

When he signed up as an Ambassador for JET, Ryan O’Connell said he hoped to contribute meaningfully by sharing both his professional insight and lived experiences. ‘My goal for this role is to raise awareness of the challenges autistic people face and to encourage systems of empowerment where all individuals are able to thrive.’

Here, he shares his views on autism and rudeness: living and working with communication barriers.

“Autism” and “rude” are two words that seem to go hand in hand. Across social media – even on LinkedIn, which is supposedly a professional space – I regularly see posts saying things like, “Autism is no excuse for rudeness,” followed by comment after comment about how rude autistic people are, with very little self-reflection.

Some autistic people are rude, just like some non-autistic people are rude. There are people who delight in being rude, but they are a tiny minority. Most of us have probably had moments when we’re having a bad day and lash out with a rude comment, enjoy the split-second relief, and then feel awful about it later.

Here’s the counter-point: autistic people are not rude – you just don’t like the way they communicate, and you haven’t learned how autistic communication works.

When I was diagnosed as autistic, one of the key areas assessed was communication. I’d argue this is central to understanding how autistic and non-autistic people differ (though other autistic people may see it differently). Let me explain why.



Non-autistic people use social lying and social lubrication. These are so ingrained that most people don’t realise they’re doing them. Social lying is part of everyday interaction. For example, you’ve been waiting 30 minutes to see your GP. When you finally go in, they ask, “Have you been waiting long?” You immediately say, “Oh not at all.” Why? Because that’s the social script. You don’t want to make the other person uncomfortable.

An autistic person is more likely to say, “Yes – 30 minutes.” This isn’t rudeness; it’s accuracy. But because they haven’t followed the expected script, the other person may feel wrong-footed and interpret the response as rude, hostile, or even aggressive. Did the autistic person actually do anything wrong?

Social lubrication is even harder for me. Someone you know passes you in the street and says, “Hi, how are you?” But it isn’t really a question. Autistic people everywhere are asking: if it’s not a question, why ask it like one?

What’s expected is a brief, almost automatic script – “All right?” “Yeah, you?” “Good, thanks” – without breaking stride.

To an autistic person, this exchange can feel pointless and confusing. We've swapped words with no real meaning yet going off-script again creates social difficulty.

This kind of social lubrication signals: I'm friendly, I belong, I'm not a threat. It happens constantly, including in workplaces. Meanwhile, autistic people are trying to answer questions honestly and are often labelled rude for doing so.

Autistic people aren't taught these things. We're expected to just "know" them, or to learn through trial and error – which often means repeated negative feedback. Even when we learn to "pass" as non-autistic, it's exhausting, and not always sustainable. This matters in work environments. Many autistic people lose opportunities, damage working relationships, or are judged unfairly – not because of their ability or intent, but because their communication style is misunderstood. A little awareness can prevent unnecessary conflict and unlock real talent.

So my request is this: don't assume the person you're dealing with is trying to be rude. If we all extended grace by default – especially at work – instead of meeting perceived rudeness with judgement or hostility, the world would be a kinder and more productive place.

***JET promotes inclusive employment by helping workplaces better understand different communication styles, ensuring people are judged on their ability and potential – not misunderstanding.**