



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 special 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

___ 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.