




How to Choose An Autism Therapy

To treat or not to treat doesn't seem to be the question when it comes to autism services. Parents want to find the very best therapeutic services for their child, but the overwhelming number of options found on Google makes the process of choosing an autism therapy daunting.

First, you must face the practical things such as waitlists, funding, and location. After making your way through the first gauntlet of possibilities, then you are faced with the endless number of choices between types of therapy. It can leave the most organized and resilient parent feeling stuck, overwhelmed, and second-guessing their intuition. The third time you hit that google search button, you start to hear the judgments of others, the fears of not doing this right, the pressure to make a decision and the heavy burden of indecision and wasted time.

Sometimes we reach out in our mommy communities to ask for advice, but even there the choices are endless. One parent had a phenomenal experience with one service, the other parent has a cautionary tale. We might pick up the phone and call our pediatrician, which leaves us feeling even more lost and even distrustful. This person who is supposed to guide the care and health of our little one doesn't seem to have many specific answers. Maybe we even reach out to our child's teacher, but again find little in terms of the answers that we so need.

So what do we do when faced with making the decision of therapeutic services for our children?



The following is a 4 step decision-making strategy to selecting the right autism therapy for your child at any age, stage or time from diagnosis.

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1. Does it fit with my values?

Likely before you had children, you thought about how you would raise them; what your home would feel like, how you would raise your little one into a happy and well-adjusted adult and everything else a parent dreams about. Although some of these initial parenting thoughts were based on perfectionist and unrealistic versions of family bliss, many of your deepest desires for your unborn child were filled with love. This same love and your own personal values are exactly what you need to tap into when making this decision

Dr. Brené Brown asserts that a value is a way of being or belief that you hold most important. **Review this list of core values** and write three that you identify as fundamentally important. Keep this list close when determining services.

For me, my values are creativity, growth and belonging. When I'm making decisions for my family, I can reflect, "Is this in service of my values?" If it is, I can make the decision to put my family's finite resources towards this thing, whatever it is. If it is not, I let it go.



I use this decision-making strategy when deciding simple things such as weekend commitments to more complex decisions such as who will take care of my children when I am working.

The important piece is that you respect your core values rather than react to the turmoil of emotions that can come up when making big decisions. Choosing your child's autism provider is a big decision. This is how your child will spend part of his childhood. These are people that will shape your daughter's identity. This decision will define what you learn and don't learn about what it means to be autistic.

Service selection does matter. It is critically important to rely on what you know about yourself and your family and make a decision from your heart not your hurt.

2. Does it appear to be respectful and humanistic?

I wish I didn't have to keep this question on my list, but I do. Autistic people are still subjected to discrimination, inhumane treatment, and coercive practices as the status quo. Many service providers within our autism community are not intentionally harming children, yet treatment effects can be harmful and traumatic. This isn't just old, traditional models of therapy and it isn't our tragic past. This is our current reality with even some contemporary service models. It is your job as a parent to protect your child from harm. It becomes your job to discern what is right and good for your child even if you are told otherwise by any number of experts. **If it feels wrong, it is.**

3. Do I feel like I am being heard and understood?

When we are in the service of raising other people's children, we need to actively listen and collaborate. From your first phone call to a service provider of any type, you as a parent should feel heard and understood. If you are not feeling heard and understood, do you think your child will be afforded this human right? Not only should your questions be answered, but you should feel comfortable in the conversation. The relationship with any service delivery model starts with the people delivering the service. Therapeutic underpinnings of a service model are important, but more important are the heart and soul of the people delivering the service. Don't confuse years of experience with collaborative spirit. Be sure that you feel heard and understood.

You may not feel like you have all or even any of the answers, but your story should be listened to and you should be allowed to be yourself.

4. Do I understand the "why?"

Simon Sinek implores us to find our why. This is similar to making decisions by values but when selecting an autism service for your child, it's important that you understand the "why" of the service delivery model.

It is easy to figure out the "what" and "how", but if you don't understand the "why" of the service, you are missing out on understanding the soul of the work. Ask the very simple question of "why would I choose this model of therapy?" and listen to see if the reason provided matches with what you want for your child.

Finally, there are a few things to avoid when selecting autism services for your child.

1. Simple solutions. There are no quick fixes to complex matters of human development and relationships. Any promise of simple steps is reducing your child and her human potential down to a sales gimmick. Respect the complexity of the human condition and avoid promises of quick fixes.

2. One size fits all. Just because a grouping of people carry the same diagnostic description does not mean that the same solutions will work for each child. We are all very different people with different backgrounds, stories, and values. Our services should reflect the tremendous diversity of human development and be created with your child and family in mind.

3. The ends justify the means. Consequentialism or behaving in a way where the moral worth of an action is determined by its consequence is morally bankrupt. Just because something works to change behavior doesn't mean that we should do it. Be very wary of services that focus on outcome without attending to the process of interaction. What happens in the moment matters.

4. Mastery over multiplicity. When goal attainment becomes the priority over the abundance of positivity, love and growth-mindset, a service is on the wrong path. Multiplicity is at the heart of being human, being a child. There are billions of ways to be a good human being and mastery of skills is not generally how we define our worth as human beings. Does not reduce your child to a mastery criterion. Multiply love through the services that you choose for your child.

5. Persuaded by pathology paradigm. When the goal of any therapy for your child is intended to make her less like herself and more like someone else, this may be something to avoid. For example, conversion therapy to change gay people into heterosexual people is illegal and immoral, yet many therapy models used to treat autistic children support converting autistic behaviors into neuro-typical behavioral norms.

Being autistic is another way of being human. Choose a therapy model that helps your child be the best version of himself rather than pretend to be someone he is not. Therapy can be respectful and supportive to the individual person's unique struggles. Ameliorating struggle and lessening of symptoms can be done while loving and supporting the development of a healthy autistic identity.

6. Now or never mentality. This is just simply selling on fear. There is not a window of growth and no timeline on human development. You have time, your child has time. Our time on this planet should not be pressured by unrealistic expectations of immediacy. What happens today, can happen tomorrow or in some future moment. Release the pressure to buy now and take the time you need to make the right decision for your family and your child. **Your child is worth it.**

People with autism are first and foremost people. Each person deserves treatment that is respectful, dignified and understands the values and uniqueness of the individual. At the Family Guidance & Therapy Centers, we understand that every person has value and is worthy of love. Call today for a free consultation with our autism specialists.

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