

State of Autism Acceptance Report

Forward

Zafer Elcik, Co-founder & CEO of Otsimo

Otsimo, the mobile learning app designed for children with autism and special education needs, offers families an opportunity to continue education away from the classroom and therapist's office.

In the past few years we've seen a rise in the amount of experiences designed for children with autism, and in general awareness around the autism spectrum disorder. This has carried over to popular culture, where we've seen more representations of people with autism in the media to reflect the fact that one in 59 children in the US have been diagnosed as being on the spectrum. Although autism awareness and representation has increased over the years, how does this translate into real world problems and interactions that people with autism manage on a day-to-day basis?

Otsimo's State of Autism Acceptance Report found that while Americans largely report having high rates of empathy and acceptance for people with autism today, that acceptance doesn't always transfer over to real life interactions.

May 2018, Otsimo





50%

of Americans reported that they want more representation of people with autism in popular culture.

Pop culture highlights the case for more autism integration into society

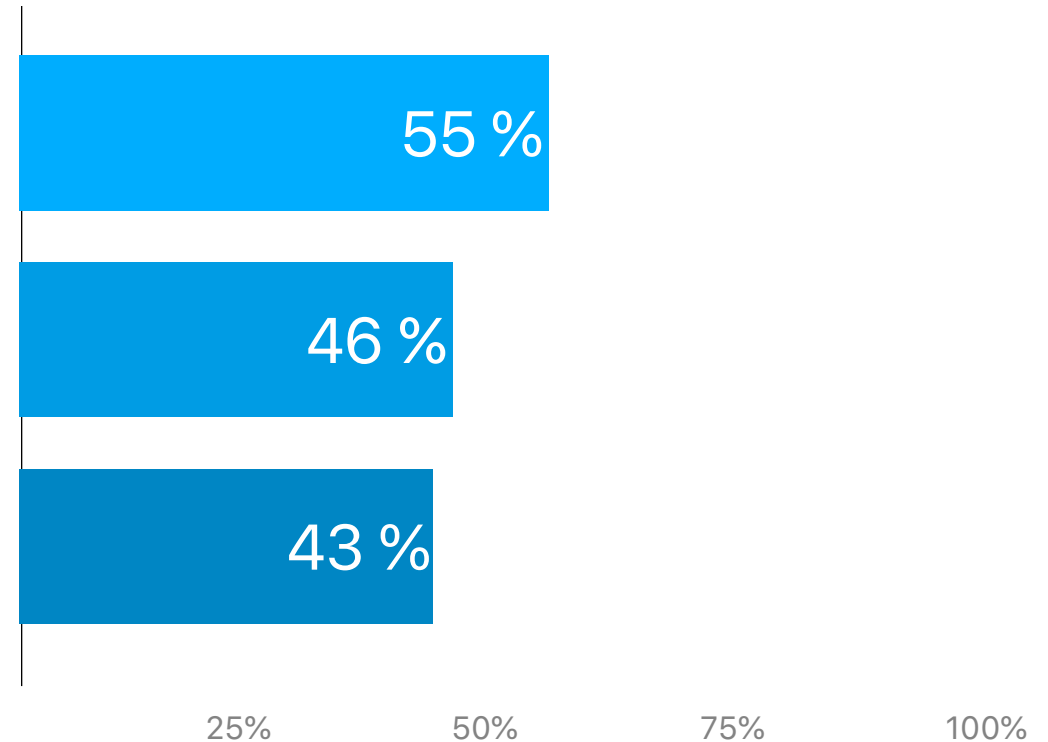
As portrayals of individuals with autism in the media has increased, such as with "The Good Doctor," "Sesame Street" and "Parenthood," Americans are simultaneously more accepting, and understanding, of autism in general. In fact, 50% of Americans reported that they want more representation of people with autism in popular culture.

These portrayals seem to correlate with an increase in the public opinion about how society should accommodate individuals with autism. When asked to think about these portrayals in the media, Americans reported:

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How Have Popular Culture Portrayals of People with Autism Changed American Perception?

