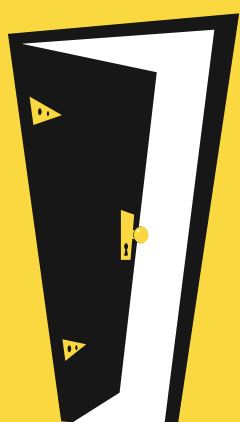


THE START OF YOUR CHILD'S

# Therapy Journey



**MY THERAPY HOUSE**  
Opening doors in communication and relationships

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## PURPOSE OF THIS BOOKLET

The purpose of this booklet is to help parents unravel the complexities they are faced with when embarking on a journey with their child. We have worked with many children and families who present with individual profiles that may compliment or challenge each other. We wanted to help families who are starting the journey to reflect on who they are in terms of their profiles and to become more confident in making decisions to suit their individual profiles and preferences which will ultimately help their child.

It's important to listen to others - but at the end of the day, the hundreds of families we have spoken to have always said to us, "This feels right," or "This doesn't match with what I was thinking." Parents know. Parents know what is right for their child and their family. We just need to stop and listen to ourselves and align with people who understand us and who are woven from the same cloth as us, our tribe, if you like - because jumping around from one place to another, from one therapist to another will just confuse you and your child. This is a long haul journey which you can take in first class or economy. It's up to you. It's important to do work on yourself as a parent so you are able to support your child the best you can.

So sit back and relax and take on things in this booklet which resonate with you, and let go of things which don't.

**There is no right way or wrong way - there is just your child's and your way.**



# Chapter One

## THE OVERWHELM

### THE INITIAL STAGES AND INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES

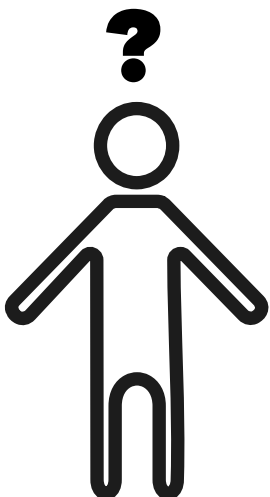
Before you have a child, you have hopes and dreams for your child. Perhaps you dreamt of your child's arrival and what life would be like with your child and for your child. Watching your child develop, waiting for that first cuddle, that first smile, first word, first step. You possibly dreamt of being a family and what the future would bring.

Then you start seeing differences in your child, comparing the way he or she is developing, compared with the way siblings or peers have developed. You become worried. You start looking things up on the internet, talking to your family and friends (or not) and visiting various medical practitioners for answers.

You can't sleep, can't eat - your child's challenges take up all of your head and heart room - I just want to help my child! You try not to get upset by unhelpful comments *"There's nothing like this in our family"*, *"Why isn't he/she talking yet?"* Family and friends may not visit as often.

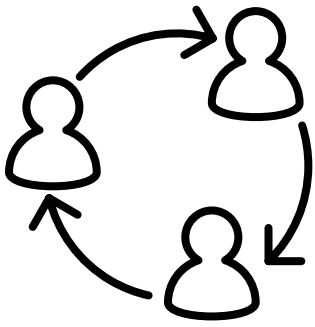
*"What is wrong with my child & how can I help?"*

There is so much information out there. So much advice.



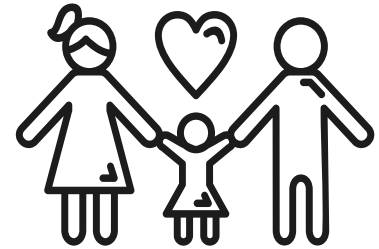
- WHERE DO I START?
- HOW EXPENSIVE WILL IT BE?
- HOW LONG ARE THE WAITING LISTS?
- WHAT TO DO AND WHAT NOT TO DO?
- WHAT IS THE RIGHT APPROACH TO HELP MY CHILD?
- WHAT IS THE RIGHT APPROACH FOR ME AND MY FAMILY?

It is important in these moments to go back to your own beliefs and values and your learning styles. Each parent, child and family will be different. Some families will be more structured with a focus on academics, while other families will be more playful. Whatever your family's style - this is the approach you may need to take so you feel grounded, centred and understand the language that health professionals are using.



