

Treating Autism, and Accepting It

To the Editor:

Re "How About Not 'Curing' Us, Some Autistics Are Pleading" (front page, Dec. 20):

As the mother of a child who recovered from autism through intensive behavioral treatment, I respect that individual differences and the need for treatment are not mutually exclusive.

The article highlighted the school of thought that people with autism should not be treated because their autism is what makes them special.

Everyone, no matter who, should be respected and appreciated for his or her uniqueness. Parents of children with autism want most of the same things as parents of typical children. They want the best for them: to help their children get along in the world, to communicate, interact and to make friends.

Treatment is not the enemy. Treatment for autism can be seen as the equivalent of schooling for the typical child. Both can help children achieve their full potential by identifying and nurturing core strengths and individual differences.

Why shouldn't children with autism have the same opportunities to learn and grow as typical children?

KAREN SIFF EXKORN

Sparkill, N.Y., Dec. 20, 2004

The writer is the author of a forthcoming book about autism.

To the Editor:

As the mother of a young autistic adult, I thank you for acknowledging the pro-autistic point of view. Understanding and acceptance of our kids is a long way down the road, but I look forward to the day they will be welcome to live in the world as autistic people.

ANNE BEVINGTON

Pacifica, Calif., Dec. 20, 2004

To the Editor:

It is so exciting to see in print that maybe autism is not a plague to be stamped out. My son is not a plague or a tragedy; he's a great kid with a good sense of humor and an awesome knowledge of old movies. What really needs to be fixed is how the world looks at autism.

JEANINE KELLY

Chester, Va., Dec. 20, 2004

To the Editor:

I am 13 years old. I am autistic. My parents did an A.B.A. (Applied Behavior Analysis) program. I am glad I can talk. I can say how I feel. I've been to London. I can talk about what I want to talk about. I am interested in politics. I can talk about politics. I did three years of treatment before A.B.A. I could not talk before I had A.B.A.

AARON B. EPELBAUM

Brooklyn, Dec. 20, 2004

To the Editor:

Autism, perhaps more than many other diagnoses, presents a broad range of manifestations, and one treatment (or nontreatment) does not fit all. Your article glosses over this fact and could be misinterpreted as making a case for not investigating the etiologies of autism or possible treatments (for those who need to be treated).

As a doctor who cares for many patients with autism and as the uncle of an autistic nephew, I know that the research needs to be done to help many of my patients and my nephew reach their full potential.

GARY MIRKIN, M.D.

Great Neck, N.Y., Dec. 20, 2004

To the Editor:

As the parent of a 13-year-old son with autism and as the friend of many families of children with various types of autism, I can say the experiences cited bear little resemblance to the reality faced by most.

One of the hallmarks of autism is the lack of self-awareness, social cognition and behavioral flexibility.

The self-awareness of those representatives of the "autistic liberation movement" you interviewed is something parents and caretakers of children with autism could only wish for.

There are no treatments that change whatever the root causes of autism may be. Nor are there ways of changing the world to make it kinder to our children. What we can and must do is to use proven and humane therapies like Applied Behavior Analysis and encourage research into other treatment methods.

DAVID SCHWARTZ

Spring, Tex., Dec. 20, 2004