

# Why taking things literally increases my anxiety.



- Like many autistic people, my natural interpretation of any new information tends to be to take it literally.
- That doesn't mean I'm naïve or lack understanding.
- I have learned many figures of speech, idioms, metaphors and sayings off by heart.
- I am very open minded and don't have the ability to filter out unnecessary or meaningless information unconsciously like many people appear to do.
- This is great for seeing situations with a unique perspective, thinking outside the box or noticing patterns.
- It also means I have to consciously process information to understand it unless it matches something I already know.
- My initial, literal interpretation can be emotional or confusing. Think about these commonly used phrases: "I'll kill him if he does that again" or "That baby is so gorgeous I could eat her".
- I have learned specific examples of how language is used as above, and also patterns such as 'emotions are often described as colours' or 'elephants are used to denote size or memory'. I can apply these 'rules' to help me get by socially.
- When the language pattern and the words don't match it can be because it is a joke or a lie or some other hidden agenda. I understand how this works and can use it to a fair degree.
- Covid-19 is an illness and usually when people are talking about illness, they are kind and caring. (Unless they believe that people are some how at fault for contracting it.)
- The language of coronavirus is the language of war. I understand that this is because of a political agenda.
- The words used are powerful and scary. 'War' and 'staying healthy and well' are opposites. The language does not fit. But this is not a joke or a lie. I feel suspicious.
- The words include 'lock down'; 'isolation'; 'curfew'; 'prohibit'; 'enforce'; 'battle'; 'threat'
- I know these words aren't meant to be taken literally but my natural reaction is to take them literally and this makes me feel frightened. Frightened because I don't want to be locked in anywhere, for example, and frightened because someone is using the wrong words and I don't really know why. I also feel confused.
- The confusion adds to my overload. My body is reacting to the fear the words create so my senses are heightened anyway (flight or fright etc). This makes everything even more difficult to process.
- I find out what the words mean. I don't necessarily agree with them or think they are the most appropriate words but I gain a better understanding.
- My understanding helps reduce my anxiety but every time I hear the words it triggers my anxiety again.
- It is sad that people are talking about an illness in a way that isn't compassionate.