At My Therapy House ® we have free initial consults with families for the purpose of working out what type of therapy the family is looking for and what type of therapy will make the family feel the most comfortable. Sometimes, as therapists, we may feel a play based approach may be more suitable for the child, but the family is adamant they want a more structured table top approach where the child is taught fine motor skills, language concepts and specific play skills. This is totally fine. It is important for you to start where you are at, and feel comfortable with the therapist and their approach.

### KNOW WHAT APPROACH YOU ARE COMFORTABLE WITH AND SEEK HELP IF NEEDED



It is important for you to know what approach you are comfortable with. Whether it's play based, pretend play, sensory play, books, table top tasks, specific teaching.

From there, think about your child's profile.

- Will they be able to sit at a table and do fine motor tasks, or are they not ready for this phase of development yet?
- What does your child need right now in their development and will you be comfortable in helping your child develop starting where THEY are at?

If not - and this evokes lots of angst and uncertainty, then we recommend parents help themselves first by seeking out a good professional counsellor or psychologist. It's important to work on our own beliefs and values and explore any blocks we may have which may be from the way we were or were not parented. At My Therapy House® our motto is

⚡ **YOUR CHILD WILL BE OK IF YOU,  
AS A PARENT OR CARER,  
ARE OK.** ⚡

Having a child with special needs is often very stressful and brings with it lots of questions and anxiety. It's important therefore, that parents seek mental health support for themselves to help them be the best they can be for their child(ren) in the moment.

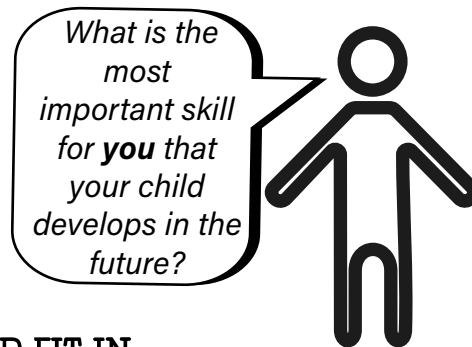
# Chapter Two

## DOCTOR'S ORDERS

### IT'S NOT ALL ABOUT TALKING OR BEING TOILET TRAINED

Often when and if you have received a diagnosis for your child, the doctor will more than often suggest your child sees either a Speech Pathologist or Occupational Therapist to help them with their talking, playing and eating and/or toilet training.

It's unfortunate that at this stage, many doctors don't understand the child's individual profile and may not ask the parent:



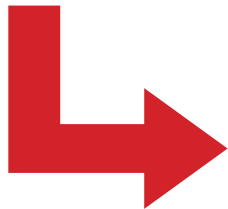
### I JUST WANT TO BELONG AND FIT IN

More often than not, the answer is, *"To have friends, to belong, to fit in."* Although Speech Pathologists and Occupational Therapists can work on these areas, it is important that these professionals understand child development, and especially the foundation skills needed BEFORE talking, playing, eating and toilet training. It's like building a house - you cannot put up the walls and roof without building the foundations and frames first. Some children who come to our practice are not even able to get out of the car, stay in the room with another person or focus on a person or object. This is where we rely on the Occupational Therapist (and other professionals) to help parents understand their child's profile. Often when we start talking about the profile to the parents, parents start opening up about their own profile to us. For example, *"I really hate messy play," "I'm scared of heights," "I cannot handle loud noises," "I cannot stand clutter - everything needs to be ordered."*

All of these realisations or *"a-ha!"* moments, help us gain a better understanding of ourselves and how our profile as the child's parents may support or challenge the child's development. For example, if I think learning numbers and alphabet, as well as colours and shapes are important, but my child thinks learning about his body and how it interacts with objects in his environment are important, then there is going to be a mismatch of the profiles which will impact the child's development.