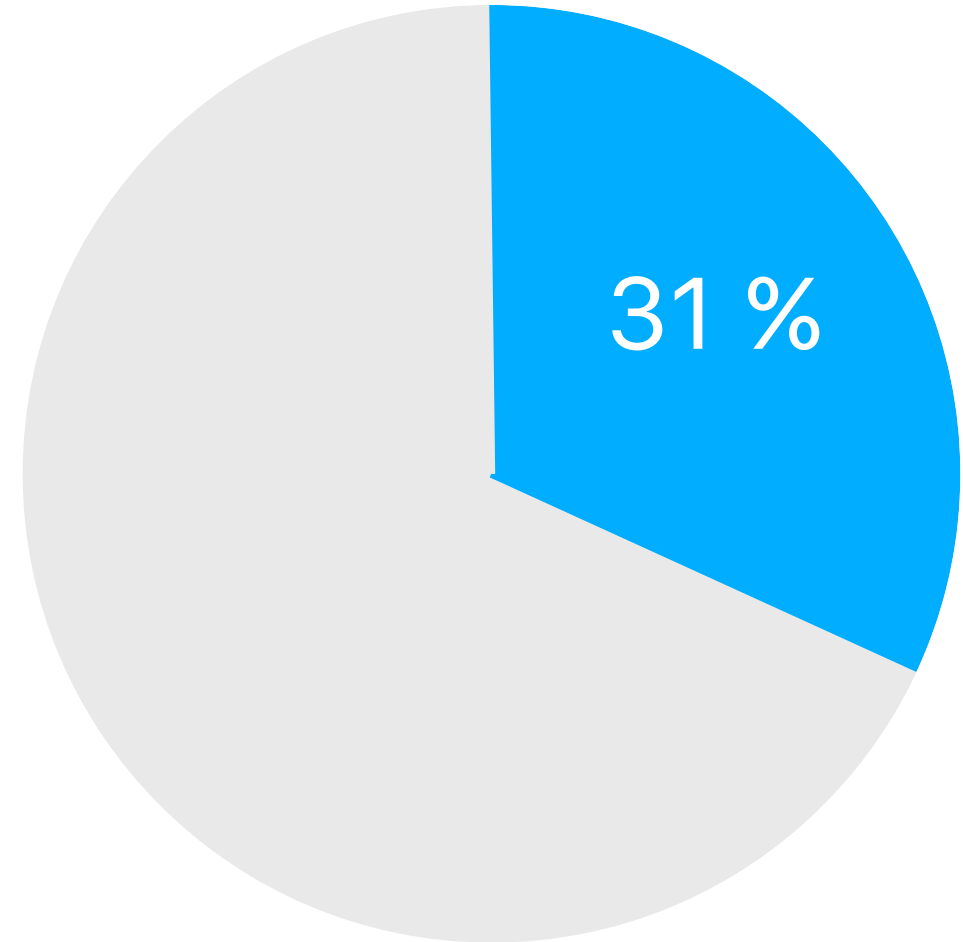
- 55% believe that society, including schools, businesses, shops, etc. should do more to accommodate people with autism.
- 46% feel more empathetic towards the autistic community.
- 43% say access to therapy methods should be available for free.



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Autism in Media vs. Reality

- Despite these findings, only 31% of Americans report that they agree these pop culture depictions accurately represent the daily life of people with autism, showing that there is still work to be done on accurate representation of people with autism in the media and reality.



Autism is not a one-time concern

Zafer Elcik, Co-founder & CEO of Otsimo

"Autism awareness and acceptance is currently in a state of growth, not only in America but across the globe. Autism enters the spotlight every April for Autism Awareness Month and while this heightened awareness is positive, it doesn't get at the heart of the matter."

"Autism is not a one-time concern. It deserves attention not just once a year, or while people are watching television, but on an ongoing basis. People with autism should not be siloed. They should be integrated into society. This includes at schools, the workplace and larger community. As a society, we need to work so that when April is over, and when people turn off their TV sets, they bring action to incorporating people with autism into society."

