

Viewpoint: 10 things everyone should know about autism

I offer 10 things I wish everyone knew about autism. I'm a developmental and behavioral pediatrician specializing in autism spectrum disorder.

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1. If you've seen one child with autism, you've seen just that: one child with autism.

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2. We can often diagnose autism reliably by 2 years of age.

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3. Autism is not caused by bad parenting.

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4. So what causes autism? Many things: infections (e.g. congenital rubella, herpes), metabolic problems (like those tested on the newborn screen – low thyroid, PKU), substances/medications that a mother takes during pregnancy (e.g. alcohol, certain seizure medications), brain abnormalities (impacting the structure of the brain or the function of the brain, like infantile spasms), and many genetic abnormalities and syndromes.

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5. Better outcomes are associated with earlier diagnosis.

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6. At present, the evidence-based treatments for autism are educational/therapy related and not medical.

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7. There are no biomedical treatments for the primary social impairment of autism.

8. There are other conditions that go along with autism. These include early loss of social and language skills, toe walking, intellectual disability, [ADHD](#), sleep problems, gastrointestinal problems and [wandering](#).

9. Above all else, children with autism are children.

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10. What does the future hold for an individual child with ASD? [...]Some remain minimally verbal and

can't live independently, while others are college students, young adults living independently and [holding down jobs](#).

Editor's note: Lisa Shulman, M.D., is a neurodevelopmental pediatrician at Albert Einstein College of Medicine

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