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# **Autism myths:** **How recent research challenges perceptions of autism**

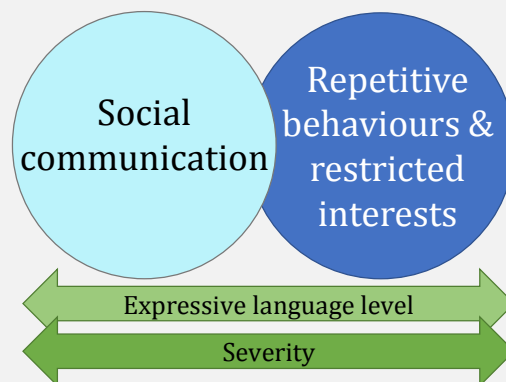
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# What is autism?

## Autism Spectrum Conditions



Source: APA, 2013

## Myth: We should use person-first language

### “Autistic person” or “person with autism”?

- **61%** of autistic adults endorse “autistic person” and **28%** “person with autism”
- **38%** of professionals endorse “autistic person” and **49%** “person with autism” (Kenny et al., 2016)

**What this means in practice:** The language we use to talk about autism is important – ask your students what they prefer

*“Separating the person from their autism is damaging, as it reinforces opinions about autism being a ‘thing’ that can be removed, something that may be unpleasant and unwanted [...] Describing oneself as autistic is an extremely important and positive assertion about oneself, it means that one feels complete and whole as one is.”*

## Myth: Autistic individuals don't care about what people think about them

- Do care about what other people think about them (*Cage et al., 2013, 2016a, 2016b*)
  - Might not automatically consider what everyone thinks, but can deliberately self-present
  - Lots of individual differences
  - Some adolescents show a desire to fit in but also want to be accepted for being “who I am”

**What this means in practice:** the social world is still important to many – provide support to overcome barriers



## Myth: Autistic individuals have no empathy

- Alexithymia – a difficulty in describing and understanding own emotions
- About half of autistic people estimated to have alexithymia – but so do non-autistic people
- Alexithymia, not autism, is associated with reduced empathy (Cook et al., 2013; Brewer et al., 2015, 2016)
- **What this means in practice:** Autistic individuals can and do experience empathy – but might process it differently



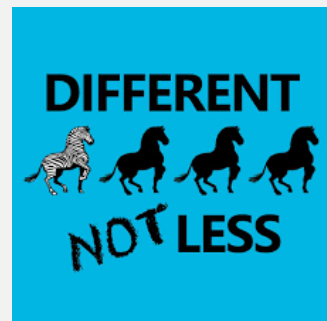
## Myth: Autism is a boy thing

- Prevalence underestimated in girls - 3:1, not 4:1 (*Loomes et al., 2017*)
- Girls show fewer obvious restricted interests (*Frazier et al., 2014*)
- Girls might be better at “masking” (*e.g. Bargiela et al., 2016*)
- **What this means in practice:** Autism is more likely to be missed, misdiagnosed or late diagnosed in girls. Consider how girls might do things differently.



## Take home messages...

- There are many more myths out there!
- Learn about the individual
- Read about the experiences of autistic adults
- Accept and encourage acceptance from peers
- Different, not less



## Resources

- Blogs by autistic people: <http://actuallyautistic.info/vv-index.php>
- Autism Education Trust (AET):  
<http://www.autism.org.uk/professionals/teachers/resource/aet.aspx>
- “What exactly is autism?” by Damian Milton for the AET:  
<http://bit.ly/2srU9Gp>
- A fantastic book about autism - Neurotribes by Steve Silberman:  
<http://stevesilberman.com/book/neurotribes/>
- Leaflet about sensory issues in autism for teachers: <http://bit.ly/sensoryissues>







# Thank you for listening

Any questions?

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## References

If you do not have access to any of these and would like to read them, please email Eilidh ([eilidh.cage@rhul.ac.uk](mailto:eilidh.cage@rhul.ac.uk)) who may have a copy available.

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