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Americans still concerned about having a child with autism, despite heightened acceptance

Raising a child is no easy feat. It's challenging, exciting, scary, joyful, stressful, rewarding, and everything in-between. And raising a child with special needs, like autism, paves itself an entirely different path for families and new parents. Americans still have concerns about having a child with autism, despite the growing state of acceptance in society.

When asked what other concerns would be if respondents had a child with autism, our research found:

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Americans

still have concerns about having a child with autism, despite the growing state of acceptance in society.

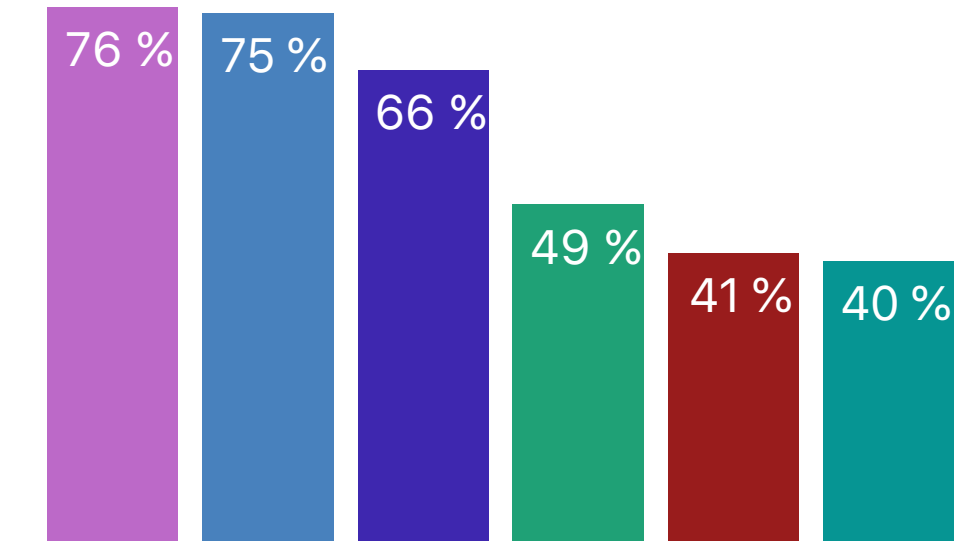


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Top Concerns of Raising a Child with Autism

- 76% of Americans are concerned about their child being bullied.
- 75% would be concerned about the child's social life.
- 66% would be worried about the lack of opportunities for the child as it grows up.
- 49% would be concerned about the financial burden associated with raising a child with autism.
- 41% reported they would be disappointed to raise a child with autism.
- 40% reported they would not feel prepared to raise a child with autism.

100 %



A photograph of a man and a woman holding a baby. The man is on the left, looking down at the baby with a smile. The woman is on the right, also looking at the baby. The baby is laughing and looking towards the left. The image is slightly faded and serves as a background for the text.

When

presented with the prospect of raising a child with autism, baby boomers reported higher rates of concern when presented when compared to millennials.

The Generation Gap: Baby Boomers (55 or older) vs Millennials (18-34) on potentially raising a child with autism

Since autism acceptance has progressed over time, we can see how these levels of acceptance are impacting perceptions held by different generations. When presented with the prospect of raising a child with autism, baby boomers reported higher rates of concern when presented when compared to millennials, suggesting that acceptance has shifted positively over time and across generations. One could infer this acceptance to an increased representation of autism in the media today, or increased awareness of new technology that lessens the access barrier to ABA treatment, which wasn't available in previous decades.



