

Red Flags And Rules of Thumb in Evaluating Treatments

1. Be suspicious of any treatment which makes grandiose claims, using words like "miraculous," "amazing breakthrough," "recovery," or "cure." Legitimate medical and educational professionals show respect for the uniqueness of each autistic person and the feelings of their family, and therefore never indulge in overstatements and boasts about what they will be able to accomplish. When strategies are particularly successful in helping a person, practitioners do not solicit and use testimonials from the person's family or encourage parents to make such grandiose promises, claims, or predictions of assured success to others.
2. Be suspicious of professionals who publicize and promote their method or program as if it were a standard one-size-fits-all packageable commodity for autism. Since autism is not a "thing" a person "has," but an attempt to capture in a single label a wide range of behavioral adaptations to a wide range of sensory and movement regulatory differences, there can be no such thing as a general treatment "for autism." Likewise, beware of parent support groups dedicated to the promotion of a particular method described as "miraculous." Enthusiastic testimonials from people who claim they have been helped by a product or treatment are no substitute for the evidence gathered through careful, unbiased investigation, and for considering the unique developmental profile of an individual. Avoid efforts to make you feel guilty or inadequate for failing to buy into a treatment or for questioning the eager rhetoric surrounding it.
3. Remember that many treatments are composed of an eclectic mix of helpful and not necessarily helpful components. The more clarity we can achieve about what really helps, then the less time, energy, and money we will waste on unhelpful, incidental, and occasionally harmful treatment components. It is helpful to note the common features in many **effective** interventions, across many different disciplines:
 - a. Slowing down the pace of interactions through modification and accommodation, setting a consistent pattern of activities and interactions that is paced to the person's unique preferences and rhythms.
 - b. Eliminating unnecessary visual, auditory, and other stimuli and distractions which may overwhelm and confuse.
 - c. Giving the person, on a daily basis, as much uninterrupted time and attention as is needed and helpful, and giving time and opportunity for sensory/motor/emotional regulation with no demands.
 - d. Following the person's lead by building on their own enthusiasms and interests.
 - e. Utilizing typical home and community settings and the friendship and support of typically-developing peers.
 - f. Last but not least, sharing with the person a belief in their competence and a delight in their companionship.