

The Importance of Autism Awareness and Acceptance

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Autism awareness and acceptance are crucial for creating a supportive and welcoming environment for individuals with autism spectrum disorder. By promoting awareness, we can clarify common myths and misunderstandings surrounding autism, reducing stigma and stereotypes that often lead to social isolation and oppression. Acceptance is equally vital, as it allows individuals with autism to feel valued, respected, and empowered to reach their full potential.

Autism Spectrum Disorder is a neurological and developmental disorder that affects millions of people worldwide. Globally, 100 children have autism. Many families face challenges related to a lack of awareness, fewer intervention services, and a lack of support.

Children with autism may have difficulty communicating their needs, wants, and emotions, leading to frustration and stress. It is so difficult for children with autism to build a relationship with other kids.

Sarah Ncumbuza (37), a parent, tells us that she went to a training provided by Autism at Snap, a private academy, for a week. Before that, the doctors were advising her on how to raise a child with autism. She said, "But attending sessions helped a lot because I would attend sessions in different autism groups across the country."

Ncumbuza then continued, "Although it is difficult to adapt because children with autism change from time to time, however it is difficult for me because my child has different kinds of behaviours. So, to meet the child's needs was through the training, and the school helps a lot in assisting us the parents, with the child's needs.

Refilwe Skosana (26), a teacher from Welkom Secondary School, said, "Our communities are not well informed about autism and the lack of knowledge may lead to undesirable treatment towards autistic individuals as they are ridiculed for being different." She continued saying, "People with autism may face difficulties with social communities and this makes it harder for them to interact with others."

Children with autism may struggle to begin or maintain conversations. They struggle to understand social cues, develop and maintain friendships in terms of communication, they may experience absent language development – which means they may develop speech abilities later than expected or not at all. This also applies to written language. Generally, other people struggle to understand the tone of voice of people with autism.

Emotionally, children with autism may struggle to manage their emotions, and will usually experience mood swings, and fear expressing their emotions. They prefer to play alone rather than with other children.

It's important to remember that each child with autism is unique and not all will show all of these behaviours. By understanding and accepting their differences, we can provide them with the support and accommodation they need. With love, patience,

and the right resources. Autism is not a challenge, but rather a difference that deserves respect, acceptance, and celebration.

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