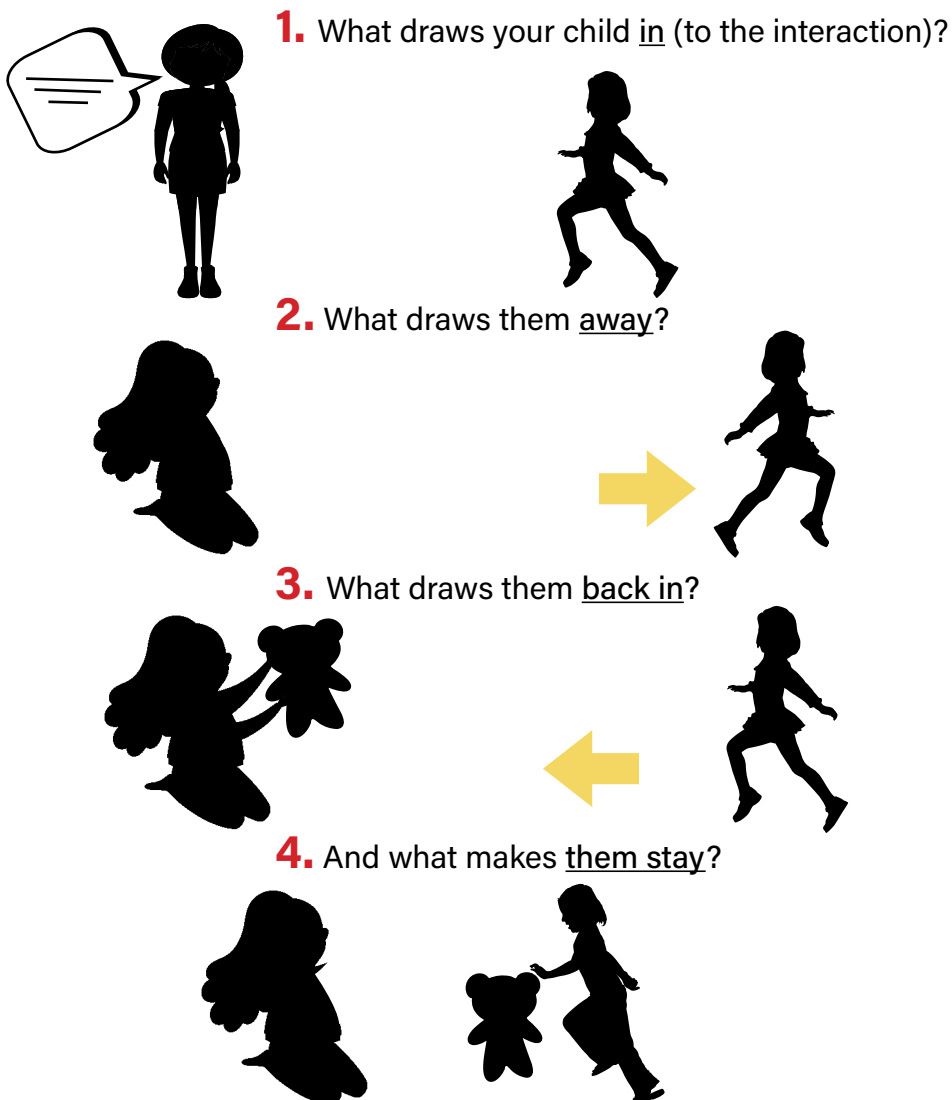
## NOT ABOUT WHAT THERAPY YOUR CHILD NEEDS, BUT WHO CLICKS WITH YOUR CHILD THE BEST

When children come into our clinic, we don't think about what therapies the child needs. We think about who will be the right person and what will be the best modality to help the child and parent start on their journey and lay strong foundations for the future. For example, the parent will often call us and say they want, "Speech Pathology for their child to help them talk," but if the child has challenges staying in the room because of their high anxiety, then they may need to work on these skills first, helping them to trust others and be with another person.



Our Early Childhood Educator, who is very playful, often clicks best with the most sensitive children. This then reduces the child's anxiety, helps them stay in the room and helps them be with another person (besides their parent). This then opens them up for learning, play, listening and vocalising, as well as sharing ideas nonverbally, which are the foundation skills for communication.

