

## **A list of therapies for more common challenges (For adults and children)**

by Aimée Engler

Neurodiversity always comes with challenges, and one of the hardest things when a person is diagnosed is to know where to seek out help. The following is a list of therapies that I have compiled based on experience and a bit of 'googling'. If you want info about the three different support areas that you can tap into, including tips for getting the most 'bang for your buck' when it comes to therapy, check out the blog post series entitled, 'Finding Support'.

This guide is divided into 2 parts:

Part 1. A list of therapies and what needs they manage and/or support.

Part 2. A list of needs and subsequent therapies that match.

Thus if you are interested in what an OT does, check out Part 1; if you need to address anxiety and want to see which therapy will help, go straight to Part 2. There are many more therapies out there, as well as many more interventions (there's a difference between the two!). Please let me know if there's something missing or is incorrect.

### **Part 1: Therapies (categorised by 'usualness')**

#### The usual

##### *Occupational Therapy (OT)*

These people do a HUGE range of things, including:

- self-care/independence – eating, dressing, personal hygiene tasks, water safety
- emotional intelligence
- manage sensory processing disorder (and just general sensory issues)
- transitions, routines
- moving around in physical environments (eg. ramps)
- bed wetting
- sleep
- constipation
- dyspraxia (teach new movement skills)
- hydrotherapy – low muscle tone
- food fussiness and sensitivities

- social skills
- learning and focus – create optimal environments
- fine motor skills (eg. holding a pencil, tying shoelaces, etc)
- gross motor skills (eg. ability to run, ride a bike, etc)

### *Speech therapy*

It's all about communication, though they are quite diverse within this field!

- their 'bread and butter' is functional speech, including
  - receptive - understanding what others are saying
  - expressive - stuttering and verbal tics, dropping initial or end sounds, combining sounds.
- literacy (eg. phonemic awareness, reading and writing. Good for dyslexics.)
- social skills
- food issues
- difficulty swallowing
- voice difficulties such as hoarseness and breathiness
- emotional intelligence
- theory of mind
- interoception
- executive functioning
- auditory processing disorder

### *Paediatrician*

- anxiety
- general behaviour
- identification of co-occurrences
- keeps track of all the things going on with a child
- distribute medications (for children)

### *Psychology*

Psychs often specialise/develop expertise in areas so it's a good idea to find one specifically for your needs (eg. do they know autism well? How about autistic girls/women?)

- anxiety (there are even special anxiety clinics).
- depression
- behaviour management plans
- lots of different assessments, including learning disabilities and educational (IQ)

- general counselling and helping with issues.
- self-care – toileting, dressing, eating, etc.
- sleep

## The unusual

### *Audiologist*

This is more of a medical field however it does overlap with neurodevelopment (and sometimes speechies double as audiologists).

- help with deafness, hearing impairment, and speech and communication problems.
- they do lots of testing, including check for auditory processing disorder
- manage hearing problems
- recommend different ways to improve hearing loss (including technology options)
- tinnitus and balance problems

### *Behavioural therapy*

They use play-based therapy to teach children strategies to replace negative behaviour with positive ones. They look at the person on a 'global' level and how different things interact, not seeking to address just one specific area. Note: not all behavioural therapists are qualified so they may not be funded by NDIS; they merely have an interest in the area and experience.

- food therapy
- eating disorders
- trauma
- depression
- attention and focus
- executive functioning
- phobias
- social skills
- behaviour issues
- self-harm
- anxiety
- emotional intelligence
- Cognitive behavioural therapy (play-based)

### *Developmental therapy*

This supports a person's ability to perform developmental tasks and activities, and then creates a customised plan to achieve these goals. They look at the person on a 'global' level and how different things interact, not seeking to address just one specific area.

- gross and fine motor skills.
- self-care activities – eg. toileting, eating, dressing
- communication
- social skills
- emotional intelligence and self-regulation
- behavioural issues
- depression
- anxiety
- executive functioning
- attention difficulties
- links into other services and do evaluations and assessments (eg. auditory, motor skills, SPD, visual)

### *Naturopath*

Just a note about naturopaths: if they start speaking about 'curing autism', walk away – at best they'll probably waste your money, at worst they'll land your child in hospital. If they say, 'I think we can work on that issue', then stay and hear them out. Sometimes sleep issues may be an issue with the body not producing gabba, or perhaps irritable behaviour is due to bowel issues in which a probiotic may be super helpful. Often over-the-counter vitamins are a waste of money and naturopaths have access to the good stuff! There are natural alternatives to many of those meds which are prescribed by doctors, but always ask if what they prescribe is 'evidence-based'; ie. have studies been done on these supplements to show that they work, and can you access these studies to check. If they have no idea what you're talking about... run!

- diet
- anxiety
- gut health
- behaviour resulting from toxin build-up
- hormone levels
- sleep disturbances
- depression
- focus and attentiveness

### *Social worker*

Many social workers have jobs as case managers, meaning they connect with the individual or family and work with them personally or link them in with other services, agencies or programmes. They can also be counsellors, psychotherapists, family support workers and community development workers.

