

List of common autism misconceptions

> Myth: Autism is a childhood condition that can be outgrown or cured

The facts: Experts agree that there is no cure for Autism. Because Autism is a 'spectrum' condition it affects different people in different ways, and the impact of certain characteristics can change as the person moves through different stages of their life.

According to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM), used to diagnose Autism, Autism characteristics start early and continue throughout life. This means that if an accurate diagnosis is made, it is not possible to 'grow out' of Autism. While it is not possible to 'cure' Autism, appropriate intervention can help:

- Capitalise on strengths and address areas of challenge
- Support the person to acquire new skills and strategies to enhance communication and social interaction, and modify or develop existing skills
- Reduce barriers to participation
- Improve Quality of Life

With the right support, people with Autism – from childhood to adulthood – can lead happy and productive lives.

> Myth: All people with Autism have the same skills and difficulties

The facts: Although people with Autism share difficulties in the core areas of social-communication, restricted and repetitive behaviours and sensory processing, every person with Autism is unique and has different abilities and interests. This is why Autism is called a 'spectrum disorder', and why supports should be tailored to the person's individual needs.

> Myth: All people with Autism have an outstanding 'savant' skill

The facts: People with Autism generally have an uneven developmental profile, meaning that their level of ability may vary across different skills and even within the same skill area. Some people with Autism do indeed have an exceptional ability far above that of the general population (also called a 'savant skill'). Still, research tells us that more than two-thirds of people with Autism don't. So, even though savant skills – like having a photographic memory, or the ability to compute complex mathematical equations quickly – and Autism may be linked in some way, most people with Autism do not in fact have a savant skill. Everyone has strengths, and the best way to learn about someone's strengths is by getting to know who they are as a person and what they love.

> Myth: People with Autism do not experience the full range of emotions

The facts: People with Autism may have difficulty expressing their feelings, or may express them in a different way. Research confirms that people with Autism are in fact capable of feeling the full spectrum of emotions, even if they can't always express this in a way that is easily interpreted by those around them.

As part of the social communication challenges associated with Autism Spectrum Disorders, it is not uncommon for people with Autism to have trouble recognising and interpreting the emotions of others, which can add to the misunderstanding about Autism and emotions. This is a miscommunication, not a lack of feeling. It is important to remember that people with Autism do have emotions, are caring and loving, and their feelings can be hurt, just like anyone else.

> Myth: Children with Autism are more aggressive

The facts: As with other children, there are those with Autism who may shout or hit out when they are distressed, but this is certainly not the case for all children with Autism. When it does occur, this behaviour is often related to a lack of alternative skills, or difficulties coping in the sensory environment, regulating emotions or communicating needs. Challenging behaviours are often a communication of last resort.

In some cases, a child with Autism may show interest in the reactions of people who are hurt or upset but may not understand what these emotions mean. It is rare for a child with Autism to intentionally cause harm to another person.

> Myth: People with Autism aren't capable of forming meaningful relationships and friendships

The facts: People with Autism often have very strong bonds with important people in their lives. They **can** and **do** have fulfilling relationships with family, friends, partners and children. Studies have shown that most people with Autism want to form relationships with others. Still, they often find it difficult to understand social cues and navigate social interactions. It is important to recognise that **seeming** uninterested is not necessarily the same as **being** uninterested. There are a variety of strategies that can help support social connections (like activities to develop social thinking and planned events around shared interests). Relationships are a 'two-way street', and success is never the responsibility of only one party. Developing Autism awareness and understanding, can also help those without Autism to be more considerate and accepting of the differences in people with Autism, thus promoting positive social connections.

> Myth: Autism is a behavioural or mental health disorder

The facts: Autism is a developmental disorder. Although challenging behaviour can be the result of underlying difficulties related to Autism characteristics, it is not a core feature of Autism. While mental illness can occur alongside Autism (like anxiety or depression), Autism is not a mental health disorder. The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) has reflected our evolving understanding of Autism. Many years ago, Autism was considered a 'psychiatric' condition, but a growing body of research has disproved this. The DSM-3, published in 1980, established Autism as its own separate diagnosis and described it as a 'Pervasive Developmental Disorder'. In 2013 the fifth edition of this manual was released. The DSM-5 reflects our current understanding of Autism, and is the standard reference used by professionals to confirm a diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder.

> Myth: There is an Autism epidemic

The facts: The definitions of Autism have changed over time, and we have better ways of assessing and diagnosing ASD. We now recognise a more comprehensive range of characteristics as forming part of the Autism Spectrum. It is likely that many people diagnosed based on today's diagnostic criteria would not have received a diagnosis if assessed against past definitions of Autism. An increase in Autism awareness and understanding has also led to improved developmental monitoring and detection of the early signs of Autism, with parents and professionals more actively seeking referral for Autism assessment. Using the term 'Autism epidemic' carries the implication that Autism is contagious. It is important to note that Autism is not an illness or a disease, and perpetuating this myth is likely to create unnecessary community concern and further stigmatise Autism.

> Myth: Autism is caused by parenting style

The facts: There is no single known cause for Autism. Science suggests that there are likely several causes with strong links to developmental and genetic factors. [Parenting style does not cause Autism.](#)

Because people with Autism experience challenges with communication, social understanding and sensory processing, some traditional parenting strategies may not be as successful with children who have Autism. Often parents need to adapt their own behaviour to meet the needs of their child with Autism, and this may appear unusual to those around them who are unfamiliar with Autism. Adjustments in 'parenting style' may in fact be necessary to help their child cope with the situation or setting they are in. Family-centred Autism services can help parents and other caregivers identify strategies that work for their family as well as ways to advocate for their child. To learn more about our services [click here](#).

> Myth: Vaccinations cause Autism

The facts: Extensive, high-quality research over the past 20 years has established that there is no link between vaccines and Autism. Conclusive evidence proves that there is **no connection** between the MMR vaccine (Measles, Mumps, and Rubella), or any other vaccines and Autism. Research also shows there is no significant difference in the rates of Autism between vaccinated and unvaccinated children.

The idea of vaccination and Autism being connected came from a flawed study of 12 children with developmental disorders in 1998. Based on a poor experimental design, very small sample size, ethical violations and scientific misrepresentation, this paper was withdrawn from publication, and the research was discredited. [Click here](#) to read more.

Source: autism.org.au/what-is-autism/common-misconceptions/