

Austistic adults shared what it is like to be forced to make eye contact. Indented bullets were meaningful responses to the original comment.

“Forced eye contact feels like.....”

- Needles in my eyes
- Burning my eyes with hot poker
- A ridiculous NT expectation that serves no purpose/A distraction/Pointless and harmful
- A cross between being naked in public and being poked with a sharp stick
- Uncomfortable. Like someone trying to bore into my soul.
- Penetration
- Staring at the sun
- Sexual assault
-seeing into someone's essence. I can absolutely and deafeningly hear every feeling they are having. I feel like I am intruding into their mind. I don't think they realize how much I see all the time and cannot stop. In addition, I am not a fan of everyone. Some people I do not wish to feel as I find them awful./It takes an obscene amount of energy to see only that which does not harm me in some people. I am however quite blunt on this./"I absorb the feelings of others and I am really tired. I can't look you in the eye right now, I need to feel my own feelings. It's not you, and it's not me. I am tired. We can do this later if you me to feel your feelings. Right now I have to look after me or I will shut down to protect myself."
 - Yes, it feels like seeing into someone's soul. Like, I'm seeing parts of them I'm not supposed to see. And it makes me extremely uncomfortable. It makes my head feel wobbly and my eyes hurt. If I'm upset at the time, or about to have a meltdown, it feels like everything is hyper-focused and when I look into someone's eyes (even someone I love) it makes my whole body shake.
 - I'm the opposite. I don't feel like I'm absorbing someone else's feelings, but rather they are absorbing my thoughts (like they are a skilled mind reader and my mind is an open book for them to look through).
- Being suddenly stripped naked and exposed to a cold wind
- Looking at the sun
- Danger, Danger. Like it's triggering my fight or flight reflex
- Torture. Eye contact is an intimacy level right up there with being naked, except it's physically painful as well. I can count the number of people I'm comfortable with direct eye contact on one hand and three of them are my biological children I gave birth to./It's like stripping down to your soul for the person. Beyond naked.

- Being dissected under a microscope
- Pure, undiluted fear
- Being stabbed by a knife that is trying to qualify and quantify you at the same time
- The one time my eye contact was forced in a group setting, I felt like an inmate in a Prisoner of War Camp coerced into adopting normalising behaviour by a nazi. It was pure, shock, trauma, torture, cruelty. It was being made to do something utterly unnatural to me in front of witnesses, in a vain attempt to normalise me, then having to endure these witnesses congratulating me for doing it. I will never free myself from the anger that experience left me with. It fuels me. I was 42.
- Being stabbed in the head repeatedly with a pen combined with the most embarrassing moments of my life flashing before my eyes. It's a combination of physical and emotional pain that no one seems to get.
- Being physically attacked while being overwhelmed with fear
- Anxiety and pain. Someone trying to force their way into your head through your eyes using a blunt object
- Uncomfortable, inauthentic, and distracting
- Vulnerability
- To compare it to someone NT might understand. For me its like restless leg syndrome but in your eyeballs. I HAVE to look away its like this painful itchy urge to look somewhere else./Also at times it will completely wipe my brain blank. I completely loose my train of thought
- So uncomfortable that the two words together make my skin crawl
- Like having your soul ripped out by a vampire. Even accidental eye contact feels very much the same as I've felt after occasional encounters with flashers and frotteurs, violated and irrationally ashamed.
- I'm forcing myself to stare at a bright light. It burns my eyes and hurts my head./I can't focus on anything other than my eyes hurting or the feeling of being so uncomfortable I need to move from where I am.
- Putting my fingers into an electric socket
- All of my thoughts are being sucked out of my head
- A creeping feeling, like someone's breathing on me but much more intense, on the back of my neck. Instant panic. Paranoia. Lost train of thought.
- I want to cry and hide. I can't think.
- Like I did something wrong... like I'm being punished and doubted. Like I'm being belittled and judged. Its a way to hurt me.
- A direct challenge
- Discomfort, self-consciousness, my ability to pay attention to anything other than how it feels to stare into eyeballs

