



**“Some people will not accept that my son has autism”**

We are continually learning more about autism. But sadly there is still a lot of inaccurate information around, especially on the internet. Here is a list of a number of so-called ‘facts’: which are true, which are not?

### True or false?

#### Autism is hereditary

**True** | Autism is 90% hereditary and is already present at birth.

#### If you spoil your child too much, it can get autism

**False** | Children with autism can sometimes be very demanding, and for example always want to eat the same thing or wear the same clothes. This is a result of their autism. It is not the case that the child will become autistic if the parents give way on this.

#### Autism can also be a talent

**True** | People with autism have a good eye for details, often work with great precision and very carefully, and adhere to (clearly defined) rules. And they are usually honest.

#### There is no point in therapy, because you can’t cure autism

**False** | For example behavioural therapy can help to learn how to handle autism more flexibly. Autism does not go away, but therapy, parental counselling or medication can help to reduce the effects of autism. With the right counselling, people with autism can often go to school, work, live independently or at home and have meaningful relationships with others.

#### It’s not simple to diagnose autism

**True** | Only a psychiatrist or clinical psychologist can form a diagnosis of autism, after extensive tests and conversations with the person concerned. They also interview parents and other family members about the development of the person and about their upbringing. The earlier a diagnosis is made, the more suffering can be prevented. Scientists are working hard on early recognition of autism. At the moment a diagnosis is made on average around the age of 7.

#### If you have autism, you can’t learn properly

**False** | Autism has nothing to do with intelligence, there are clever and less clever people with autism. But often a clearly-defined structure and extra counselling is needed at school or at work. Because people with autism think and learn in a different way, they sometimes have more trouble with organising and planning.

#### You can be diagnosed as autistic even when you are an adult

**True** | Sometimes autism is only identified when someone is an adult. Often they are given a different, incorrect diagnosis when they are younger.

#### People with autism prefer to be on their own

**False** | Many people with autism enjoy contact with others just as much as people without autism. But they just find it more difficult to make and keep friends, which means they often feel lonely.

#### Want to know more about autism and how to deal with it?

Visit: [www.autisme.nl](http://www.autisme.nl)

**“Some Turkish people say: you can talk normally, so you are not autistic!”**



#### Published by:

#### The Dutch Autism Association

The Dutch Autism Association (NVA) has been working on behalf of people with autism, their family members, partners and other affected people since 1978. The association has over 15,000 members. Key concepts in the NVA’s goals are: protection of interests, support, information, contact with other people with autism, promotion of expertise, encouraging research and quality control of care.

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### Support the Autism Fund: giro 479

The NVA uses the income from the Autism Fund to carry out projects to make sure that people with autism can do more: at school, at work and in their leisure time.

More information: [www.autismefonds.nl](http://www.autismefonds.nl)

# What is autism?

**incl. classic autism, PDD-NOS, Asperger’s, McDD**



This information folder was made possible by support from NSGK



Nederlandse Vereniging voor Autisme





**“My daughter lives in a curious world, which I get a glimpse of now and then”**

### What is autism?

Autism is a developmental disorder in the brain. Everything that people with autism hear, see, smell etc., is processed in a different way. They perceive the world in separate pieces. A series of photos rather than a film. This means it takes a huge effort to understand what is happening or what is meant. In this disconnected world they look for structure and security. That is why people with autism sometimes behave differently, and are often not understood by their family, classmates or colleagues. Autism is an invisible handicap, but has a major impact on someone's life. We usually talk about autism spectrum disorders (ASDs) to indicate that autism is different in each person. But these are the most common areas of symptoms:

- *understanding what another person is thinking and feeling*  
Someone with autism has problems understanding what another person is thinking and feeling. And someone without autism often does not understand how someone with autism thinks. This makes it difficult to deal with each other.
- *communication*  
A conversation does not just consist of what people say, but even more of the way in which it is said. Is something

meant seriously or not? What sort of face are they pulling when they say it? Someone with autism often finds it difficult to properly understand the body language and tone of voice in which something is said. Some people with autism have a special way of talking; others have difficulty talking or cannot talk at all. But there are also people with autism who have no problems at all with talking.



**“My children might have problems, but they are also lovely, kind children.”**

- *thinking about how something will happen*

If you have autism it is often more difficult to think through in advance how something will happen in the future. For example, how to organise a journey so that you arrive at the destination at an agreed time. This means that someone with autism can become very anxious about change and unknown situations.

- *things which do not go as expected*

If something does not go as expected, for people with autism it is often very difficult to handle. Surprises intended to be a treat are usually not very nice for someone with autism. They really want to know in advance exactly what is going to happen and they will often find a fixed daily schedule very attractive. In addition many people with autism like to always occupy themselves with the same activities or subjects and feel happy by doing things the same way every time.

- *noise, light or touch*

Many people with autism are more sensitive than others to bright light, loud noises or being touched (unexpectedly). And in some cases they feel pain more strongly, or indeed less strongly, than other people.

More than 1% of Dutch people – about 190,000 people – have some form of autism.

### Types and degrees of autism

Autism manifests differently in each person. Some people with autism are mainly turned in on themselves and do not seek much contact with others. Other people with autism actively seek contact, but they often do this in a way that seems 'strange' to other people.

Several different diagnoses are covered by the terms autism or autism spectrum disorders (ASD's):

#### Classic Autism or core autism

This diagnosis occurs if you have many symptoms of autism, and these symptoms were already visible by the time you were three.

#### Asperger's syndrome or disorder

With this diagnosis typically you can talk and learn well, but you have difficulty understanding language and grasping



**“I would like to live in a world where you can be who you truly are.”**

what other people are thinking and feeling. People with Asperger's often tend to talk a lot, and often have more imagination and a greater need of friendships and relationships than people with classic autism.

#### PDD-NOS

PDD-NOS in full = Pervasive Developmental Disorder Not Otherwise Specified. You will get this diagnosis if you do not have all the symptoms of autism, but do have some of them.

#### McDD

If you are diagnosed with McDD (Multiple complex Developmental Disorder) then you have autism symptoms, and in addition you are very anxious or get angry very easily.

#### Other diagnoses

It is possible that besides autism you may have, for example, a diagnosis of ADHD, epilepsy or mental handicap. And sometimes autism is also combined with a (rare) hereditary syndrome such as Klinefelter's, or tuberous sclerosis.

*More information about the symptoms for each diagnosis at: [www.autisme.nl](http://www.autisme.nl)*

#### On the photo:

For the project 'Give autism a face' portrait photos were taken of ten people with autism and their families. A selection of these portraits can be found in this folder. Warm thanks to these wonderful people for their collaboration on this. Photography: Monique Post