Generational Differences in Raising a Child with Autism

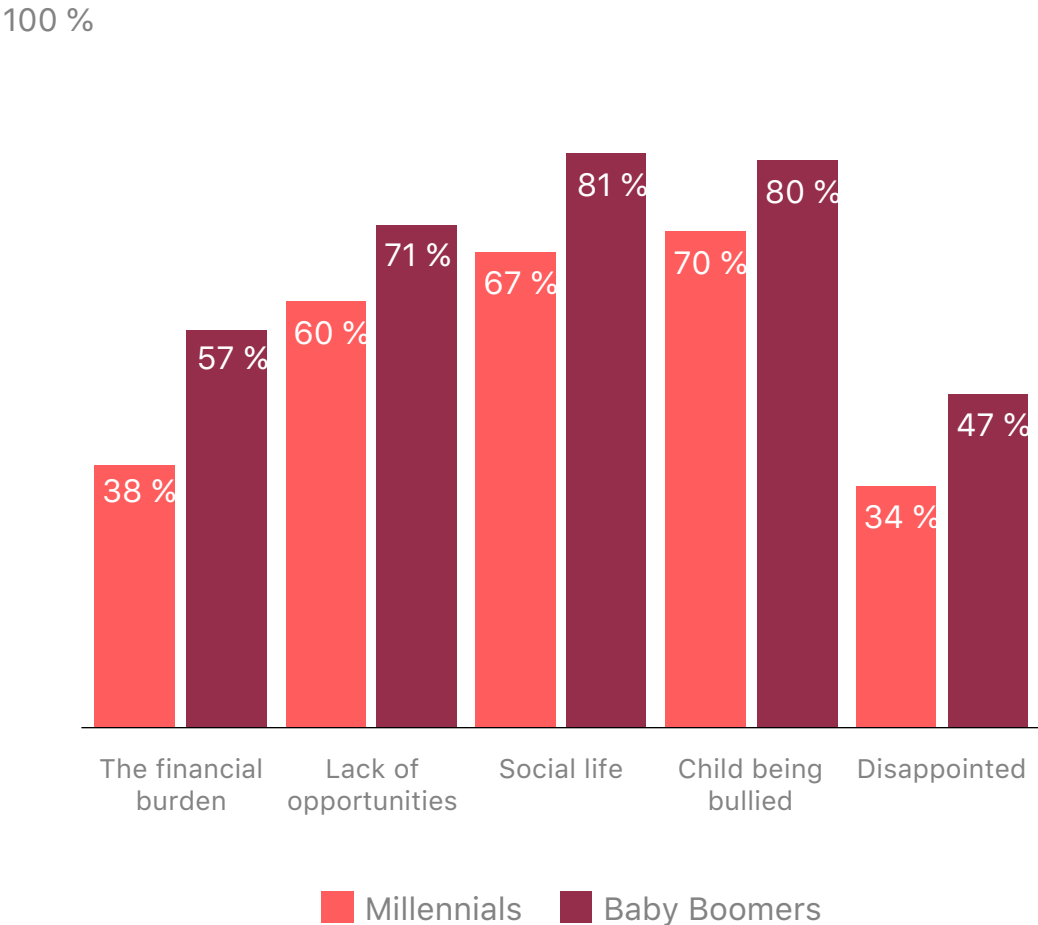
The financial burden – 38% of millennials would be concerned compared to 57% of baby boomers.

Lack of opportunities – 60% of millennials would be worried vs. 71% of baby boomers.

Social life – 67% of millennials would be concerned vs. 81% of baby boomers.

Child being bullied – 70% of millennials compared to 80% of baby boomers.

Disappointed – 34% of millennials vs. 47% of baby boomers.