- Feels like I'm in the Principals office & he's forcing me to look him in the eye. Its hostile & aggressive
- A distraction. I can look you in the eye but I can't process anything you say. I also struggle with the appropriate about of eye contact. I know I'm not supposed to just stare into your eyeballs. But I don't know how much I'm supposed to look you in the eye and look away.
- Pressure. Pressure to perform, pressure to do it "right", pressure of expectations that I don't feel I can meet.
- It feels like I'm being rude and like I'm in trouble maybe? Or like I immediately believe myself to be lower than whoever I'm looking in the eye. I feel like bugs are crawling on me when it happens and it physically makes me just uncomfortable.
- Powerful, violent, white-hot jolts of electric shock zapping my brain
- Torture, powerful, selfishness of the person whose forcing you to do it and stressful
- Really uncomfortable! Like a violation! Totally forced and unnatural./Sometimes I feel like people think I'm lying if I get uncomfortable with eye contact I sort of squirm and keep looking away then I start to fidget and freak out...all the classic signs basically a lie detector would say I'm a liar!
- It starts mildly uncomfortable then progresses to a painful brain numbing. Like when the dentist freezes your mouth but it's my brain and I cant think or talk or even blink properly.
- A black hole
- Skipping a step going downstairs while having a mild panic attack
- It feels like sharp pain throughout my body and dizziness
- Vacuuming words out of my mouth
- I can't hear what the person is saying anymore and it makes my body start to feel tense and if it goes on long enough I go into fight or flight.
- Being told to not blink
- A gyno exam
- Sometimes it feels unbearable. Sometimes if it's my husband eye contact doesnt scare me but confuses me and I have to look away to talk and remember the conversation. Sometimes I feel like I have the hang of it and start staring at everyone and cant tell if I'm doing it right or know if they know Im staring.
- Two magnets set at polar opposition
- Forced eye contact feels like we're about to have sex, even if I don't like you and find you repulsive (it's just too intimate)
- Like I don't know which eye to look at (thanks to my wife for that description) and like I want to suck my eyeballs into my skull so I don't feel like my skin is crawling

- Staring at snow covered ground on a sunny day. You may not ACTUALLY go blind from it, but it doesn't feel good, then it starts to hurt and make your eyes tear up.
- A dementor just out of reach to kill me
- Pure anxiety. Instinctually wrong.
- My worst nightmare
- Piercing pain, it can lead to tears, and IQ drops of 60 points that I can't afford to shed at that time.
- Being itchy all over; it's really uncomfortable and I can't stay still and maintain it./Also, I feel a sense of sheer dread in my gut, nauseous and a little panicked if I look someone in the pupils (can't even look myself in my eyes in the mirror... I have ONE person in the world who I can look in the eye and feel nothing at all, which I find weird).
- Being stripped completely naked and burned
- Weird, twitchy. My body from the neck down needs to move somehow if my eyes are forced to maintain eye-contact.
- Fight./It feels like a fight.
- Awkward and overly personal. Distracting. I can only focus on forcing myself to look at their eyes instead of what they are saying. I'd say it's exactly as distracting as juggling. When you juggle, it's all you can do, and you're tense the whole time.
- Being out in the sun with bad quality sunglasses

A few allistic parents reported for their autistic children (with child's consent):

- I know I'm not autistic, but I asked my autistic daughter and she said "it feels like a challenge, like it's either fight or flight"
- Answering on behalf of my 2 kids 6 and 9... son 9 says it hurts his head and he gets confused./Daughter says i like to look at you for a split second then look away as your face doesnt make sense with the words
- Wrong./My son says it's just weird.
- Autistic daughter asked me to write: "It feels like everyone is judging me."
- My daughter said "feels like they trying to intimidate me"
- From my 7yo. My skin is crawling.

Some autistic individuals don't have any or much of a problem with eye contact.
Remember, each autistic person is unique!

- I am autistic, but I don't actually have a problem with eye contact. I remember once being in the car with my father, giving intense eye contact since we were talking, and he got so mad at me for it. I actually find more of a problem if I am not allowed to give eye contact. I simply feel like its respectful, though sometimes I think people believe it must mean I am interested in what they are talking about even when I am not, which makes it difficult to leave conversations./But this is also coming from a person who just sort of has to *see* everything going on. Like if I get a needle for example, I have to watch as it is used. It sort of makes me feel... in control of the pain, I guess. It means I can expect the exact moment something is going to happen and prepare for it accordingly, etc.
 - Chuffed to read this. I'm almost exactly the same, I can become overwhelmed with eye contact in big groups, but one to one I've been told I'm intense; it was an area that i was worried about, pre diagnosis, in having an assessment.
- I don't really have a "problem" with it. I think I can feel some people's energy more than others, which effects whether I'm comfortable enough to want to give them eye contact.
- idk? It's nothing I've forced myself to do. Maybe the closest is during interviews and then I feel like it's two dogs staring each other down and facing off. My little one makes eye contact, too. We just don't prefer it necessarily. Now that I've been prompted to answer this, I actually have no idea how often we do or don't make eye contact. I notice sometimes when I'm explaining something to a subordinate at work (is this the right word- it sounds bad!) they look behind them and that's when I notice I'm not making eye contact and readjust.