

Before Choosing an Option

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Spirale Factsheet #1: www.autismontario.com/spirale

There are now a great number of approaches and treatments available for people with autism and parents and professionals may find it difficult to decide which approach is best-suited to their individual circumstances.

It is important to remember that, although different approaches have been known to work for some people with an autism spectrum disorder, these approaches have not been evaluated on a long-term basis. Before using any particular approach it is best to find out as much information as you can about it. Any approach should be positive, build on people's strengths, and help to discover their potential, increase motivation and provide opportunity.

Here are some questions to consider before choosing an approach.

About the Approach

- What does the approach claim to do?
- How does it work?
- How was it developed?
- How long has the approach been in existence?
- How many people have been treated and what was the outcome?
- How long is the course of treatment?
- Does the approach focus on one particular skill or does it offer more general treatment?
- Are treatment goals individual (i.e., based on the needs of each individual)?
- Exactly what involvement is required from the person with autism, their family, and professionals working with them?
- Is there a brochure or other written information?

Credentials of Staff

- What is the background of the program director and staff?

- What are the qualifications of the program director and staff?
- What is the experience of the program director and staff with individuals with autism?
- Have the program director and staff worked with people who have similar needs to my child before?

Costs

- How much in total does the approach cost? This total cost might include enrolment and registration fees, course fees, the cost of course materials and your travel costs.
- Can costs be refunded if the approach is not effective?

Facilities, Equipment and Modifications

- When and where will the treatment take place?
- Will special adaptations or modifications to the person's home be needed?
- Will special equipment be needed?
- Will we have to suspend other treatments?
- Will we have to suspend or modify other family activities?

Effectiveness of the Approach

- Is there supporting evidence for the approach's effectiveness from other parents and professionals, or any research available on its use?
- Can I talk to other parents who have tried the approach?
- Are there any known side-effects?
- Are there many cases where the approach has not worked and what were the circumstances?
- Are there many cases where the approach made things worse and what were the circumstances?
- Is there a complaints procedure?

And Remember

- Be skeptical about any approach that claims to 'cure' autism. Parents whose child has just received a diagnosis may be particularly susceptible to trying anything. Autism is a lifelong condition and although certain approaches may help control and manage characteristic behaviours and/or enhance particular skills that make life for the individual much easier and more enjoyable, they will continue to require some level of support and assistance throughout their life.
- Do not rush judgment about any particular approach if you have only been using it for a short period of time. Changes in behaviour at the beginning may be temporary and settle back into a usual pattern so it is best to evaluate effectiveness in the long-term to decide whether the individual benefits from any particular approach.

- Be wary if you are advised that the individual cannot improve unless one particular approach is used. Every person is different and what works for one person with an ASD may not necessarily work for another. You may also find that the individual may improve to a certain extent without the implementation of any professional approaches. Interventions are mainly used as additional tools to help aid development more quickly and easily.
- Be wary of any method which suggests it is the only/best approach to use and cannot be used alongside other approaches. Many approaches are compatible and can be used alongside others to give the most comprehensive support to an individual with autism.

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