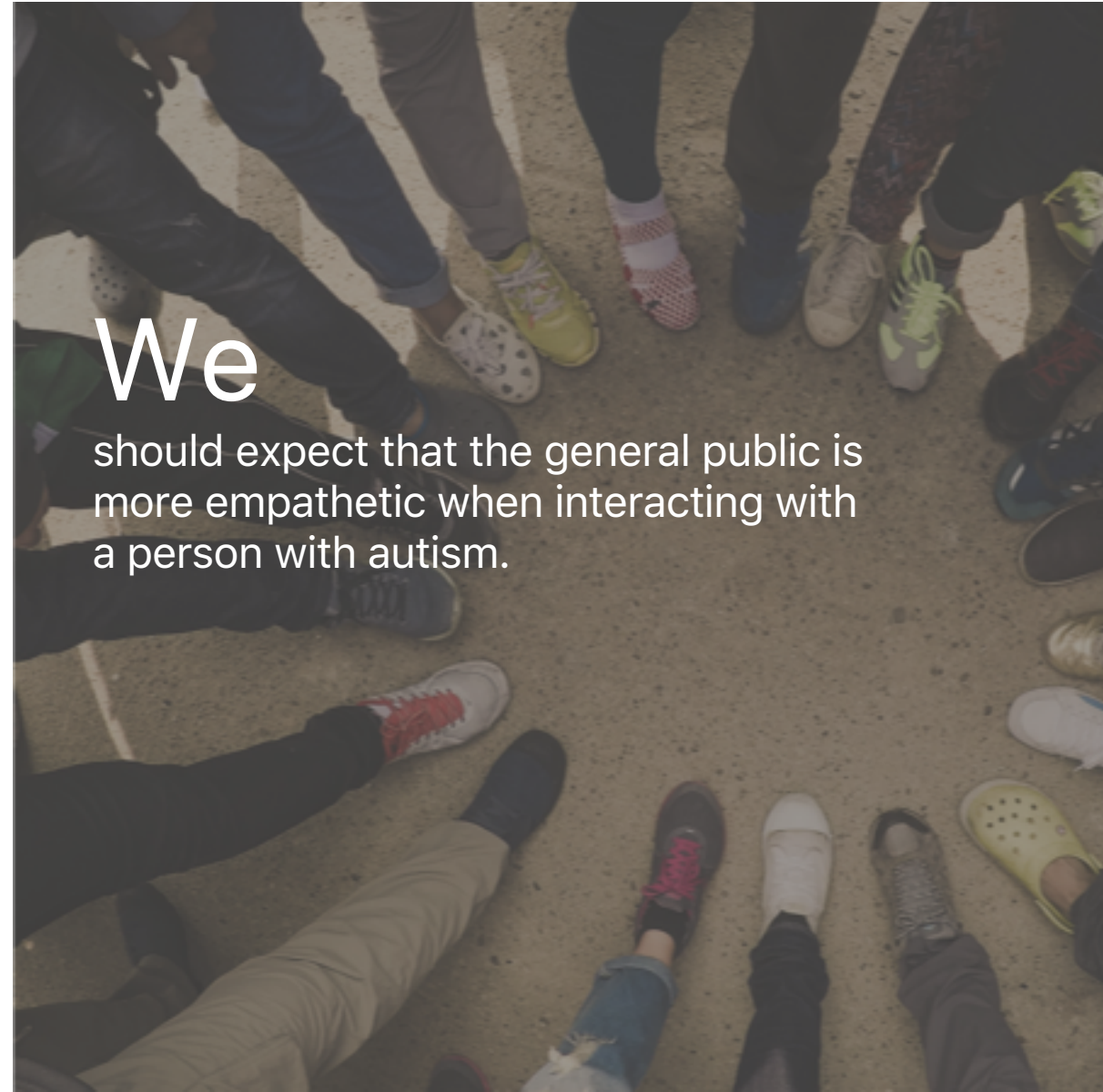


Where do we stand in putting higher rates of acceptance and awareness into practice?

Americans are reporting a higher degree of autism awareness and acceptance now than ever before. But how does this translate to interacting with people with autism in real life? If we're to believe that pop culture portrayals are contributing to changing attitudes about how society needs to incorporate people with autism and that autism acceptance is on the rise, we should expect that the general public is more empathetic when interacting with a person with autism.

Although these portrayals seem to be working to increase awareness, it doesn't always positively change behavior.

