

IN A DIFFERENT KEY:
THE AUTISM UNDERSTANDING TOOLKIT

WRONG IDEAS: BLAMING MOTHERS



INTRODUCTORY CONTEXT

(suggested)

As the documentary IN A DIFFERENT KEY shows, the first child diagnosed, Donald Triplett, went on to live a good life, surrounded by support and understanding. But the film also tells stories about people who were not so fortunate, as both autistic individuals and their families often experienced negative attitudes and wrong ideas about what autistic people needed, and why they were autistic in the first place. This segment focuses on especially on one such idea that took hold in the 1950s and 1960s and the harm it caused. Though now a part of the past, its acceptance at the time provides a cautionary and valuable lesson for the present, because wrong ideas can gain a footing at any time.

KEY THEMES

- How bad mothering was seen as the cause of autism
- How treatment focused on the parent, not the child
- How experts could be wrong, but also influential
- Other discredited treatment ideas

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

How could psychiatry be so wrong?
Why weren't the experts challenged more vigorously?
How did this wrong idea likely impact autism research?
Are there still wrong ideas about autism in currency today?