

Common Myths About Autism in Adults

(Adapted from the list at www.grasp.org)

	Myth	Reality
1	People on the autism spectrum do not have emotions or feelings.	In fact, most people on the autism spectrum experience the same range of emotions as anybody else. Furthermore, in spite of not reacting with the degree or type of emotion to some situations as would be expected, they can sometimes react with much more emotion.
2	People on the autism spectrum have no interest in social interaction.	While it is definitely true that most people with ASD have a need to “keep to themselves” for at least part of the time, (and that they can become absorbed in their areas of interest to the exclusion of everything else), they often long for chances to socialize even as they dread them. Some more severely autistic individuals may have an aversion to all social interactions, but this in no way implies that the vast majority have any less need for human companionship than anybody else.
3	People on the autism spectrum do not have a sense of humor.	This myth is ridiculous, (though fairly harmless). In reality, many people with ASD develop a strong interest in humor, (though they may find “normal” humor unfunny), especially after enough jokes are explained to them and/or they develop the ability to grasp jokes independently. The result can range from a downright hilarious individual, who happens to be on the autism spectrum, to someone with an unconventional and perhaps highly original style of humor.
4	People on the autism spectrum are not interested in sex.	In fact, people with autism are every bit as interested in sex as anybody else, (if not even more so as a result of the abysmal reality that their social lives often are). Because of the deficits in interpersonal skills, lack of awareness of social subtlety and cues, and inability to perceive things from the perspective of another person, however, many do go through life without ever experiencing a healthy sexual relationship, and most are highly vulnerable to addictive behaviors.
5	People on the autism spectrum do not speak.	In fact, the vast majority of people on the spectrum are not only quite capable of speech, but are generally quite articulate and often even talk too much for others’ comfort. The fact that some individuals on the spectrum tend to “keep to themselves” and avoid social conversation (especially “small-talk”) also helps to contribute to the myth.
6	People on the autism spectrum are all geniuses.	Despite the notable presence of savants and true geniuses, most are pretty average in terms of general intelligence. Because individuals with AS often have stilted, overprecise language and excellent memory for obscure facts, however, it is easy for others to think that they are more intelligent than they actually are. This myth can work both for and against those with ASD.
7	People on the autism spectrum are mentally retarded.	Actually, most individuals with ASD are at least of “average” or “normal” intelligence, and many are in the above-average and even superior ranges. What is true about the autism spectrum is that many individuals, regardless of their cognitive intelligence, have difficulties with things that are relatively easy, if not instinctive, for the majority of “normal” people; this includes academic subjects as well as “real-world” skills such as socializing, emotional navigation, and daily living.
8	People on the autism spectrum have no “Theory of Mind.”	Most people with ASD have no problem passing so-called theory of mind tests. Just because they are often self-absorbed, this does not mean that they are unable or unwilling to acknowledge that other people have minds that are different from their own. And while most struggle to show empathy correctly, individuals with AS are often <i>oversensitive</i> to the emotional states of others—to the point that they become anxious and overwhelmed (and thus react inappropriately).
9	People on the autism spectrum cannot have normal relationships or live independently.	While it is true that some people with ASD do not marry and do not live independently, many do. As intelligent people, they are able to compensate for their handicaps through sheer force of will and determination. Additionally, the advent of the internet has created new opportunities for them to socialize and connect with other individuals who share their interests and opinions.
10	People on the autism spectrum will never be able to hold “real” jobs.	Actually, the attention to detail, perfectionism, creativity, and vast subject-specific knowledge of most ASD individuals can make them exceptional employees, and some even become leaders in their fields. Technical fields, in particular, can be a great match for those on the spectrum.
11	People on the autism spectrum are more likely to commit crimes.	Those with ASD are actually more law-abiding than most, and often have an overdeveloped moral sense. While it is certainly true that there are well-publicized cases of criminals with ASD, this is exceptional, and usually involves people who also have severe psychological problems.
12	Autism spectrum disorders are extremely rare, and easy to spot when they exist	In fact, researchers suspect that the vast majority of adults with autism are undiagnosed and that their proportion in the population may actually be higher than 1 in 100! Many of them have developed coping/masking skills which enable them to blend in seamlessly, while others carve out a niche as harmless eccentrics, reclusive but responsible citizens, or highly-trained specialists.

Critical Success Factors:

Key Indicators of Likely Success in Adulthood for ASD

(in no particular order)

From a presentation by Jared A. Stewart, M.Ed., April 2012

Research shows that individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders who possessed all or most of the following characteristics have had the best chance of achieving positive life outcomes:

1. **Exhibited** communicative phrase speech by age seven, and **average or better communication skills by adulthood** (approximately age 25).
2. **Displayed average or better IQ** (80+), and engaged in life-long learning/education.
3. **Had early intervention** (reduces secondary psychological problems/skills deficits)
4. **Understood their diagnosis** and accepted it along with its strengths/deficits.
5. **Had at least one caring person** who encouraged and supported them no matter what (**preferably a “Mentor” or “Model”** as well as ***at least one real friend***).
6. **Participated actively in the world** around them (insofar as possible); **were not overly sheltered** in childhood, and had a **wide range of life experiences**.
7. **Had an accepting community** (a core group that tolerated their differences)
8. **Had a system of strongly held values** and beliefs to guide them.
9. **Set clear goals** for themselves and worked persistently toward achieving those goals while learning how to flexibly deal with changes that arose.
10. **Achieved success in their special interests** (which offsets social challenges).
11. **Developed the skills to care independently** for their physical safety and needs.
12. **Learned to present a socially acceptable mask/persona/face** in public, including hygiene/grooming, conversation skills, facial expressions, and eye contact.
13. **Developed coping skills** for dealing with anxiety, failure, rejection, and aloneness.
14. **Developed critical-thinking skills** and problem-solving (EF) skills (i.e. mental talk).

Sources: Attwood, T. (2007); Doyle, B. (2008); Farley, M (2008); Goldberg, R. etc (2003); Williams, D. et al (2012)

Additional Resources for Adults on the Autism Spectrum:

(Please note that these links are merely meant to be representative of the *many* websites designed to help those with ASD.)

<http://healthcare.utah.edu/home/resources/>

Neurobehavior H.O.M.E. Program (Healthy Outcome Medical Excellence) publishes a **resource guide for Utah adults with ASD** that covers residential, employment, and other needs.

<http://dps.missouri.edu/Autism/AutismFactSheet2011.pdf>

Scott Standifer, clinical associate professor in the School of Health Professions at the University of Missouri put together this great guide for adults/parents on **Autism and Employment**.

<http://www.wrongplanet.net>

Wrong Planet is a web community designed for individuals (and parents of those) with Autism, Asperger's Syndrome, ADHD, PDDs, and other neurological differences. It provides a discussion forum, exclusive articles and how-to guides, a blogging feature, and a chatroom. Great stuff!!!

<http://forums.delphiforums.com/asandpartners/start>

AS&P is **Asperger's Syndrome and their Partners**; a semi-private forum which provides a place for asking questions and having positive discussions about relationships in which one partner has Asperger Syndrome. Not a place for venting or complaining, AS&P focuses on improving relations.