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SpLD myth #2: Autistic people don't want to make friends

In the ELT classroom, pair and group work – in frequently changing combinations – is the norm. It's a great way for all the members of a class to get to know each other. Right?

I think most teachers understand that some learners prefer to work individually – people with autism, for example. But I'm not sure that it's true that autistic people *want* to be on their own – probably it just seems like the least worst option in a busy classroom. Think of it this way: you might be desperate to go for a swim to cool off, but if the water is full of jellyfish, staying on the hot sand might be preferable.

In my experience, autistic people – like most of us – want to form relationships, have friends and partners, even colleagues they enjoy working with. Humans generally want to feel that they belong to a community, where they are accepted as themselves. But when you experience the world very differently from the majority of the population, it's much harder to find that mutual understanding that forms the basis of close and lasting relationships. Unfortunately, most of us are just too unpredictable and inconsistent to make that easy.

Rather than assuming that the neurodivergent people in our classes and workplaces are naturally 'loners', and leaving them to their own devices, perhaps we (the largely 'neurotypical' people) could do more to try to understand what it is that deters them from joining in.

Maybe the noise or lighting levels in the classroom make it hard to focus on a conversation, or perhaps their classmates constantly talk over one another. Could it be that the line between 'banter' and bullying is too fuzzy? The only way to understand what barriers they are experiencing is to start that conversation. From there, we can begin to raise the awareness of their peers and teachers, and help to develop more inclusive communication strategies.

Visit [ELT well](#) to learn more about neurodiversity and its various impacts on learning.