Michele Ricamato is a Speech Language Pathologist in the USA.  
Her questions help us understand the child and their profile a little better:



**THESE QUESTIONS  
ARE VITAL TO HELP  
UNDERSTAND YOUR  
CHILD'S PROFILE.**

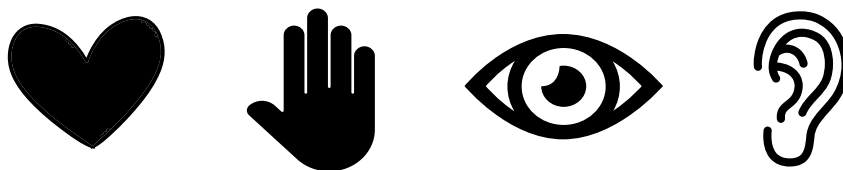
# Chapter Three

## HOW DO YOU KNOW WHO YOUR CHILD CLICKS WITH?

### UNDERSTANDING INDIVIDUAL PROFILES

Each of us has an individual profile.

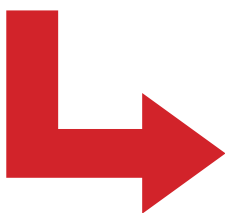
We all have a way of feeling, sensing, viewing, hearing and perceiving our world.



Some of us may really enjoy loud noises, while others may like silence. Some of us will love fast and high rides at the shows, while others would prefer to have both feet firmly on the ground. Some of us may become overwhelmed by too much visual information and visual billboards and advertising, while others may seek lots of lights and bling.

Knowing what soothes and relaxes us and what agitates and frustrates us is very important. This may help us feel calm, regulated and take in information and learn, or it may make us feel dysregulated and overwhelmed.

Children also have their individual profiles. It is important that your child's therapist is able to work with you to unveil your child's profile to help you better understand how to support him or her in staying calm and alert to take on information, learn, communicate, play and socialise. It is important that when you have been to a therapy session with your child that you come out feeling you have gained information about yourself and/or your child and what you could do to support your child's development between sessions.



When working with a therapist consider asking the therapist questions about **what they are seeing**, and **what they are doing** and **why they are doing it**. A good therapist will be able to explain what they see and why they are responding to your child in a certain way. They will be able to highlight the nuances of your child's profile and what supports them to stay calm, take on information, and be in the just right space for learning.

Sometimes taking short videos of your child's sessions may be helpful (with the permission of the therapist) to help you remember what was said/discussed or shown. Videos can also help your child remember and rehearse the play ideas in their mind ready for the next session.



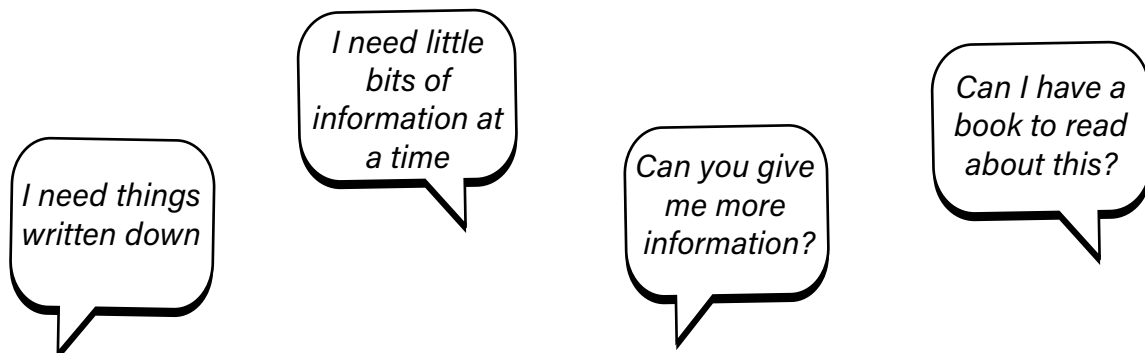
## COMMUNICATE, COMMUNICATE, COMMUNICATE !

It is important you feel a connection with your child's therapist.

We all communicate and socialise differently. Sometimes people use minimal words to communicate and may communicate using single word answers, some people may communicate using lots of words and complex phrases. Some people may communicate using fast speech and high pitch sounds and/or loud volume, while others may speak slowly using low vocal tones. The way another communicates with us will either help or interfere with us on focusing on what they are saying and taking on information. Have you ever been in a room with someone and when you have come out and were asked what they said your response was 'A lot was said but I am not sure what they were saying.' At other times, you may feel like you are 'speaking to a wall and not getting anything back.'



It is important that you feel comfortable with the communication style of your child's therapist and therefore, feel comfortable in communicating with them about your child's development. If you feel you cannot communicate with your child's therapist let them know - maybe they can change or adapt their communication style. Be clear and specific to help them know what to change or adapt.



