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Autism Awareness: Debunking Misconceptions

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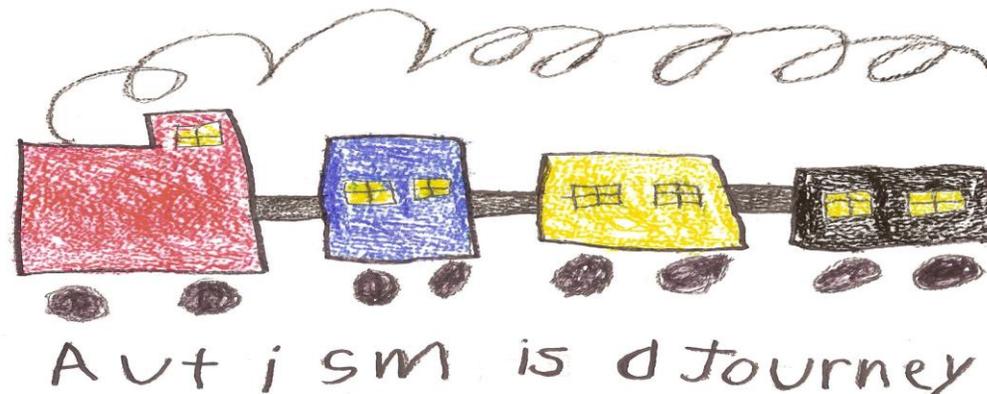
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Where do children with autism receive treatment?

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

