



Myths about autism

myth one: there is an autism 'epidemic' 1

No there isn't. The growth in numbers of people diagnosed as autistic is related to the broadening of the diagnostic category and the fact that people are now more knowledgeable about what autism is and therefore more likely to have their child or themselves assessed.

myth two: autism is caused by... 2

Autism is not caused by diet, heavy metals, immunisation, bad parenting, or any other environmental factors. Autism is genetic. There is no scientific evidence that proves it is caused by anything and as such, it cannot be 'cured'.

myth three: some autistic people are 'high functioning' and some are 'low functioning' 3

Not true. Like all people, we have ups and downs related to life and environmental stressors, illness, etc. Some autistic people need supports for aspects of daily life that typical people do without supports; however, this does not mean we function less well, but rather that we function as normal autistic people who need support to access our environment.

myth four: you can't be autistic if you can speak 4

Yes, you can. Non-speaking autistic people are thought to represent only about 25% of us.

myth five: all autistic people are alike

No, we are not. Autistic people are different to neurotypical people in the way we communicate, move, process sensory, social and other information, and engage with our environment. But we don't all do this in exactly the same way. For example, while many of us stim, we don't all flap our hands.

continued on page 2...



Myths about autism, continued

myth six: all autistic people are gifted

No, we're not. Whilst some autistic people do have extraordinary skills in certain areas, many of us do not.

myth seven: autistic people never make eye contact

Wrong. Although eye contact does feel unnatural for many autistic people, some of us do not seem to find this difficult, and others work hard to be able to make facial contact when necessary to meet social expectations.

myth eight: autistic people don't want friends

This is not always true. The majority of us want and have friends, however our expectations of friendship may be different to non-autistic people.

myth nine: autism is more common in boys than in girls

Probably not. Although it's true that currently boys are four times more likely to be identified as autistic, there are many reasons for this, like bias toward identifying boys in our diagnostic processes and the way we socialise young children of different genders. The more we learn about gender, the more we understand that it's complex and exists outside of the binary idea of girl/boy categories. It's more useful to understand that autism exists across the full gender spectrum.

5

myth ten: autistic people have no empathy

Wrong. In fact the latest research suggests that autistic people may experience a kind of 'hyper-empathy' that is so overwhelming to process that it leads to a 'shut down', which may be perceived from the outside as a lack of empathy.

endnotes on page 3...

myths about autism: references

1. (autism 'epidemic')

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3. (functioning labels)

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