

MYTHS AND FACTS ABOUT AUTISM

Because autism is pretty common (1 in 34 people in the United States are autistic), there are many misconceptions about it. This guide will introduce you to some myths and explain what's true about autism. The myths are grouped together because many myths are very similar or about the same thing.

CAUSES

Myths

- Vaccines cause autism
- Bad parenting causes autism
- Something a parent did while pregnant or raising their child caused autism
- Something in the environment causes autism

Facts

We don't know exactly what causes autism, but we know that some of it is genetic: it runs in the family. We also know that no parenting choices or behaviors cause autism. Autism doesn't come from vaccines, mercury, or anything else in the environment. It is something you're born with.

WHO IS AUTISTIC

Myths

- Only boys have autism
- There is more autism now than there used to be
- Autism only happens in Western countries
- Only kids have autism/you have to be diagnosed as a child

Facts

Anyone can be autistic: every gender, age, race, nationality, or ethnicity. Autism is lifelong: while many people are diagnosed as kids, some people don't realize they are autistic until they're older. There are more autism diagnoses than there used to be, but no one is entirely sure why. A few reasons include:

- The diagnostic criteria have changed, so more people meet the diagnosis
- We have gotten better at identifying autism
- There used to be more stereotypes about autism: people thought only white boys had it. We are more likely to accept autism in a variety of people now.

WHAT ARE PEOPLE WITH AUTISM LIKE?

Myths

- Autism looks the same in every person who is autistic
- Most people with autism have intellectual disabilities, learning disabilities, or special skills
- Autistic people don't have relationships/don't feel love/don't have empathy
- Autistic people all like math/science/technology
- Autistic people don't like to socialize or don't want to connect with other people
- Autistic people are violent
- Everyone is a little bit autistic

Facts

Autism is a spectrum: that means every person with autism is different. They'll have different strengths and challenges. Some autistic people can speak out loud, others can't. Some have additional disabilities (like learning disabilities or intellectual disabilities) and others don't. Each autistic person has different interests: some prefer math and science, while others are more creative.

The traits that make up autism are traits that anyone can have. However that doesn't mean everyone is a little autistic. It means that we all have similarities. Autistic traits and challenges are more intense and take up more of a person's life than they would for someone else.

Autistic people may not express or communicate their feelings the same way as others, but many still want to connect to others. Autistic people can love deeply, can feel lonely, and can want to socialize. While people with autism can hurt themselves or others when they are having a meltdown, generally this is because they feel out of control or overwhelmed. There is no evidence that shows autistic people are more violent than anyone else.

STIGMA AND LIFE WITH AUTISM

Myths

- You can cure autism (with a diet, therapies, or something else)
- People grow out of autism
- If an autistic child cannot do something, they won't be able to do it in the future
- Autistic people cannot live independently and won't have fulfilling, purposeful lives
- Autistic people can't have jobs/get married/own a house/have children

Facts

Autism is lifelong. A person doesn't grow out of autism, but just like anyone else, they will grow and change over time. They might gain new skills, get better support, and act different.

While a person with autism may have fewer challenges when they get support, skills, and strategies, they are still autistic. That's because autism is how your brain works, and nothing will change a person's brain.

With the right support, autistic people can do all kinds of things, from having a career to dating to living independently. Not every autistic person will be able to or want to do all these things, but every autistic person has the right and the ability to find a fulfilling, purposeful life that is right for them.