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|  | Management of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) |
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There is no one-size-fits-all intervention or treatment for children with an ASD. The goal is to maximize your child's ability and skills by supporting their development and learning.

**Treatment options**

A diagnosis of ASD brings a multitude of questions about what to do next. You'll need to make important decisions about your child's education and treatment. Because we do not know the cause for ASD, there is no specific treatment that can cure it.

Given our current state of knowledge, there is not just one way to help/teach a child with an ASD1. There is no cure for autism at present, the word ‘treatment’ should only be used in a very limited sense, reflecting interventions aimed at helping people with an ASD to adjust more effectively to their environment.

Management of ASD should begin as early as possible and be tailored to the child’s unique strengths and needs. A variety of evidence based therapies are more likely to promote development, improve behaviour and reduce stress experienced by the child and family. Three common approaches are outlined below. More information can be found at: Raising Children Network2. <http://raisingchildren.net.au/children_with_autism/children_with_autism_landing.html>

**Educational therapies**

Children with an ASD often respond well to highly structured educational programs. Successful programs include parents and professionals working together to improve social skills, communication and behaviour in daily activities. Preschool children who receive individualised behavioural interventions can make good progress.

**Behaviour and communication therapies**

Many programs address the range of social, language and behavioural difficulties associated with ASD. Some programs focus on reducing problem behaviours and teaching new skills. Others focus on teaching children how to act in social situations or how to communicate better with others.

**Family therapies**

Parents and other family members can learn to understand how ASD affects their child and also learn how to play and interact with their children in ways that promote social interaction skills, manage problem behaviours, and teach daily living skills and communication.

**How can I tell whether a suggested therapy is worthwhile?**

This question is often asked by parents/carers of young children with an ASD and also by those professionals who work with them.

Parents and professionals need to make informed decisions about therapy options for children but it can be difficult to work out whether a treatment that is being considered for a particular child is known to be effective.

Ask questions and think critically about ASD treatments3.

* Could the therapy result in harm to my child? (physical or psychological harm)
* Is the therapy developmentally appropriate for my child?
* How will failure of the therapy affect my child and family?
* Has the therapy been validated scientifically?
* How will the therapy be integrated in to my child’s current program?

When you are planning what your child’s intervention will be, ask the people providing ASD programs questions such as:

* How successful has the program been for other children?
* How many children have gone on to regular school and how have they progressed?
* Do staff members have training and experience in working with children with an ASD?
* How are activities planned and organised?
* Are there predictable daily schedules and routines?
* How much individual attention will my child receive?
* How is progress measured?
* Will my child be given tasks and rewards that are personally motivating?
* What is the cost, time commitment, and location of the program?

**Some points to remember about therapies**

* Beware of therapies that promise “cure”
* Beware of therapies that are said to work for all children with an ASD
* Detailed assessments and behaviour, language, cognitive and social skills baselines must be completed before any intervention program can begin so that change can be documented and measured
* Intervention must be sensitive to the development level and skills of each child with an ASD if it is to be effective.

For more information about the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development’s Autism Friendly Learning website go to:

[www.education.vic.gov.au/autism](http://www.education.vic.gov.au/autism)

References

1. Francis, K. (2005). Autism interventions: a critical update. Developmental Medicine & Child Neurology, 47: 493-499

2. Raising Children Network: <http://raisingchildren.net.au/children_with_autism/children_with_autism_landing.html>

3. Freeman, B. (1997). Guidelines for Evaluating Intervention Programs for Children With Autism. Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders, 27, 641-651