

Autism Myth Busting

1 in 100 people in Scotland are autistic
differentminds.scot

With so many myths surrounding autism, it is not surprising that many autistic people describe feeling misunderstood and misrepresented. Different minds. One Scotland. is a campaign created in partnership with autistic people looking to address some of those myths and misconceptions and raise awareness and understanding of autism in Scotland.

Autism is a part of everyday life in Scotland with 1 in 100 people being autistic. Autism is a neurological difference. Put simply – autistic brains work differently to non-autistic brains. Autistic people, see and experience the world differently to non-autistic people. It's important that we all understand more about autism, both what it is and what it is not.

Each of the myths within this booklet have been addressed directly by autistic people living in Scotland.

If you would like to find out more please visit differentminds.scot.

Everyone's a little bit autistic.

“There's a myth that everyone is a little bit autistic. But that's just not true. Everybody has autistic traits and everybody presents autistically at different times to a certain extent, but you're only autistic if your brain is built in that way.”

Marion, Autistic Person Organisation CEO & Autistic Advocate

This is a common misconception. Some people have autistic characteristics, for example, being hyper-focused or rigid in routines, but that doesn't make them autistic.

Autism is about how the brain works. How you think and communicate; how you process information; differences in sensory experiences. Autistic and non-autistic people can share similar characteristics, but autistic people see and experience the world in a fundamentally different way.

Autism is a mental health condition.

“Autism isn’t a mental health condition. Autism actually is a cognitive difference between you and I. It’s not something that should be viewed as flawed or problematic or wrong or something that needs treated. It’s just how I view the world and how you view the world. And that’s ok.”

Jasmine, Autistic Student & Autistic Advocate

Autism is a neurological difference – MRI scans show distinctions in the ways that autistic and non-autistic brains receive and process information.

However, many autistic people do develop mental health problems. Approximately 40% of autists have at least one anxiety disorder and the proportion of those who experience depression is higher amongst autistic people.

Mental health issues and anxiety are not inherent in autistic people and can often stem from a lack of understanding, for example, feeling pressure to fit into ‘normal’ life.

Autism mainly affects young children.

“I would say, in some ways, that as an adult, being autistic in a ‘neurotypical’ world, is actually more difficult than it was when I was a child. And obviously I’ve been autistic all my life. I spent the first two years after my diagnosis looking back and working out all the things that were probably due to me being autistic.”

John, Autistic Advocate, Mental Health Professional & Father

Neither age, gender nor ethnicity matter – people are born autistic. Some autistic people don’t get a diagnosis until adulthood, but they have still been autistic their whole lives.

Many autistic adults try to hide their autism as they feel they can’t be the real version of themselves for fear of judgement and lack of understanding. You can find out more about masking at differentminds.scot

Autistic people don't feel empathy.

“Not true. Autistic people feel empathy just the same as everyone else does. Many autistic people report that they're actually often overwhelmed by other people's emotional states because they feel so strongly. But we may not always demonstrate our empathy in the way that you might expect.”

Catriona, Researcher, Advisor & Charity Lead

Many autistic people feel extreme empathy for others but may respond in a way that non-autistic people would not. For example, by sharing a similar experience of their own to indicate solidarity, by offering practical help, or by freezing and doing nothing because they're unsure how to respond in a way that's wanted or required in the situation.

All autistic people have a learning disability.

“This is a total myth. Many of us, autistic people have learning differences. Some of us might require a little bit of extra support, but what we do need most of all is just your patience and your understanding.”

Gyll, Autistic Advocate, Trainer & Charity Trustee

Current research shows that over two thirds of autistic people don't have learning disabilities or learning difficulties. However, many autistic people do have learning differences – a different way of learning. And this shouldn't be viewed as negative: it might mean a greater ability to read as a young child or a way to identify patterns more easily.

Like everybody else, autistic individuals are just that: individuals. Some might require extra support – educational, employment or emotional – but this differs from person-to-person, just like non-autistic people.

All autistic people have special skills like Rainman.

“This isn't true either. A small percentage of autistic people are Savants, which means they have mathematical skills beyond compare or can produce incredible artwork. However, most are regular folk.”

Thomas, Photographer

You can argue that experiencing the world in a different way – if embraced and understood – can bring something brilliant to every aspect of life. In which case then yes, this is a special skill.

You can tell someone is autistic by looking at them.

“Well that’s not true. There are autistic people in all walks of life. In different professions, of different ages, genders, ethnicities and religions. Autism does not have a look. Nor does it always have visible identifying characteristics. And when it does they do not apply to all autistic people.”

Jacqui, Retired Accountant & Mother

It can be upsetting for autistic people when they share that they are autistic with someone new, only to be told that they don’t look autistic. Autism is something that shouldn’t be dismissed, it is a unique part of that person and will not always be visible to anyone else.

Autistic people like to be on their own, they’re anti-social.

“Autistic people can find socialising more tiring than non-autistic people, particularly if we have to hide our autism in order to blend in. However, we are not being anti-social. We are actively making an effort to socialise.”

Christopher, Software Testing Consultant

Just like some non-autistic people love socialising, whereas others would prefer a quiet night in with a book.

Some autistic people can find socialising more tiring than non-autistic people if they feel the need to suppress their autism to ‘blend in’. Where this is the case, it can take some autists time to recover their energy after socialising. But they’re not being anti-social; if anything, they’re actively making an effort to socialise.

Autism can be cured.

“No it can't. That's not true. It's not an illness. You can't cure or grow out of autism. It's part of a brain difference. We are the beautiful people we were born to be. Value us for who we are. Don't try to cure us. Let's work together to make the world a more understanding and caring place.”

Rosie, Cattery Owner

Autism is not an illness. Being autistic is part of who a person is, like their eye colour, and not something that can be changed or grown out of.

Each day autistic people navigate the world they experience – its challenges and positives. Some develop strategies and skills to do this on their own and some need support. Increased acceptance and understanding of autism are what's needed, not a 'cure'.

In a world where everyone thought the same nothing would ever change.

To understand more about autism visit differentminds.scot.

Whilst every effort has been taken to ensure the accuracy of this text, the original documentation should be relied upon as the true and accurate version.