If, when you have let your child's therapist know how you prefer to be communicated with, and they are not able to change their communication style for whatever reason, then perhaps you may need to look for another therapist for your child. There are many therapists out there - it's about finding the right one which fits with your child's and your own profiles - given you will be your child's primary support person and you will need to work with them to support your child's development.

We often tell families, *"If you don't let us know what we could do better, then how can we do it better?"*

Don't be afraid to speak up and advocate for your child's and your own learning and communication styles.

Most of the time, therapists really appreciate this and make the necessary changes needed.

# Chapter Four

## FINDING THE RIGHT THERAPY PRACTICE

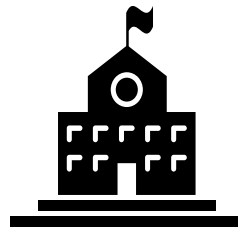
### DIFFERENT TYPES OF SUPPORTS AND SERVICES

Currently, there are many different therapists and service providers providing therapeutic support for children. Different children and families will need different types of therapies, approaches and practices.

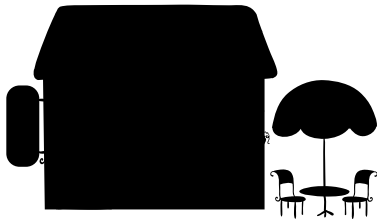
Some practices will deliver therapy:



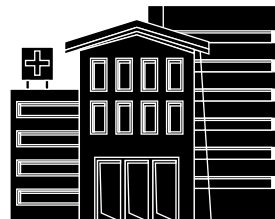
- Within the home



- Within the educational setting



- Within the community



- Within a clinic

There is no one right way of delivering a therapy service. It's what fits into your family's lifestyle and schedule.

Each therapist is doing the best they can with what they know and what they have got. Some therapy practices will consist of just one therapist, some will consist of many therapists, some will have different therapists working as a multidisciplinary team.

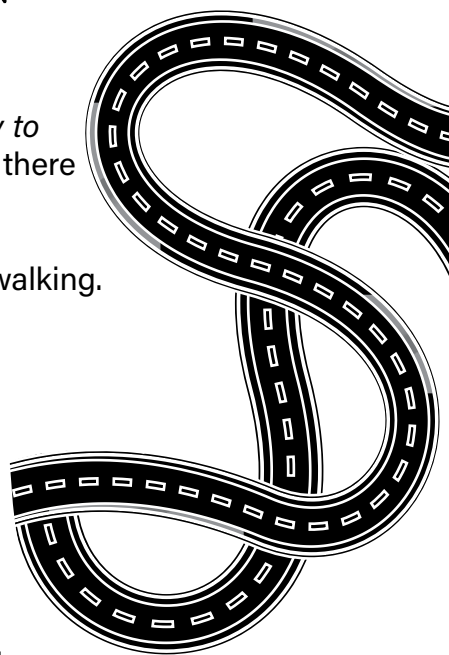
### YOUR CHILD'S GOALS ARE IMPORTANT

It's important to be clear about your child's goals and know what they are. They aren't just statements on a National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) plan - they have been formed for a reason. If you are not sure what your child's goals should be, talk to someone who understands your child and your child's development. They will be able to help you with your child's next steps on their development journey. Unachievable goals which have been written too high for your child to achieve in 12 months often leave the family disillusioned and deflated. Knowing your child's goals and believing in those goals will help you find and choose the best practice, approach and people to meet them and support your child's development.

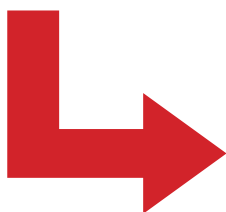
## DIFFERENT WAYS OF GETTING TO THE SAME DESTINATION

We always give the analogy of travelling to a destination. We may all want to reach the same destination e.g. *"developing my child's ability to communicate with family members,"* but the way we are going to get there may be different.

Some of us may travel by plane, some by train, some by bike, some walking.



Some of us will get there faster than others, and that's OK. So the speed of getting to that destination may be different for each child as will the modality. Some may need to work with a Speech Pathologist, some with a Psychologist, some with the Early Childhood Educator, some with a Music Therapist and some with an Occupational Therapist. It will depend on the best match to your child's profile.



