Media & Learning

MLA4MedLit 2026 Whose Literacy? Whose Rights? Interrogating Digital and Media Literacy for Everyone

Case studies: Whose literacy, for whom? · 23 October 2026

MediaCare

Empowering caregivers of children with neurodevelopmental conditions through media literacy

Myths about neurodevelopment, misinformation, and what media literacy can do for caregivers



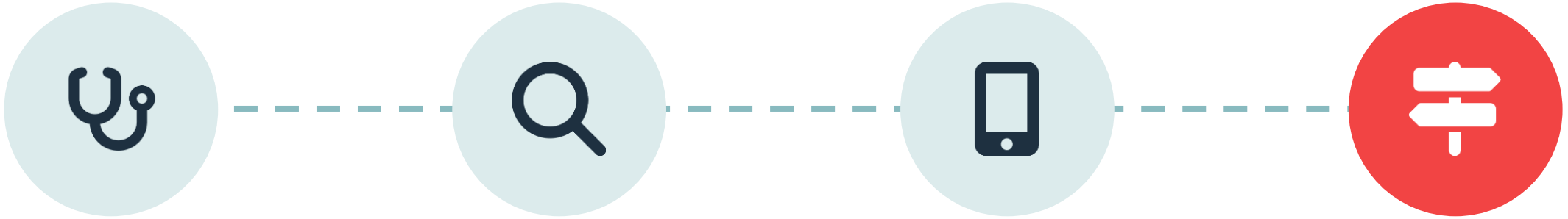
Eva Bei, PhD
Marie Skłodowska-Curie Postdoctoral Fellow · PI, MediaCare
Department of Education, Languages, Intercultures, Literatures and Psychology (FORLILPSI), University of Florence

Funded by the European Union (Horizon MSCA Postdoctoral Fellowships, grant 101151750)



THE PROBLEM

Imagine a parent who has just heard “autism” or “ADHD”



A diagnosis

…and a hundred new questions

The search

Many look online, often before or alongside a clinician

The feed

Videos, posts, ads and advice

A decision

Medication? Which school? Which therapy? A diet?

Between diagnosis and decision, every source runs through the wider information ecosystem: clinicians, family, schools, search and social media.

THE PROBLEM

What social media serves up

ADHD ON TIKTOK

52 of 100

of the most popular videos about ADHD were classified as misleading. 27 were personal experience.

None of the misleading videos advised a medical, psychiatric or psychological assessment before linking symptoms to ADHD. Healthcare providers posted more useful videos.

Yeung, Ng & Abi-Jaoude (2022), Canadian Journal of Psychiatry

AUTISM ON TIKTOK

27%

of the 133 most-viewed informational videos were accurate. 41% were inaccurate and 32% overgeneralised.

Accurate and inaccurate videos showed no significant difference in engagement. Videos by healthcare professionals were more likely to be accurate.

Aragon-Guevara et al. (2025), Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders

Lived experience matters — the problem is not personal stories. It is that, in the feed, accurate and inaccurate content can look alike and travel just as far.

THE PROBLEM

Neuromyths convince professionals too

Neuromyths: common misconceptions about the brain and neurodevelopment.

% of 820 Italian teachers who didn't recognise each myth (Bei et al., 2024)



If people trained to work with children find these convincing, parents meeting them for the first time might too.

≈30%

of neurodevelopmental myths missed overall — more than general brain myths

Bei et al., 2024

No gap

between special-education and mainstream teachers

Bei et al., 2024

Protective

reading science sources and neuroscience training

Bei et al., 2024; 2025

THE PROBLEM

Which neuromyths circulate

Examples of the myths MediaCare targets, drawn from research with teachers and the public

	ADHD	AUTISM
Causes	“ADHD is caused by poor parenting or screens”	“Too much screen time causes autism”
Treatment	“Cutting sugar reduces ADHD symptoms” · “Stimulants lead to addiction”	“Autism can be cured with the right treatment”
The future	“Children outgrow ADHD”	“Wait and see: many children grow out of it”
Everyday life	“ADHD affects mostly boys” · “They could control it if they tried”	“Autistic children lack empathy” · “They can’t notice social rejection” · “They don’t like to be touched”

THE PROBLEM

Why these myths stick and spread

Simple beats accurate

Neurodevelopment is complex. A simple, wrong explanation is easier to remember, share and act on.

Science gets distorted

Oversimplified results, sensational reporting and missing caveats turn findings into myths.

Gini et al., 2021; Bei et al., 2024

There is a market

Diets, supplements and programmes are sold on the strength of the myth itself.

Feeds don't filter for accuracy

Accurate and inaccurate autism videos drew similar engagement; feeds serve more of what we watch.

Aragon-Guevara et al., 2025

Hope and urgency

Parents want answers now — often searching before, or alongside, seeing a clinician.

THE PROBLEM

A myth can become a decision

A video says

"Cut sugar and the ADHD symptoms calm down."

It feels true

It sounds simple, and others say it worked.

The family acts

A strict diet starts — at home, at school, at parties.

The child loses out

Time, money and hope go to something that doesn't help.

THE SAME PATTERN, OTHER MYTHS

"Medication leads to addiction"
→ an effective treatment refused

"Autism can be cured"
→ money spent on unproven cures

"Autistic kids dislike touch"
→ a stereotype replaces the child

WHOSE LITERACY?

Caregivers are expected to adapt

Media literacy is often designed for…	…but a caregiver is
Students and the general public	**A parent deciding about their own child**
Judging a headline or a website	**Choosing a diet, a medication, a school, a therapy**
Low personal stakes, time to think	**High emotional stakes, little time**
Generic false news	**Claims sold with a promise or product attached**

And behind every caregiver is a child — whose diagnosis, schooling and support are shaped by what the adults around them believe.

