The most effective treatments for autism

Since the discovery of autism major gains have been accomplished in helping others understand what it is and helping those who are diagnosed. While there is no cure for autism there are a variety of treatments that are used today. Defined as having “difficulties in social interaction, verbal and nonverbal communication and repetitive behaviors.” (Autism Speaks 2014) It seems that autism begins in the early stages of brain development. The most obvious signs tend to show from ages 2 to 3 years old. From the beginning researchers did not have a clue as to why it occurred recent research has shown that there isn’t just one cause. Just like everyone individuals with autism are unique. They are known to have exceptional abilities in the areas of visual skills, music, and academic skills. Studies to date have involved music, animals, treatment used with medicine, exposure to different sensory techniques, and different diets. So with the many advances in technology and research concerning autism it is just a matter of time until the best treatments are pinpointed.

Travis Thompson is a professor in the department of Educational Psychology at the University of Minnesota. In his article he discusses the history, progress, and challenges of autism. He states that the development in technology and brain imaging has led to a deeper understanding of autism. Thompson says progress made has allowed for the treatment to become so advanced that most children with autism can participate in classrooms alongside their peers. This has been allowed because of the treatment technique known as early intensive behavioral intervention. Thompson attributes effective intervention to a strategy based on principles of applied behavior analysis by Baer in 1968. Before this many were trying to treat children with the disorder by using psychoanalytic therapy because they believed Bettelheim’s 1967 study. He said that it was a psychogenic disorder likely caused by parenting not of the genetic origin. in addition to early intervention for autism, the article mentions that behavioral analytic was a choice for treating autism. This idea was attributed to Burrhus Skinner and O. Lovass. Skinner offended many because in his studies he used rats and to imply that they reacted the same way to their surroundings as humans offended many. Lovass although he did not work directly with Skinner proved his theory correct and his study proved to be highly effective and the results lasted. The article also mentions a cognitive developmental alternative. The results indicated that the participants experienced an increase in certain physical skills but did not show any elementary understanding, self-reported empathic skills or parent reported social behavior did not improve In the summary he makes a point that it is unlikely for a single medical treatment to be developed for all forms of autism. He also admits that a neglected area has been studying the transition from adolescent to adulthood for individuals with autism. This treatment includes specifically tending to the needs of the child with autism.

Robson wrote an article that focused on therapies that are beneficial to children with autism and do not place extra stress on them. The article looked at many factors contributing to autism such as the mother’s health, the baby’s health at birth, breastfeeding, and some other factors. Robson concluded that an approach that featured multiple options was best. In the article exercise, acupuncture, and animal assisted therapy. There were also some dietary approaches that included vitamins that were mentioned for ways to improved symptoms. There was no statistical evidence to back the use of acupuncture. Robert Selles and Eric Storch examined anxiety treatment for kids with autism. There is limited empirical support for antidepressants although it is commonly prescribed. More is needed to prove the efficacy for the treatment. Studies to date have been small. In the article they say that some studies have used large sample sizes many have been underpowered to have the results analyzed. There is hope that someday
soon enough research will be available to say which treatment is most effective for children with autism and anxiety. Along with these many different treatments there are also sensory and musical approaches.

Shaun Heasley of the journal PALAESTRA writes that there is a study that says sensory experiences can be beneficial to children with autism. Sensory therapy has been used to teach children with autism to tolerate sound, touch and other potentially challenging sensory experiences. The goals of this study were set by the parents. The study observed 32 children with autism from age 4 to 8. The results as expected favored the experimental group. They needed less help from their parents with self-care and socialization. Schaaf an occupational therapist and neuro scientist did state that she believes the study needs to be replicated with a larger number of participants. In theory I believe that this treatment could work. Time and effort are definitely something that would impact the behavior of a child with autism. Music is something that can be incorporated in people’s day smoothly. Ralio, Traficante, and Oasi wanted to observe the process of music therapy and analyze its content from a clinical, relational and music therapeutical point of view. They wanted to do this intersubjectively. The results showed that one participant show improvement in level of functioning. At the time of his first trial he had a level of development that was equivalent to 17 month of age with potential to reach 24 months. Overall they found a good increase in the patient’s nonverbal behavior. They concluded that the development of sonorous music can also show the potential therapeutic results reached through music therapeutic treatment. I think that if you coupled therapy like this with other therapies you could reach maximum positive effects. A therapy that could possibly be combined might be equine assisted therapy.

Lanning a professor at Baylor University examined the effects of equine assisted activities on autism. Quality of life assessments were used to assess the behavior changes. For 9 weeks children with autism participated in equine assisted activities. At the end of the day improvement was reported by the parents in many different areas of quality of life. Parents are left with a choice of whether or not to have their child participate as no treatment that has been proven to work has been name the best. Results from this study have a probability rate of 75% positive improvement. This lends credit to the fact that equine assisted therapy is effective.

Givona A. Sandiford, Karen J. Mainess, and Noha S. Daher did a study where they wanted to study the efficacy of Melodic Based communication therapy to traditional speech and language therapy. They found that melodic based communication therapy proved to be a valid form of therapy for children with autism. Twelve participants were assigned randomly to either the traditional group or the group. The groups were measured by the number of 25 target words that they successfully learned. Efficacy was evaluated by the number of verbal attempts, number of correct words, number of words reported by the parents in the home and number of imitative attempts. A faster rate for learning was discovered in the melodic based communication therapy. They state that “intensity of the treatment and the highly specific nature of reinforcers” (Sandiford, Mainess,Daher,2012, p.1305 ) may have played a role in the progress. The effectiveness to which humans pick things up depends on many things. Atmosphere and circumstances play a big part in how humans function.

Many of the articles that I used above have focused on just children with autism. There is the possibility that the children may have more than just one thing affecting them. Van Steensel, Bogels, and de Bruin collaborated to write Psychiatric Comorbidity in children with autism spectrum disorders: a comparison to children with adhd. Their study was interesting because of the higher numbers. 53% of
children with autism had at least one comorbid disorder as compared to 40% of children with ADHD.

Anxiety is common for many people. Imagine how common it could be for someone who is plagued by having difficulties interacting in a social setting.

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The study that involved putting the kids with autism in different sensory experiences showed an increase in the child’s ability to tolerate sounds, touch and other potentially challenging sensory experiences. The researchers did state that they wanted to do the study with a larger group of participants. The results of the equine therapy also showed an improvement in children with autism. This program consisted of working with horses for nine weeks. Quality of life assessments were used to measure the improvement.

Equine therapy is the use of horses as a mean of therapy. Animal assisted therapy is nothing new but the effects are becoming recognized by a wider array of people. Positive effects of equine therapy include a sense of self-efficacy and self-esteem, knowledge and well-being, as well improving the quality of life for people. (Rothe, 2005, p. 375) With a child that has autism the symptoms they'll likely the show common symptoms of poor development of social interaction, communication, and behavior. These are traits that are proven to be improved by using animal therapy. In the study performed for nine weeks the children participated in equine assisted activities. They participated in therapeutic riding sessions for nine weeks. To make the program successful and to produce improvement in the children consistency needs to be key. The program could be run in a quiet setting away from social distractions. A change from the study could be that the program runs for a longer time. Gaining the child’s trust and putting them at ease with the horse is very important. There are more options than just riding the horse, just being around the horse or perhaps touching and seeing has been proven to be beneficial. The use of horses in the article had a probability rate of 75% improvement in physical and social functioning (Lanning, 2014, p. 1905).

These articles show that there are treatments available and that the results are positive. This is just a small amount of what is out there. As stated earlier everyone is unique and that could mean different results for your child.

Citations