Different professionals may work on your child achieving their communication goal within the scope of their individual differences. For example, we have worked with children who move a lot. The Occupational Therapist at My Therapy House® works on the child's communication within a sensory motor environment. This way, the child is more open to listening and learning while they are moving. They are more motivated to communicate while they are doing what they love. Their early words may be all around their passion and what is meaningful for them - movement.

Some children love pretend-play. The Early Childhood Educator at My Therapy House® works on the children's communication through her expertise in play. The child may be very motivated to play and therefore communicate while playing. They may learn to understand different concepts through their play as well as how to interact and communicate with another person. We see faster improvements in the child's communication when the right modality, which meets the child's interest and passion and which is most meaningful to the child, is used to work on the child's goal.

It is often helpful if a therapy practice has different modalities available (i.e. different disciplines) who work together as a team to address each child's unique goals, depending on the child's unique way of learning at the time. The way of learning and their interests and passion may change over time.

Sometimes your child will need a number of practices to meet his or her goal as there may be expertise in different therapy providers that your child needs at the one time.

**It is important not to overwhelm your child with too much therapy and have space for your child just to be themselves and have some time with you and their siblings.**

## **IT'S NOT ABOUT THE TYPE OF THERAPY, BUT ABOUT THE CHILD'S GOAL**

When parents call us, they say their child needs to see a Speech Pathologist and/or Occupational Therapist. This often comes from what other people have told the parents or what parents have traditionally heard in the therapy circles. Parents rarely talk about their child's goals.

It's a shame that people are referring children to a discipline, e.g. a Speech Pathologist, rather than to a practice who may specialise in a certain area e.g. play, early childhood supports, working with anxious children, social groups, parent-child relationships, children's individual profiles. For example, at our practice, we specialise in working with children in the early years and children who have emotional sensitivities. We have all received different training in these areas as a whole team and individually. We will meet with families for a free initial meeting to ascertain if we are the right fit for that family and child, and if not, we will refer to a practice that may better suit their individual profiles and needs.

When a child presents to us, and if we know we can meet his or her needs, then we determine together with the family during the assessment, who would be the best person to work with the child. This is determined by considering therapists' training and expertise e.g. relationship and interaction building, sensory motor and awareness of self and other, or social development and play.

## **NOT ALL THERAPISTS ARE THE SAME**

Parents also need to realise that not all Speech Pathologists or Occupational Therapists or Physiotherapists will be the same. Some of us may work with children, but our approaches will be different. Again, this will depend on the therapist's individual profile and preferred way of working. For example, some Speech Pathologists may like table-top activities, some may like using technology, others may use worksheets, while others may focus on pretend play or sensory motor activities. Some Speech Pathologists will specialise in helping children with their understanding of language, some may specialise in the way they pronounce their sounds and words, some may specialise in social skills while others may work more on the foundation skills needed for language development. It is important that you find the right type of therapy practice for your child's learning and development.

## **WAITING LISTS**

Unfortunately, many practices now have long waiting lists. It is important to let the practice know why you would like your child to attend. For example, you may be interested in working with therapists who specialise in play, who work as a team, who work using a particular approach, for example, Marte Meo®, Development Relationship Based Approach or Applied Behaviour Analysis. This will also help the practice in managing their waiting lists or refer you to someone who may also be appropriate but may have more openings.

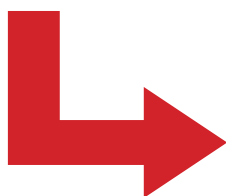
# Chapter Five

## GIVING THE THERAPIST A GO

Once you have found the right therapist and the right practice, try sticking with them for a while. Remember, your relationship with the therapist will be only as good as your communication with the therapist.

### MANAGING EXPECTATIONS

It is important you clarify your expectations with your therapist from the outset. For example, if you want your therapist to help your child talk in 6 months and your child needs work on other skills to strengthen his or her foundations in development, it is important that you let your therapist know about this and also it is important that your therapist clarifies what they are doing. One parent told us she had brought her child to Speech Pathology but was not expecting the Speech Pathologist to work using the Thomas the Tank Engine. If you have questions - ask. If you are not sure what your therapist is doing and why - ask. Sometimes therapists assume that parents have the same knowledge base they do.



