



Australian Government
Department of Social Services



The hidden curriculum of the workplace

*The Department of Social Services
acknowledges the traditional owners of
country throughout Australia, and their
continuing connection to land, water and
community.*

*We pay our respects to them and their cultures,
and to Elders both past and present.*

What is the hidden curriculum?

The hidden curriculum of the workplace includes *expected communication styles, unwritten social rules and body language* on the job.

It is often difficult for people on the autism spectrum to figure out the hidden curriculum.

By reading these modules we hope to prepare you for some of the universal work conventions expected in most workplaces.



What is the hidden curriculum?

You probably don't realise that there are two aspects to learn about a 'job':

1. The first is the specific role that you have been employed to do.
2. The second is the hidden curriculum, which includes unwritten workplace rules.

The hidden curriculum is the 'culture' of the workplace, consisting of rules that people expect you to follow. These rules enable everyone to get along together.



What does the hidden curriculum involve?

The hidden curriculum is the social information that most people know without being taught; the unwritten rules and expectations in situations. These workplace social rules are assumed to be known and understood. The hidden curriculum can be especially confusing to individuals with autism.

The hidden curriculum involves:



- Observational learning



- Non-verbal cues



- Body language



- Slang
- Facial expression
- Tone of voice

The hidden curriculum is dependent on context (more information about context is referenced at the end of the module). For example, if someone is crying ... is it expected behaviour?



YES if they are watching a sad movie

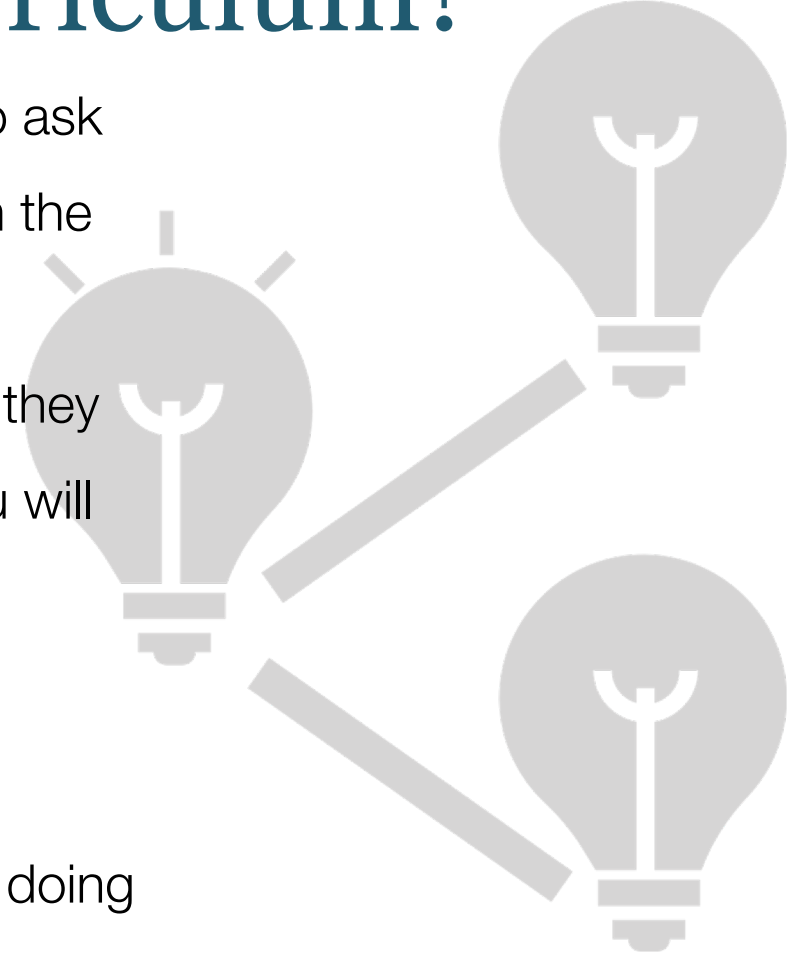


NO if they are in a team meeting at work!

It is helpful to tell someone you trust about your interpretation and have them help you clarify any ambiguities.

How do I learn the hidden curriculum?

- If you are unsure of the social norms of your workplace it is ok to ask your manager, mentor or a trusted colleague to help you to learn the social rules.
- Everyone needs to learn the social norm of the workplace when they start a new job. The good thing is that it does get easier and you will get more familiar with what is expected of you over time.
- Ask questions.
- Watch those around you.
- If ever you feel that you are being made fun of for unintentionally doing the 'wrong' thing it is important to tell your manager about it. It is not ok to be teased for rules you do not understand.



Further reading and short videos can be found below.

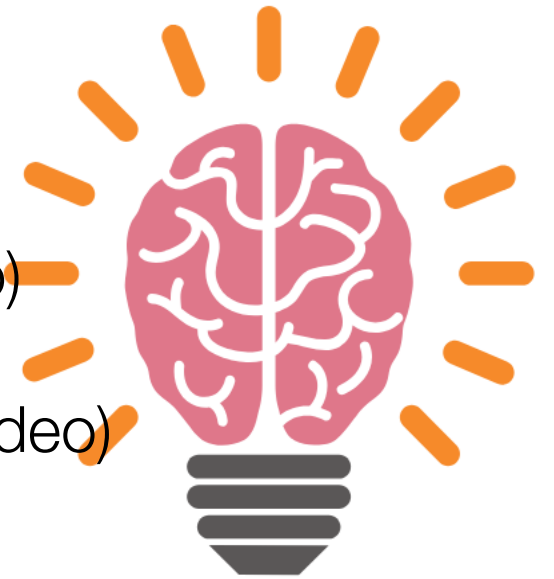
[Unspoken rules and body language](#) – by Centennial College
(2 minute 40 second video)

[The Hidden Curriculum](#) – by Brenda Smith Myles (2 minute video)

[What is the Hidden Curriculum](#) – Sylvia Van Meerten (3 minute video)

[Context and Autism](#) – by Peter Vermeulen (2 minute animation)

[Learning Unwritten Social Rules](#) — from "*Aspergers from the Inside*" (4 minute video)





THANK
YOU

Thank you for reading.

You have now finished this module.



This training forms part of the Department of Social Services' Autism@Work pilot program with DXC Technology and Untapped.