

WHAT'S NEXT? MAKING DECISIONS ABOUT THERAPY FOR YOUR CHILD WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER

After a diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), many parents feel lost. They want to help their child, but they wonder: What therapy does my child need? How often? How do I afford it? Where do I start?

Treatment for ASD can vary greatly in terms of who is involved, where it takes place, how much it costs, and what is available in your geographical area. Some therapies address all of the core symptoms of ASD while others focus on certain aspects (e.g. speech therapy) or associated conditions (e.g. feeding disorders). Parent involvement in therapy can vary from drop-off programs to programs that train parents to act as therapists for their own child. The National Research Council recommends that children with autism receive approximately 25 hours of structured intervention per week early in development. This structured intervention can include school, clinic, or home-based intervention, should address core and/or associated symptoms, and be delivered by a professional or trained parent.

The professionals involved in your child's autism evaluation and other experts in your area can help you understand what options are available. They will help you prioritize which treatments to choose based on your child's strengths and needs. Your local or state autism society may also have advocates who can provide you with information. Be aware that there are programs that have not been properly tested and may not result in positive change. Once you have narrowed down which therapies you are considering for your child, it is important to collect more information about the therapy by asking the following questions:

APPROACH

1. What methods are used?
2. Is there research evidence to support the safety and effectiveness of the method (i.e. is it "evidence based")?
3. Are there any studies on the methods that are replicated by other experts (i.e. "blind studies")? Can I get a copy of the studies?
4. What symptoms are addressed?
5. How do I know that the therapy is working?
6. What does the therapy NOT address? Are there any limitations of the therapy?
7. How long does a child typically stay in treatment?
8. What are the criteria for exiting treatment?
9. Are there any risks or potential harm?
10. How does the method help my child make the transition from practicing skills learned in therapy to using those skills in the real world?

COST AND TIME COMMITMENT

1. What is the cost of the treatment?
2. Is it covered by insurance?
3. Who files a claim with the insurance company?
4. Are there extra fees?
5. What is the time commitment involved?
6. Will the time commitment work with my schedule?

PROCEDURES

1. Are parents allowed to observe sessions?
2. Are parents trained to participate in the therapy?
3. Is data collected and shared with parents?
4. How is progress evaluated?
5. What happens if progress is not occurring?
6. How does staff handle behavior challenges?
7. What is the student to staff ratio?

STAFF

1. What is the staff turnover?
2. Is the staff licensed?
3. How much experience does the staff have in autism?
4. How is the staff supervised and by whom?

FAMILY CONSIDERATIONS

1. Does the cost and time commitment work with our family life and resources?
2. Does this approach provide me, the parent, with the support I need?
3. Does the treatment support the goals and values I have for my child?
4. Do I get a positive feeling when interacting with staff and hearing about the program?