Studied least, deciding most

Research on neuromyths has focused on teachers, students and the public.

Caregivers, who make many of the decisions, are not always represented.

MediaCare

Empowering caregivers of children with neurodevelopmental conditions through media literacy

An app with a series of short myth cards for parents of children with autism or ADHD. Each card has three parts:

1 · THE MYTH
A claim parents really meet

2 · THE FACTS
What research shows instead

3 · THE CHECK
A habit to test the next claim

MediaCare receives funding from the European Union's Horizon programme under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Postdoctoral Fellowships — grant agreement 101151750.



In development · not launched yet

A first look at the cards

ADHD

Can ADHD medication lead to addiction later in life?

✕ This is not true

Taken as prescribed and monitored, stimulant medication does not cause addiction. Effectively treated ADHD is linked to a lower risk of later substance-use problems.

Quick check
Search the claim. Find what one independent health body says, and compare it with where you first saw it.

AUTISM

Do autistic children lack empathy?

✕ This is not true

Autistic children may show or read emotions differently — but that is not the same as not caring. Many autistic people report feeling others' emotions very strongly.

Quick check
Find where the claim comes from. Is it based on research, or one person's story? Look for a second source.

EVERY PARENT

Do children learn better in their preferred "learning style"?

✕ This is not true

Matching teaching to a "visual" or "auditory" style does not improve learning. Varied, well-designed teaching helps all learners.

Quick check
Look up who is behind the claim. Are they selling a programme? Check what an independent source says.

WHAT CAN WE DO?

Act at three levels

The information environment
Policy & platforms

Name caregivers in policy
EU rules require media literacy and reporting every three years, but don't name caregivers of children with neurodevelopmental conditions.

AVMSD Art. 33a & 28b

Boost credible voices
Platforms can promote professionals: in both TikTok studies, their videos were more useful or accurate.

Yeung et al., 2022; Aragon-Guevara et al., 2025

The professionals around the child
Clinicians, teachers, therapists

Train on neuromyths
Teachers with neuroscience training held fewer myths, so training should cover neurodevelopmental myths.

Bei et al., 2024

Easy access to reliable sources
Teachers who accessed accurate information more often held fewer myths.

Bei et al., 2024

The caregiver
Media-literacy skills

Credible, accessible information
Parents use the most accessible channels, so reliable content must be easy to reach and matched to their child.

Lindly et al., 2022

Build media literacy skills
Checking skills can be taught, and explaining why a myth is wrong beats stating the fact. Evidence so far comes mainly from students/other populations.

Wineburg et al., 2022; Schroeder & Kucera, 2022

WHOSE LITERACY?

A myth held by an adult can become a decision made about a child.

If media literacy is for everyone, it must reach caregivers at the moment they decide, on the myths they actually meet.



Media & Learning

MLA4MedLit 2026 Whose Literacy? Whose Rights? Interrogating Digital and Media Literacy for Everyone

Case studies: Whose literacy, for whom? · 23 October 2026

Thank you!

eva.bei@unifi.it



Eva Bei

MARIE SKŁODOWSKA-CURIE FELLOW

PI, MediaCare
FORLILPSI, University of Florence

Work with families in Europe?

Schools, clinics, parent associations, NGOs: get in touch!

MSCA

UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI FIRENZE

MediaCare receives funding from the European Union's Horizon programme under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Postdoctoral Fellowships — grant agreement 101151750.

References

Aragon-Guevara, D., Castle, G., Sheridan, E., & Vivanti, G. (2025). The reach and accuracy of information on autism on TikTok. J Autism Dev Disord, 55(6), 1953–1958.

Bei, E., Argiropoulos, D., Van Herwegen, J., Incognito, O., Menichetti, L., Tarchi, C., & Pecini, C. (2024). Neuromyths: Misconceptions about neurodevelopment by Italian teachers. Trends Neurosci Educ, 34, 100219.

Bei, E., Zarzycki, M., Incognito, O., & Pecini, C. (2025). Misconceptions about neurodevelopmental disorders among Italian special education teachers: A mixed-methods study. Int J Educ Res, 133, 102709.

Directive (EU) 2018/1808 amending the Audiovisual Media Services Directive, Articles 28b and 33a.

Gini, S., Knowland, V., Thomas, M. S. C., & Van Herwegen, J. (2021). Neuromyths about neurodevelopmental disorders: Misconceptions by educators and the general public. Mind, Brain, and Education, 15(4), 289–298.

Küçükaydın, M. A. (2026). The prevalence of neuromyths among Turkish parents: Sources, purchase intentions, and effects on educational strategies. Trends Neurosci Educ, 42, 100278.

Lindly, O. J., et al. (2022). “I don’t do much without researching things myself”: A mixed methods study exploring the role of parent health literacy in autism services use for young children. J Autism Dev Disord, 52, 3598–3611.

Schroeder, N. L., & Kucera, A. C. (2022). Refutation text facilitates learning: A meta-analysis of between-subjects experiments. Educ Psychol Rev, 34, 957–987.

Wineburg, S., Breakstone, J., McGrew, S., Smith, M. D., & Ortega, T. (2022). Lateral reading on the open Internet: A district-wide field study in high school government classes. J Educ Psychol, 114(5), 893–909.

Yeung, A., Ng, E., & Abi-Jaoude, E. (2022). TikTok and attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder: A cross-sectional study of social media content quality. Can J Psychiatry, 67(12), 899–906.