

2015

## Autism Awareness: Debunking Misconceptions

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### ScholarWorks Citation

Summers, Nicole, "Autism Awareness: Debunking Misconceptions" (2015). *Honors Projects*. 388.  
<https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/honorsprojects/388>

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## What is autism?

### Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

ASD is a diagnosis found in the Diagnostic and Statistical System Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5). It is a spectrum disorder, which means some people diagnosed with ASD have more significant challenges (e.g. they might be non-verbal, have adaptive skill deficits, or have significant tactile sensitivities) while others might have fewer obvious difficulties. The core symptoms of ASD include social-communication deficits and ritualistic and repetitive behaviors. These might include: difficulty reading social cues, using gestures, or developing and maintaining social relationships, or stereotyped and repetitive behaviors or motor movements, and a preference for particular routines and interests.

## Some words from an individual diagnosed with ASD

"I think it's important for individuals {who provide support} to listen to the desires of autistic individuals over their own preconceived notions."

"I've found that it is very frequent that people will look down on people with autism just for exhibiting abnormal behaviors. Autistic people aren't inferior or subhuman just because they behave differently from the norm."

"[Autism] does not represent the end of a person's well-being. Autism is something that a person is born with, and dealing with it isn't a matter of trying to fight against that fact and blaming everything else. The important thing for parents is to accept it when their children have autism, and after that, work as hard as possible to make sure they have opportunities to be successful."

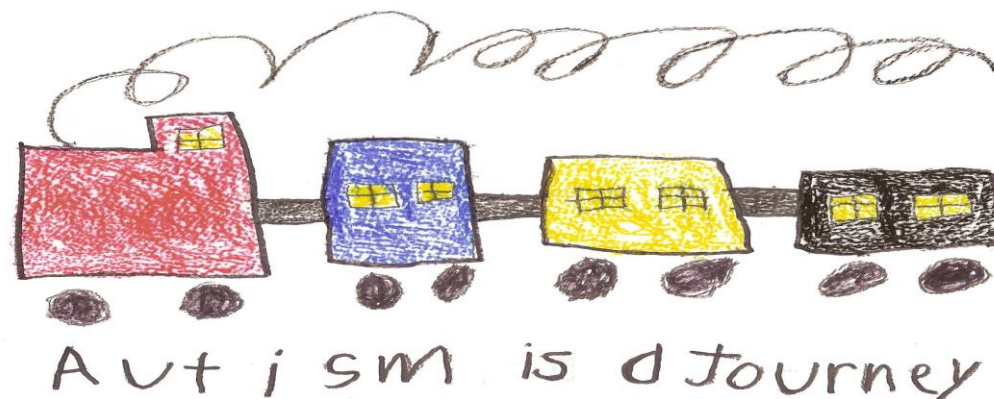
## Autism Awareness: Debunking Misconceptions

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# Where do children with autism receive treatment?

Most children with autism receive support in school, and they may also receive individual therapy services. Depending on where the child falls on the spectrum, the therapy may be more or less intensive and frequent. Most therapies target goals such as improving communication, social skills and independence. Intervention can take place in clinics, homes, school settings and the community.



## What do I need to know about Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)?

Autism is not equivalent to being mentally challenged. It is not a disease, and people who have it are not always dependent on others throughout the rest of their lives. In fact, many individuals with autism have higher than average intelligence and are able to function through daily chores with minimal difficulty. With ASD, a single diagnosis is not equal to every other diagnosis. Some individuals require more guidance in their everyday lives and benefit from more consistent support from their families, peers, and the professionals who work with them.

One defining symptom of autism is poor social-communication skills. If you have a conversation with someone who has autism, you might notice that the individual will not always pick up on your social cues when you try to change the topic of conversation, end the conversation, or provide cues that suggest you are disinterested. Some individuals with ASD completely avoid unfamiliar social environments because they have difficulty interpreting social cues and understanding sarcasm, irony or body language. This can also lead them to have difficulty when other people are providing

instructions for a difficult or vague task, as they may have trouble processing these directions.

Another challenge for those with autism is when people change plans very suddenly without prior notice, since they prefer schedules and routines. If you try to plan something with someone who has the autism diagnosis, it is helpful to provide enough notice beforehand as to what the plans are, and offer enough time to process any changes that take place. Individuals with ASD may experience anxiety when plans change, or when they are participating in new or unfamiliar activities and environments.

Knowing small ways to help those with autism feel more comfortable in any given situation will not only help them cope more easily, but will also help you understand them better without misinterpreting behavior. Here are some ideas:

- Say what you mean
- Be sincere, patient & honest
- Don't expect eye contact
- Recognize that every individual with an Autism Spectrum Disorder is different and unique