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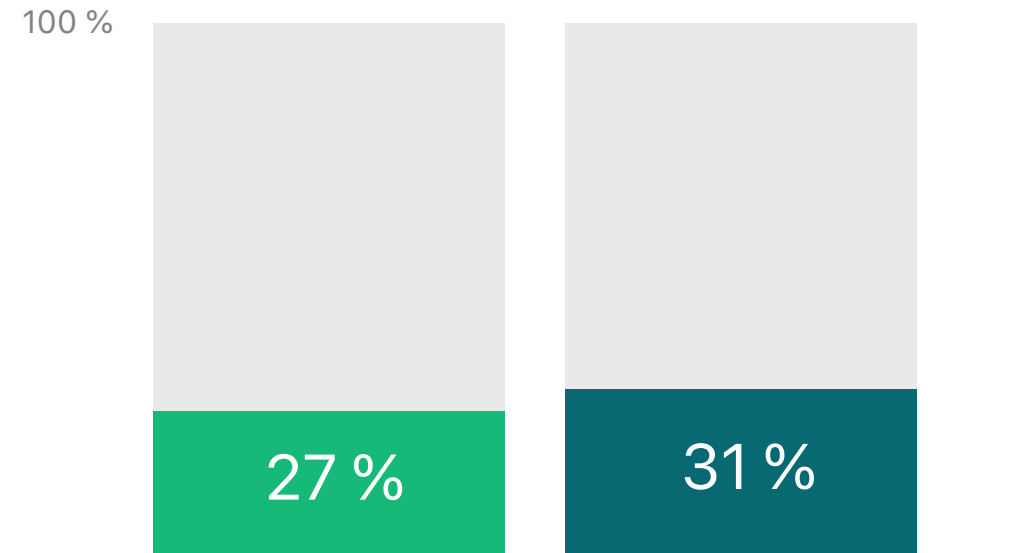


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American Interactions with People with Autism - Service Professional

When asked about working with a services professional (i.e. IT technician, plumber, etc.),

- Only 27% would trust this person.
- Only 31% said they would feel comfortable during an appointment with a service professional diagnosed on the autism spectrum.

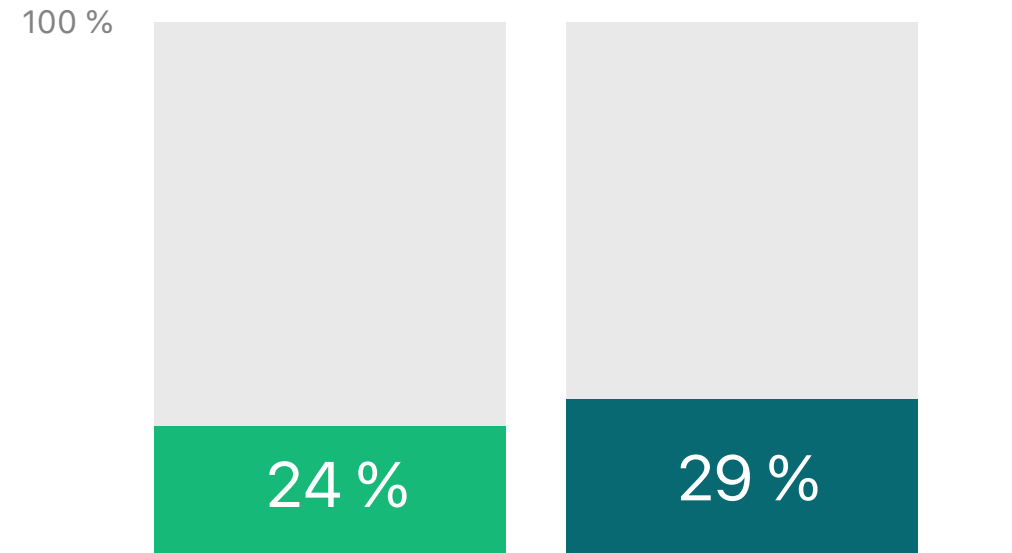


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American Interactions with People with Autism - Esteemed Professional

When asked about working with an esteemed professional (i.e. doctor, lawyer, etc.),

- Less than a quarter (24%) would trust this person.
- 29% would feel comfortable during an appointment with a skilled professional diagnosed on the autism spectrum.