- mental health
- relationship and behavioural issues
- parenting issues
- family violence
- trauma
- grief

### *Physio*

You may know physios as the person to see when your back hurts or your knee needs strengthening, however they also specialise in gross motor and planning.

- dyspraxia – improve gross and/or fine motor skills
- balance (inner ear) problems
- proprioception – where body is in space
- coordination
- gait disorders – pigeon toe, toe walking
- hydrotherapy – low muscle tone

### *Psychiatrist*

These are medical doctors trained in mental health and complex disorders. They are also the only ones who can prescribe ADHD medication to adults, which makes them highly sought after (paediatricians help spread the load with kids).

- anxiety
- OCD
- depression
- mental illness such as schizophrenia, personality disorders
- self-harming behaviour
- eating disorders
- trauma, PTSD
- distribute medication (for children and adults)

## The almost unheard of

### *Art therapy*

Like psychology combined with art (though they're not usually trained psychs). Uses various forms of art (painting, drawing, photography, sculpture, craft, etc) to connect with a person and help them develop emotional intelligence, etc. The attendee doesn't have to be particularly arty.

- general counselling and psychotherapy
- behaviour issues
- emotional intelligence and self-regulation
- reduce stress
- improve self-esteem and awareness
- help communicate feelings

### *Exercise physiologist*

Autism can prevent a person from engaging in typical exercise. For example, group sports may be ruled out due to difficulties in socialising or emotional regulation, or running might be impeded due to motor coordination deficits. Yet exercise helps the body function well, can fulfil sensory needs, be a positive replacement for harmful stimming, and increase social opportunities (to name a few positive aspects). Exercise physiologists plan an exercise programme tailored to an individual's needs.

- behaviour issues
- improve motor planning and skills
- improve social opportunities
- sensory issues
- overall health and fitness
- focus and attention

### *Music therapy*

Like art therapy, its psychology + music (though they're usually not trained psychs). Again, the attendee doesn't have to be musically talented.

- improve communication and speech
- reduce anxiety and stress
- emotional intelligence and self-regulation
- manage challenging behaviour
- social skills
- improve gross and fine motor control, balance
- sleep

- attention and focus
- executive function
- reduce pain perception

### *Neurotherapy*

Psychologists who look at how the brain functions and attempt to re-write the brain directly through a series of activities (some technology-based, others 'analogue').

- learning disabilities
- communication
- attention and focus issues
- executive functioning
- anxiety
- depression
- sleep issues
- chronic pain
- trauma
- assessments – speech, autism, ADHD, learning

### *Play therapy*

The therapist will get down on the child's level (literally on the floor, if necessary) and engage in whatever the child wants to do. They play with them, allowing the child to lead the therapy session while gently directing and guiding behaviour.

- social skills
- trauma
- relating to other people
- theory of mind
- emotional health
- anxiety

## **Part 2: Needs**

### *Anxiety*

Art therapy

Behavioural therapy

Developmental therapy

Exercise physiologist

Music therapy

Naturopath  
Neurotherapy  
Paediatrician  
Play therapy  
Psychiatrist  
Psychology

*Assessments*

Audiology  
Developmental therapy  
Neurotherapy  
Psychology  
Speech therapy

*Attention and focus*

Developmental therapy  
Exercise physiologist  
Music therapy  
Naturopath  
Neurotherapy  
OT

*Behaviour*

Art therapy  
Behavioural therapy  
Developmental therapy  
Exercise physiologist  
Music therapy  
Naturopath  
Paediatrician  
Play therapy  
Psychiatrist  
Psychologist  
Social worker

*Emotional intelligence and self-regulation*

Art therapy  
Behavioural therapy  
Music therapy



OT

Play therapy

Psychology

Speech therapy

### *Executive functioning*

Behavioural therapy

Developmental therapy

Music therapy

Naturopath

Speech therapy

### *Food/eating*

Behavioural therapy

Naturopath

OT

Psychiatrist

Speech therapy

You can also look into specific food therapy places as well as dieticians.

### *Learning disorders*

Neurotherapy

Speech therapy

You might also want to check out Behavioural Optometrist to ensure it's not a vision issue.

### *Medication*

Paediatrician

Naturopath

GPs

### *Motor skills*

Developmental therapy

Exercise physiologist

Music therapy

OT

Physio

### *Self-care/independence*

Developmental therapy

OT

Psychology

### *Sleep*

Music therapy

Naturopath

Neurotherapy

OT

Psychology

### *Social skills*

Behavioural therapy

Community groups: Scouts, Autism SA

Developmental therapy

Music therapy

Play therapy

Specific social skills groups

Speech therapy

OT

### *Speech and communication*

Art therapy

Audiologist

Developmental therapy

Music therapy

Neurotherapy

Play therapy

Speech therapy

### *Other interesting therapies/groups*

cooking groups – food, social, self-care/independence

craft groups – social, motor skills

lego therapy – social, executive functioning, communication, emotional intelligence

drama – communication, social

fitness groups – social, motor skills