

Identifying Non-Evidence-Based Therapies for Autism

Finding out that your child may have a disability like autism can be a huge shock for families. Often, parents are overwhelmed with decisions before they even have time to process the news. They suddenly must deal with confusing medical terms, special education options and various treatments that may claim to “cure” their child. With every child being unique, families often wonder which treatment is truly best.

This is an emotional time, and parents naturally want to help their child as quickly as possible. However, it’s important to think carefully about options. Seek advice from knowledgeable sources about early intervention, behavioral therapies, communication techniques and educational strategies. It’s easy to be drawn to treatments that promise quick and miraculous results, but these should be approached with caution.

To choose the right therapy for your child, look for treatments that are backed by scientific research, known as evidence-based practices. Here are some warning signs that a therapy may not be evidence-based:

- Claims to be a “cure” for autism
- Promises quick and drastic results
- Suggests that anyone can do it without training or qualifications
- Has high costs that aren’t covered by health insurance
- Relies on personal stories instead of scientific evidence
- Is popular on social media but not in scientific journals

Many parents feel tempted by treatments that seem like miracle cures, hoping they can quickly solve any problems that their loved one is facing. However, it’s crucial to understand that there is no “cure” for autism. Some activities like swimming with dolphins or horseback riding may be fun but won’t change the underlying condition. Some treatments claiming to be cures can even be harmful or stressful for families. Through the decades, various dubious “treatments” have become popular, including special diets without a doctor’s guidance, chelation, spinal and vision therapy, neurofeedback, essential oils and certain supplements not prescribed by a medical doctor.

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So, what can families do to handle these challenges? First, don't rush into anything. Take your time and make informed choices. Gather as much information as you can. Talk to experts and read articles that cover different viewpoints about treatments. It's important to listen to a variety of opinions rather than just those that agree with what you want to believe. By following these steps and consulting experts such as your child's doctor, you can find a treatment that is best suited for your child and family.

This tip sheet was written by a physician and father to an individual with autism.

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