

Uta Frith

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University College London and University of Aarhus

William James Fellow Award

An internationally renowned developmental psychologist, Uta Frith has pioneered much of the current research into the cognitive neuroscience of autism and dyslexia. In fact, she is regarded as one of the first scientists to recognize autism as a condition of the brain rather than the outcome of detached parenting, a conclusion she argued for persuasively in her seminal 1989 book *Autism: Explaining the Enigma*.

In her work with Alan Leslie (now a professor at Rutgers University) and Simon Baron-Cohen (now a professor at the University of Cambridge), Frith pioneered the idea that autistic people lack a theory of mind — the ability to attribute mental states to oneself and others and to intuit what others may be thinking. She has also proposed the theory that individuals with autism have “weak central coherence,” leaving them highly capable of processing details but worse than other individuals at integrating information from many sources.

Additionally, Frith has been a major force in destigmatizing dyslexia, showing it to be separate from environment and intelligence. Her work on reading development and spelling has been highly influential. Most recently, Frith has been championing the advancement of women in science, fostering support networks for female researchers who juggle family and career. She has worked tirelessly to close the divide between neuroscientists, teachers, and policymakers, calling for a common language to bridge lab-based experiments and classroom practice. Ultimately, her goal is to help improve the quality of life of those with developmental disorders by a better understanding of the challenges they face.