

# Busting Autism Myths

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- Media/public representations of autism are largely negative, framing it as a tragedy that destroys lives.
- Autistic people are portrayed as emotionless or as having 'inappropriate' emotions, often linked to dangerous or deviant behaviour.
- Autistic children are shown as "trapped" in their own world, unable to communicate 'appropriately' or show empathy and affection to others, including their parents.
- These portrayals draw on and perpetuate myths and misconceptions about autism

## Myth

## Reality

### Vaccines cause autism



1 in 5 people believe autism is or may be caused by vaccines

#### AND/OR

### Autism is Caused by Bad Parenting



Many people also still believe there is a link between parenting and autism, although numbers vary between communities.

(85% in China: 25% in USA)

There is **NO EVIDENCE** that post-natal environmental factors, including vaccines and parenting, cause autism (Bolte et al., 2018).

Multiple large-scale longitudinal studies have demonstrated there is **no link between vaccines and autism** (DeStefano & Shimabukuro, 2019; Taylor et al., 2014).

**Genetics** is widely accepted to be the primary cause of autism, although environmental factors **during pregnancy** may influence gene expression (Bai, et al., 2019; Bolte et al., 2018))

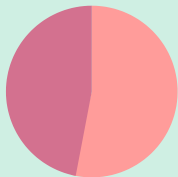
### Autism Only Effects Children



1 in 4 people believe autism only effects children

#### AND/OR

### Autism can be 'cured'



Almost 50% of people believe autism can be cured

1

Autism is a **lifelong neurodevelopmental condition**

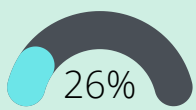
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Autism is not a disease and therefore **does not need to be cured**

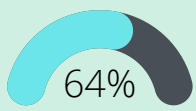
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Removing barriers in the environment is the most effective way to support autistic children and adults

### Autistic People have an Intellectual Disability/ Special Talents



Autistic people have a low IQ/should go to a special school

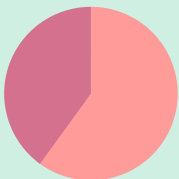


Autistic people have savant/special abilities

As with the general population, an autistic person may have an intellectual disability, be intellectually gifted and/or have special talents, however **autism and intelligence are unrelated** (Katusic et al., 2021).

This myth has been perpetuated by media stereotypes (Nordahl-Hansen et al., 2017)

### Autistic people lack empathy/are violent



Over a third of Australians surveyed believed or thought it possible that autistic people are often violent

#### AND/OR

### Autistic People Aren't Interested in People/ Relationships

Several studies have shown that one of the most common myths about autism is that autistic people do not want friends and/or aren't interested in relationships.

These dangerous and damaging myths are based on dehumanising theories that autistic people do not understand how other people think and feel (Theory of Mind), and media stereotypes of autistic emotion.

#### Research increasingly demonstrates that:

- **Non-autistic people do not understand how autistic people think/feel, i.e. cannot empathise with autistic people** which contributes significantly to social interaction difficulties.
- Despite these difficulties, **autistic people want friendships and relationships**
- **Neurodivergent interactions flow naturally, are comfortable and demonstrate mutual understanding.**

(Balek, 2018; Chen et al., 2020; Crompton et al., 2020; Heasman & Gillespie, 2018).

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