

4 autism insights from a clinical psychologist

Breaking down whether more children have autism today, if autism is more prevalent in males than females, and if there is comorbidity.



Do more children have autism than ever before?

According to clinical psychologist and founder of Minds & Hearts Dr Michelle Garnett, research has shown that there are more children with autism now than before, and it's not just because the definitions have broadened.



The reasons for the increase have been hypothesised to include more chemicals in our diet, increased use of fertility treatments to have children, and having children later in life, and increased immigration.

— Dr Garnett

Do more males have autism than females?

Dr Garnett says that males are more vulnerable across the spectrum of neurodevelopmental disorders — fundamentally, there are more males born with autism than females.



So, one of the reasons is that their brains are more vulnerable to having neurological differences. One of these, for example, is less communication and integration across the two brain hemispheres.

— Dr Garnett

What mental health disorders are co-occurring with autism?

There are many reasons anxiety and depressive disorders can arise for someone on the autism spectrum, says Dr Garnett.



One of these is that the genes for mood disorders cluster with the genes for autism, so there is a genetic transmission that occurs for both types of disorder. However, we do not know why autism and depression tend to be genetically expressed within the same families.

— Dr Garnett

Why do approximately 70% of people with a diagnosis of autism also attract a diagnosis of ADHD?



It is still the case that we cannot receive genetic counselling for whether or not we will have a child with autism. The genetic transmission pathway, that is which chromosomes are implicated, is not yet known. We do know that autism is largely a frontal lobe disorder, as is ADHD.

— Dr Garnett