



AWARENESS

AUTISM: AN INTRODUCTION TO THE SPECTRUM

“Being autistic...doesn't automatically make you a 'human calculator' or a 'living Google' – despite what some people may think.” – James McGrath, Leeds Beckett University, in *The Conversation*.

Around one in 160 children worldwide has an autism spectrum disorder, an Autism Research paper shows, but despite its prevalence, misconceptions are rife.

To help dispel some of the myths and fill knowledge gaps, here is a collection of facts worth knowing about the group of conditions:

- Autism spectrum disorders (ASD) are a group of neurodevelopment conditions that impact learning, communication, social interaction and behaviour, to varying degrees.
- Symptoms occur on a continuum from mild to severe and can include difficulty forming age-appropriate friendships, reacting inappropriately in discussions, misreading nonverbal exchanges, dependence on routine, struggles with change, restricted interests and sensory hypersensitivity.
- ASD can affect children and adults across all backgrounds, however, the condition is more prevalent in males than females.
- The needs and skills of those with ASD vary considerably from person to person and can change.

- There are those who require extensive support to those who can function independently. Some may be highly gifted thinkers, while others may face learning challenges.
- Behaviours viewed as naughty or troublesome in children with ASD may, in reality, be a means of expression if communication skills are limited.
- For those with ASD who have trouble making sense of the world, change can be distressing and confusing.
- Difficulty communicating and interacting with others doesn't negate the need and desire for friendship in people with ASD.
- Treatments, such as speech and language therapy, occupational therapy, social skills coaching, parent support, specialised education and medication may improve the lives of those living with ASD.
- Discrimination, stigma and human rights violations are a major problem for those living with the condition.
- For families and caregivers, the condition can be mentally and financially demanding, which is why holistic support is crucial.

For more information or help, contact your local healthcare provider or autism support network.