

## Myths and Facts about Autism

### MYTH

### FACT

Autism is not a growing problem. Better diagnosis accounts for the increase in autism cases.

- According to the CDC, autism is the fastest growing developmental disorder and between 2000 and 2010, there was a 119% increase in the number of individuals diagnosed with autism.
- Better and earlier diagnosis can only account for some of the current increases in numbers. Researchers still do not fully understand what is causing this increase.
- Autism affects 1 in 68 children and 1 in 42 boys. Autism affects 5 times more boys than girls and about 1% of the global population has autism spectrum disorder.
- Autism affects people of all races, ethnicities and socioeconomic backgrounds.

Autism is caused by vaccines.

- Autism is NOT caused by vaccines, and no scientific evidence suggests that there is a link between autism and vaccines. The fear that vaccines increased the risk of autism originated with a 1997 study conducted by British surgeon, Andrew Wakefield which was published in a prestigious medical journal. The paper was later completely discredited and Dr. Wakefield lost his medical license. Follow up studies were unable to establish any link between any vaccine and the likelihood of developing autism.

Autism is caused solely by environmental factors.

- While we still do not definitively know what causes autism, most researchers believe that both environmental and genetic factors play a role. Some studies link an individual's genetics as well as parental age to the incidence of Autism.

Poor parenting causes autism.

- While this was a prevalent theory in the 1950s and 1960s made popular by Bruno Bettelheim, this is simply not true. Autism is not caused by parenting styles.

People with autism cannot communicate verbally.

- There are a wide range of symptoms and behaviors associated with autism spectrum disorder. These symptoms can be vastly different for each individual. Close to 40% of children with autism do not communicate verbally.

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People with autism have below average intelligence or have special gifts.

All people with autism are similar.

Autism cannot be diagnosed before the age of 4.

All people with autism are violent.

Certain interventions can "cure" autism.

People with autism should be education separately from their peers.

### FACT

- Each individual with autism is unique. They may have cognitive deficits, be very bright or of average intelligence. About 50% of children with autism have above average intelligence. While some individuals with autism may show a keen understanding of mathematics, art and other topics, this is not typical of most individuals with autism.

- Although most individuals with autism typically have challenges with social interaction, communication and behavior, each person with autism is a unique individual.

- A child can be diagnosed with autism at the age of 18 months, however the average age for diagnosis is 3 to 4 years. Early diagnosis and intervention is critical for a better long term outcome for a child with autism.

- Studies have shown that less than 30% of children with autism may show signs of aggression, whereas the majority of children with autism may not show any aggressive behaviors.

- There is no cure for autism spectrum disorders and autism is considered a lifelong condition. However, early and intensive intervention started before age 4 is critical in helping a child reach his/her potential.

- Children with autism are entitled to a free and appropriate education in the least restrictive environment. This is guaranteed by federal law for all children from the age of 3-22.
- An Individualized Education Plan is designed to address each child's specific needs in the most appropriate educational environment.
- While some children may require the services of a specialized program in order to thrive, it is generally the goal to educate children with autism in an inclusive environment where they can interact with typically developing peers.

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People with autism lack the ability to develop social skills and the desire to socialize with others.

Autism is a mental health disorder.

People with autism cannot lead successful lives or contribute to the community.

### FACT

- People with autism do feel empathy and love but often lack the ability to instinctively connect to others. While their social skills may not develop independently, many individuals with autism can learn social skills if given specialized training.
- Autism Spectrum Disorder is a developmental disability that manifests early in a child's life and will typically continue throughout a child's lifetime.
- Autism is a spectrum disorder and thus effects each individual differently. With early diagnosis and support, many people with autism can live successful lives working and contributing to the community.

We hope you have found the ideas in this module useful. You can find additional resources on our website: [www.porchlighteducation.org](http://www.porchlighteducation.org).