocopy "a few" copies of something. I took "a few" to mean 3, because I have grown up with the understanding that few = three. I took this too literally, one of the major problems with understanding instructions for autistic people. /4

If an instruction is given to me, unless I know otherwise based on previous experience and current knowledge, I will take the instruction at its word and process it very literally. This can mean I don't look at the surrounding factors which may affect the instruction. /5

So, in this example with the photocopying, the person assumed I would look at what the photocopy was of and realise I would need at least 10 copies. I guess looking back this was fair enough. 3 would not be adequate. But 3 was what they got. /6

Not only are most instructions poor, and my brain interprets them very literally, but sometimes the instruction can genuinely be interpreted in multiple different ways. I suppose this adds to them being poor. PLEASE be explicit and straight to the point in your instruction. /7

I don't want to stand there staring at you blankly as I try to process what you have just said to me and consider which of the several ways you want me to respond to your instruction. I guess this is why I'm told I lack common sense. /8

But, even when I know what I should probably do, and usually do this, I have so often been wrong in the past (like with the photocopying) that I doubt and I doubt and I doubt myself until my brain is exhausted. A very simple instruction can cause my brain to be overloaded. /9

I am so desperate to not be wrong and not look like a fool for misinterpreting a simple instruction, that I can seek reassurance a lot. Just to check I am doing it right. Because also, I'm a perfectionist. My brain is wired in a way that everything has to be perfect. /10

I want to carry out the task perfectly so I do not disappoint you. I want to do it perfectly, but when my definition of perfect and your definition is different, that can leave me feeling like I can't even begin to act on the instruction because I just don't KNOW what to do. /11

Another thing that can make following instructions very, very difficult is executive functioning skills. I seem to find it impossible to remember more than one instruction at once, so if the instruction comes in stages, I have to write them down. I have learned this. /12

At school, this was a nightmare. Especially in Design and Technology lessons. Especially Woodwork where I was also battling the sensory nightmare of that classroom. We'd be verbally told instructions, and I would forget them all apart from the first one. /13

Therefore, because I forget the rest of them, I'd be told I wasn't paying attention. Believe me, I AM paying attention. Probably harder than everyone else. But my brain simply can't remember an instruction that isn't immediately relevant to the task. I need it written down. /14

My impulse control also isn't great, and this means I can act on an instruction without necessarily thinking of the consequences. Sometimes I just act without thinking, and everything seems to blow up in my face. It's not great. /15

One very common shared experience for autistic people when it comes to instructions, is a need to understand WHY we have to follow the instruction before being able to carry it out. Except, when we ask why, it comes across as rude. /16

Asking why you want me to do something is not me asking why I have to do it, or being reluctant to help, it's simply enabling me to complete the task. I just want to understand, so I can do it. Otherwise, I really, really struggle. /17

There we go, that's why I hate instructions. Especially verbal ones. Unfortunately we deal with them every day, and I have a tendency to selectively focus on the ones I fail at. Most of the time, I manage (to my surprise). A bit of support and understanding goes a long way. /18

Sharing my tip jar just in-case. ■■

<https://t.co/vyjCpvdxFC>

Here is this thread in blog post form!

<https://t.co/chfJWeOE9f>