

# The Problem of Eye Contact



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FACT SHEET

## ASD: A New Perspective

Often one of the most concerning things for parents of children with autism is a lack of eye contact with their child. For some, it can be devastating. If this is you, we encourage you to keep reading and rethink this topic in a way that can be life-changing.

Because eye contact is considered to be important for social communication, it is often taught as a behavior that can miss the incredibly important thinking aspect on why people look at each other to begin with!

"The phrase 'eye contact' does not capture the act of looking as a fluid, dynamic skill, but as a rote, mechanical or static act. Indeed, if eye contact is sustained for too long a period of time, it may actually be inappropriate. In teaching children with ASD to visually reference, it is important to understand and respect why they may look away (e.g., perhaps there is too much stimulation) and also to give them opportunities and whatever assistance they need, to take in visual information at a pace that allows them to derive meaning from what they are seeing....when we help children to use their vision to take in information and, when needed, assist them in figuring things out, we motivate and empower them to become seekers of information."

After years of studying this obstacle, the developers of RDI have redefined what is truly missing when we see lack of eye contact. In the RDI program, eye contact has been removed as a treatment goal and replaced it with visual referencing: the dynamic skill of using the sense of sight to gather, or reference, information.

*(Moving Beyond Eye Contact, Linda Murphy, 2012)*

"IF YOU ARE AT ALL INTERESTED IN UNDERSTANDING THE THINKING AND ATTENTION OF YOUR STUDENT, THE FIRST THING YOU MUST DO IS STOP TEACHING EYE CONTACT. THE MORE YOU PROMPT EYE CONTACT, THE MORE YOU ARE TAKING AWAY YOUR DATABASE THAT GIVES YOU CLUES INTO YOUR STUDENT'S THINKING. INSTEAD, LEARN TO OBSERVE WHERE THE STUDENT IS PLACING HER GAZE, WHICH WILL GIVE YOU A SENSE FOR WHAT SHE FEELS IS IMPORTANT IN THE MOMENT. WHEN HUMANS WANT TO ATTEND AND FOCUS ON SOMETHING, WE SHIFT OUR GAZE TO THAT SUBJECT. IF WE FORCE A PERSON'S GAZE, WE ARE ELIMINATING OUR BEST CHANCE TO UNDERSTAND WHAT THEY ARE THINKING. FORCING EYE CONTACT DISCONNECTS A STUDENT'S GAZE FROM HIS THOUGHTS AND ESSENTIALLY JUST TEACHES HIM HOW TO STARE WITHOUT ANY MEANING BEHIND THE ACTION."

Looking for a deeper connection with your child?  
Join us in the RDI Learning Community: [www.rdiconnect.com](http://www.rdiconnect.com)