

Correcting Commonly Held Myths About Autism

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Vaccines do not cause autism.

A 1998 study finding that the MMR vaccine caused autism was greatly flawed, and once released, the paper was retracted and discredited. The doctor who ran the study lost his medical license as a result. Several high-quality experimental large-scale studies have since examined the possibility of a link between vaccines and autism and have found no evidence to support the link.

Autism is a neurodevelopmental condition, not a preventable disease.

Autism is a natural variation in the human genome that you are born with. Common characteristics present themselves during the developmental phase, typically around age three. Autistic people do not need to be fixed or cured.

Researchers overwhelmingly agree that the cause of autism is largely genetic, not due to environmental exposure.

Autism has been “blamed” on various causes across time, including refrigerator moms (i.e., unemotional/cold mothers, bad parenting), toxins, and pollution, rather than accepting autism as natural human diversity.

There is no autism epidemic.

The data suggest an increase in autism diagnoses across time; however, this is due to changes in diagnosis criteria and increased awareness, including a better understanding of how autism presents differently in girls and family advocacy for services. Even so, people assigned female at birth and BIPOC autistic people are significantly underrepresented. This is a concern because an autism diagnosis provides them with access to services/supports and involvement in and support from the autistic community.

Autism is a spectrum with some people having greater support needs.

Having greater or more complex support needs, such as not using verbal speech to communicate, does not make them less than. They deserve to live and be valued, autonomous members of society, regardless of their perceived contributions (e.g., paying taxes).

Many students with autism are educated in self-contained classrooms and special separate schools with little change over time.

There is a common assumption that segregated settings provide individualized support that can better meet the needs of students with autism; however, research does not support this. Segregated settings lead to poorer short and long-term outcomes for students with autism compared to general education settings (i.e., >80% of the school day in the general education classroom).