

Busting the Autism Stereotypes

As with anyone with a physical or mental disorder, autistic people deal with a wide range of reactions from others, from full support to uncaring ignorance. Unfortunately, even those who support autistic family members, co-workers, and friends may not understand autism very well. This leads to stereotypes, which can result in hatred, embarrassment, or other unhappy situations. By becoming educated about autism, you can help others in your community cope with this disorder.

It is most important to note that not all autistic people are the same. Other diseases and disorders have their own sets of rules, but autism is such a complex medical condition, that everyone reacts differently to it. Autistic people are usually rated on a functional scale, with high-functioning people being able to hold jobs and low-functioning people needing 24-hour-a-day care. Symptoms include behavioral challenges, uncontrollable movements, speech and communication difficulties, and emotional inadequacies. Some show all symptoms, while other show few, and still others may have most under control to the point where you cannot tell they have autism at all.

Because every person is different, no one thing can be said about autism and be true overall. However, most autistic people have trouble communicating emotions. This does not mean that an autistic person does not feel. He or she simply cannot express this feeling. It also does not mean strong relationship bonds are not possible. On the contrary, many autistic people are happily married and in love. Forming relationships is more difficult for most, but can be accomplished over time.

Many people believe that being autistic coincides with being a genius in some aspect. While it is true that some autistic individuals have extraordinary math, music, and art skills, this number is nowhere near the majority-in fact, relatively few autistic people function outside of the normal range in any skill. This stereotype is perpetuated in the movies and on television, because the story of a talented person fighting disadvantages (such as autism) makes a good plot. However, this is not the norm, so nothing more than the best they can personally do should be expected from an autistic person. However, it is important to note that autism is not a form of mental retardation. Some autistic people are mentally retarded as well, but most are not and should not be treated as such.

In the end, the most important lesson to take away from your studies on autism is one of tolerance. You will probably need to be patient when dealing with autistic people, but by understanding a little more about the disorder, perhaps

this will be easier. Learn what you can and spread the knowledge to those you know to help create a more tolerant setting for autistic individuals in your community.