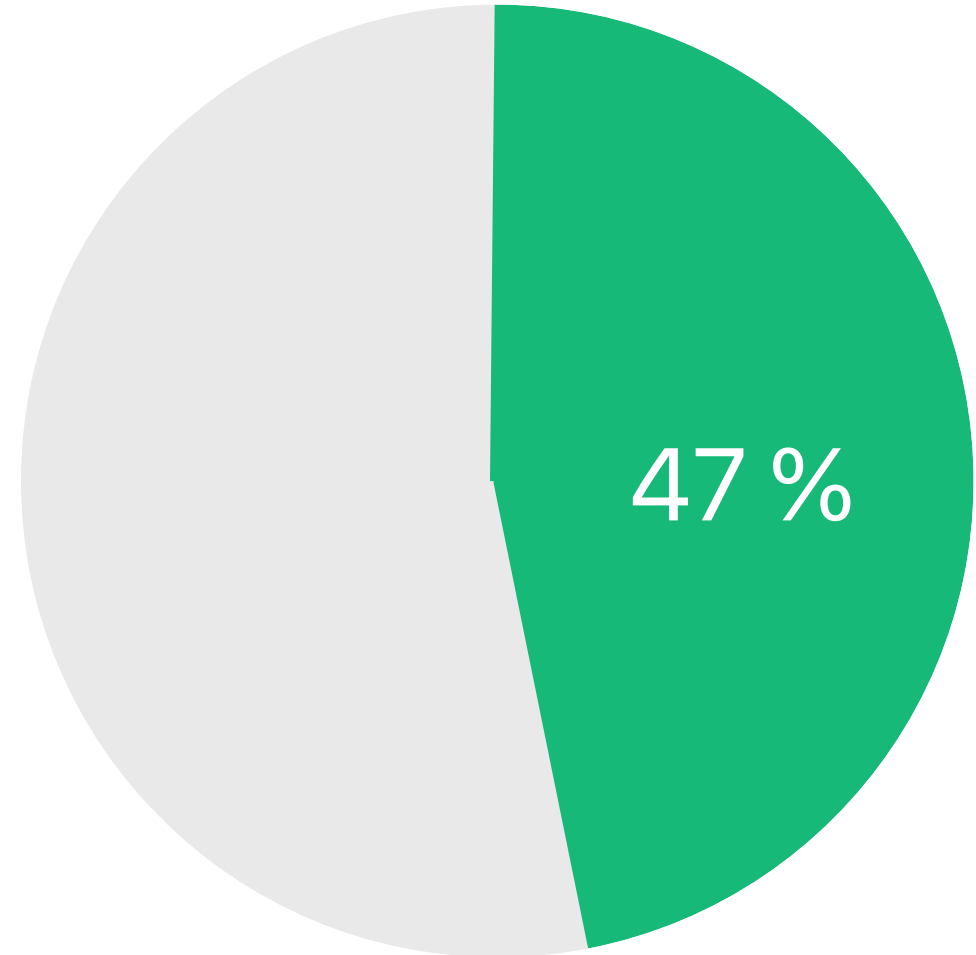


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American Interactions with People with Autism - Esteemed Professional

When asked about working with an esteemed professional (i.e. doctor, lawyer, etc.),

- Less than half of the Americans (47%) would keep their appointment with a highly skilled professional if they found out s/he was diagnosed on the autism spectrum disorder.



We'll be here doing it

"Our society has evolved to recognize the benefits of diversity. Although when discussing diversity, neurodiversity is often left out of the discussion. We need to inject neurodiversity into this conversation and treat autism not as a disorder but as a unique trait. People with learning disorders can be among the most dedicated, creative and intelligent workers that anyone could have the pleasure to know. However, we will not get to a place where neurodiversity is widely accepted until we shift our mindset. As we saw in our research, many people report having empathy towards people with autism, but that empathy unfortunately doesn't always translate into action, or acceptance. There's still work to be done, and we'll be here doing it."

Zafer Elcik
Cofounder of Otsimo

The logo for Otsimo, featuring the word "OTSIMO" in white, uppercase, sans-serif font, set against a blue rectangular background that tapers to a point on the right side.

All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from YouGov Plc. Total sample size was 1202 adults. Fieldwork was undertaken between 18th - 19th April 2018. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all US adults (aged 18+).