

How to Spot a Good-- or Bad-- Therapist for Your Autistic Child

Checklist for Harmful Therapy for Your Autistic Child

—— How about forcing or encouraging increased eye contact? Eye contact can be painful for autistic kids, can make it more difficult to listen, and divert their attention.
Do they use the phrase "quiet hands" – stopping your child from stimming, which is vital for the regulation of their thoughts and feelings?
Is the term "extinction burst" used to describe your child's emotional reaction to being forced to do something that feels wrong for them?
Do they listen to your child's pleas to stop when it gets too much for them?
Do they treat meltdowns as if they were just tantrums?
Do they think sensory needs should be combated or overcome, rather than respected?
Is pushing your child to achieve results more important to them than preventing sensory overload?
Do they understand the need for sensory breaks?
Has your child's behaviour ever been described as "attention-seeking"?

Do they use "planned ignoring" as a teaching tool despite the distress being ignored can cause anyone, especially a child?
Is the way your child chooses to play a problem to them? Are words like "inappropriate" used about the way they play – as if playing wasn't just playing?
Do they push your child repetitively to play "their way" without investigating their cognitive level or abilities?
Do you see words like "dysfunctional" or "non-functional" in their reports or sales pitch?
Do they insist on speech as being the ONLY acceptable way to communicate?
Do they use sweets, treats, or privileges as tools to bribe your child into compliance?
Is your child's autonomy and right to self-determination respected the way you would?
Checklist for Healthy Therapy for Your Autistic Child
First things first, there is no "autism therapy"
Every autistic person has different needs
Good therapy builds on a child's intrinsic motivation to learn and connect with others
Has no expectations or aims for eye contact
Happily accepts your child's harmless stimming
Respects your child's choice of communication- sign language, AAC, other
A good therapist respects bodily autonomy
Good therapy addresses root causes anxiety, sensory, cognitive)
The therapist talks about profiling and supporting sensory needs as these are so common.
Good therapy focuses on the child's emotional wellbeing.
A good therapist respects a child's limits and encourages self-advocacy, even when a child communicates, "No".
A good therapist will not rely on motivating through extrinsic rewards and punishments.

Connection is made without rewards, treats, or conditional access to specia interests.
When the child shows signs of distress, they are validated and unconditionally allowed to stop/avoid/access safe space – rather than pushing them through it or seeking compliance.
A good therapist is kind, and trusts that a child is doing their best
$\underline{\hspace{0.3cm}}$ unconditionally reduces demands when the child shows any sign of distress however communicated.
The therapist is transitional, empowering parents and carers to support in the day to day.
A good therapist shows warmth and kindness at all times.
The therapist is keen to learn from Autistic Adults.
A therapist like this will help your child will thrive.