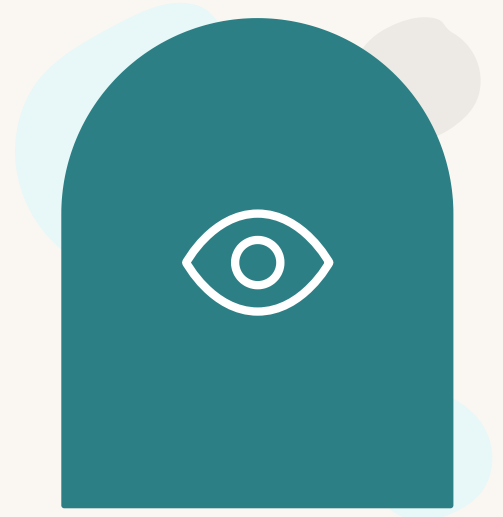


FACT SHEET

Autism awareness starts with *understanding*

Autism is a neurodevelopmental condition that affects how a person communicates, interacts and experiences the world. Because it is often invisible, it is widely misunderstood. Autism is a spectrum: every autistic person is different.



1 in 127

people worldwide is estimated to have autism.

Lifelong

Autism isn't something children grow out of. Autistic children become autistic adults.

Unknown

How common autism is in many low- and middle-income countries, including much of Africa.

Source: World Health Organization, Autism fact sheet (2025), estimate for 2021.

WHAT AUTISM CAN LOOK LIKE

Not every autistic person shows all of these, and each shows them in their own way.



Communication differences

May speak late, little, or differently, or prefer other ways to communicate.



Social differences

May find eye contact, small talk or reading social cues hard.



Repetitive behaviour

Repeated movements, routines or intense interests that bring comfort.



Sensitivity to change and stimulation

Noise, light, crowds or sudden changes can overwhelm.



Motor differences

Coordination, balance or fine motor tasks may take more effort.



Strengths, too

Many autistic people bring deep focus, honesty and a sharp eye for detail.

MYTHS AND FACTS

Replace myths with *knowledge*

MYTH

FACT

Autism is caused by bad parenting, a curse or witchcraft.

Autism is a neurodevelopmental condition. Nobody caused it – not the parents and not the child.

Vaccines cause autism.

They don't. The World Health Organization confirms that the MMR vaccine doesn't cause autism, and that other childhood vaccines don't raise the risk.

Autism is an illness that can be cured.

Autism isn't an illness. Understanding, the right support and a calmer environment help autistic people thrive.

A child who doesn't speak doesn't understand.

Many people who speak little or not at all understand a great deal, and communicate in other ways.

Autistic people don't feel or show love.

Autistic people feel deeply. They may show it differently – and that is no less real.

Autism only affects boys, or only children.

Girls and women are autistic too, and are often missed. Autism is lifelong.

WORDS THAT HELP

Language shapes how people are treated. If in doubt, ask the person or family what they prefer.

SAY

INSTEAD OF

autistic person or person with autism

"suffers from autism", "autism victim"

needs more support with... (name the need)

"high-functioning", "low-functioning"

non-autistic

"normal"

meltdown or overwhelmed

"tantrum", "naughty", "stubborn"

nonspeaking or communicates in other ways

"dumb", "mute"

Our goal is to replace myths with knowledge, fear with empathy, and exclusion with *intentional inclusion*.



Learn more
[africaautismalliance.org/
awareness](https://africaautismalliance.org/awareness)



Find support
africaautismalliance.org