

Information Sheet: Common autism myths

MYTH: Autism can be cured

FACT: People are born autistic and it's a lifelong condition. It cannot be cured or prevented, and people do not grow out of it. Our research shows that this is one of the most common misconceptions about autism: 30-55% of Australians agree/are unsure that autism can be cured.

MYTH: Autism is a mental illness or disease

FACT: Autistic people are not mentally ill (although mental illness commonly co-occurs with autism), nor do they have a disease. Autistic brains are simply 'wired' differently to neurotypical brains.

MYTH: Vaccines or emotionless parenting cause autism

FACT: There is no specific cause of autism. The myth that vaccines, particularly the MMR vaccine, cause autism has long been debunked by medical science. However this misconception remains and our research shows that 12% of Australians agree/are unsure that vaccines cause autism.

Parenting style can certainly influence how an autistic child is able to cope with the world, but it is definitely not the cause of autism.

MYTH: Autistic people do not experience empathy

FACT: Autistic people feel a range of empathy levels just as non-autistic people do. However, autistic people may have trouble detecting emotions from unspoken interpersonal communication like body language or tone of voice. When emotions are communicated more directly, autistic people are much more likely to feel empathy and compassion for others. They may have trouble expressing it or they may express it in ways that are different or harder to recognise.

MYTH: Autistic people are violent

FACT: There is no evidence that autistic people are more violent than non-autistic people. In fact, autistic people are more likely to be the victims of violence than perpetrators. If aggressive behaviors are shown by an autistic person, they are most likely caused by frustration, physical and/or sensory overload, or similar issues.

MYTH: Autistic people are anti-social

FACT: Autistic people may need support with social skills or interact differently with the world around them, but many autistic people enjoy having friendships and other meaningful relationships.

MYTH: Only boys are autistic

FACT: The current estimated ratio of autistic boys and men, to autistic girls and women, is 3:1. However girls and women are more likely to be misdiagnosed, or diagnosed later, than boys and men.

The ongoing systemic failure to identify and diagnose autistic girls and women results from a lack of recognition and understanding across sectors of the differences in how autism can present in girls and women compared to boys and men. This is in addition to historic gender biases in autism screening and diagnostic tools.

MYTH: All autistic people have outstanding talents

FACT: The characteristics of autism vary significantly from person to person. Some autistic people have extraordinary memories, but most don't. Forget the *Rain Man* stereotype – like all people, autistic people have diverse and varied strengths.

MYTH: Autistic people are intellectually disabled

FACT: Intellectual disability isn't an autistic trait, however many autistic people do have co-occurring intellectual disability. Autistic people should not be assumed to have intellectual disability. Regardless, all autistic people must be treated with equal respect.

MYTH: Autistic children need to go to 'special schools'

FACT: While some autistic students do attend specialised schools, many go to mainstream schools – i.e. public and private schools for typically developing children. Amaze's position is that all autistic students should have access to an education system that provides an inclusive culture and a multi-faceted, individualised, needs-based approach that is tailored to their strengths and unique learning styles.

MYTH: Everyone is a little autistic

FACT: Only autistic people are autistic. Autism is a neurodevelopmental disorder and people are either autistic or not autistic. The autism spectrum is not a linear scale of 'not very autistic' to 'very autistic'. The autism spectrum refers to the diversity of traits of autistic people.

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