

Evaluating Interventions

Treatment approaches and nontraditional therapies identified for autism spectrum disorders are debated by researchers, parents and professionals on a regular basis. Many approaches exist that promise cures or, at the very least, dramatic improvement. While some of these strategies are effective for some, there is no one approach that is effective for all people with autism spectrum disorders. Most importantly, autism cannot be cured. However, early intervention and appropriate educational planning can minimize the effects of autism on a person's life by teaching them skills to enhance their ability to communicate and socialize.

Parents are strongly encouraged to investigate thoroughly any treatment approaches or nontraditional therapies prior to implementing them with their child. The following is a list of questions that should be considered:

1. What is the treatment/therapy?

- a. Is there written information, a program description, or detailed brochure?
- b. Exactly what is involved for the family and the child?
- c. What is the length of treatment:
- d. How much parent time is required?
- e. What are the financial costs?
- f. Is there training required for parents, care providers, teachers and others?
- g. Is there follow-up and/or support after treatment termination?

2. Is there reliable evidence of the effectiveness of the technique/intervention?

- a. Does the treatment promise a cure?
- b. Does the treatment claim to be effective and appropriate for everyone?
- c. Does research support these claims? Is there quality empirical evidence?
- d. Do the claims made correspond to what is known about autism, language, and neurological functioning?

3. What is the rationale, philosophy, or underlying purpose of the treatment program?

- a. Does the treatment address important aspects of the autistic disorder (e.g., social interaction, cognitive issues, and language)?
- b. How is the philosophy tied to the specific treatment techniques?
- c. How were the philosophy and treatment methods developed (e.g., scientific research or clinical experience)?

4. How is the determination made that the treatment/therapy is warranted and appropriate?

5. Does the treatment focus on one particular aspect or is it a general comprehensive approach?

- a. Does it allow the integration of other techniques?
- b. Are the components of the treatment program compatible?
- c. Are the treatment goals individualized for each person and their family?

6. What are the credentials of the program director and the staff?

- a. What are the background, training and credentials of the program staff?
- b. What are the staff's understanding, training and experience in autism?
- c. How much experience have they had in providing the treatment?
- d. Are they open to questions and input from family members and other professionals involved with the child?

7. Is there evidence that supports the effectiveness of the treatment/therapy?

- a. Is there independent confirmation of the effectiveness?
- b. What are the possible negative effects or side effects of the treatment?
- c. What impact might the treatment have on the family's lifestyle (e.g, time, finances)?

8. Does the treatment/therapy promise a cure?

9. Is there excessive hype surrounding the treatment?

There are many people that claim to have a cure for autism. However, the majority of treatments and claims of cures that exist have yet to be scientifically documented. Treatment decisions are best made following a comprehensive assessment and after thorough investigation of the various treatment options being considered. Education and investigation will help parents arrive at the conclusion of what is the best treatment option for their child and family.

References:

Sasso, G. (1995, November). Choosing Interventions for Individuals with Autism. Presentation conducted at the Midwest Autism Conference.

Center for Disabilities
1400 West 22nd Street
Sioux Falls, South Dakota 57105

(605) 357-1439
1-800-658-3080 (Voice/TTY)
www.usd.edu/cd