### BUT MY CHILD DOESN'T LIKE THOMAS THE TRAIN

There are many assumptions that people make about each other and about how our world functions. If your child isn't interested (or you think they are not interested) in a particular toy or play theme, let your therapist know. Maybe your child isn't interested because not enough meaning was made around these toys or play themes. Maybe your child appears as though they aren't interested because they have no ideas around the play themes.

We once saw a very young client whose parents told us the child wasn't interested in any children's songs - only opera. It appeared that the child hadn't heard any children's songs or experienced their parents being joyful and playful around the songs - only opera. Often our own interests as adults will guide what our child may be interested in and learn how to play with. These are all discussions you can have with your therapist.



## LET YOUR THERAPIST KNOW WHO ELSE YOUR CHILD IS SEEING

It's important to let your therapist know who else your child is seeing. Try not to compare therapists - because each therapist will be different. Look for what your child's therapist can give your child and you in this moment:

- Are they contributing to your child's development?
- Are they helping you understand your child better and supporting you to support your child's development?
- How? If not - then it may be time to have a chat with the therapist and maybe look for another therapist.

Moving from one therapist to another can be quite disruptive to your child, especially if they take time to build relationships and trust. Children need time to get to know a person, place and extend their skills. The more your therapist knows what your child is doing when they are not seeing them the better prepared your therapist can be, as well as working with any other therapists involved.

### ARE THERE ANY AREAS YOU WOULD LIKE YOUR THERAPIST TO WORK ON?

If something has happened during the week that you would like your therapist to address with your child, let them know before the session, either via email or phone call. Your therapist may or may not be able to address these areas, but will be ready. It's best not to talk about your child in front of them. If you have a lot to talk about with your therapist, you may wish to organise a separate appointment with them when your child is not present.

### SESSIONS WITH THE PARENT ARE JUST AS IMPORTANT AS SESSIONS WITH THE CHILD

Therapists who work with the child should always be working with the parent as well, by letting them know what they are doing and why, providing them with strategies, and providing them with opportunities to practice the strategies. A hands on approach with the parent is most beneficial because then the parent can go home and use the strategies with the child. Remember, the child may only see the therapist for one or two sessions every week or every 2 weeks. The more you can learn as a parent, the better, because then you can use opportunities at home to help your child develop his or her skills. Again, if you don't know - ask!



### IT'S OK TO MOVE ON

If your therapist refers your child to another therapist it's OK to move on. This may mean that the therapist knows that your child needs help, outside of their specialist area. Be thankful and grateful to your therapist for suggesting the move if they know there is someone with more skills out there, and not continuing to see your child out of habit. Ensure the therapist you see will refer to other therapists when your child's needs change and it's time to move. At our practice we refer our clients to other therapists when we know we can not offer them the same effective and efficient therapeutic support, like another therapist could. Don't take it personally. See it as a gift from the therapist to your child's journey of development.



Remember, it takes a village to raise a child.

# Chapter Six

## LOOK AFTER YOURSELF

Remember, while your child is receiving all this therapy and may be attending different appointments it is important for you, as your child's champion, advocate, and carer, to look after yourself, because without you, your child would have difficulty in advancing in their development. When travelling on an aeroplane, you are instructed, in the case of an emergency, to put an oxygen mask on yourself before putting on your child's mask. This is because if you cannot breathe then you won't be able to fit the child's mask.

It's the same with self care: if you don't look after yourself, then you won't be there to look after your child. It's important that you seek help if needed. Talk to your family, friends, service providers, government bodies; talk to your therapist - they may be able to refer you to a mental health professional to talk to.



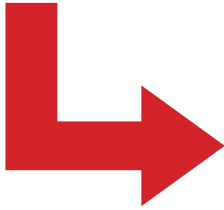
It's important that, in this complex world, when raising a child with special needs and sensitivities you have an outlet you can access for support. This may be a friendship group, your faith, a mental health practitioner, or all of these. At My Therapy House®, we often recommend parents seek mental health support for themselves to help them navigate their feelings around having a child with special needs. It is important to know that you are not "*weak*" or a "*failure*" for doing this. It takes courage and strength to face your own fears and vulnerabilities and work on these.

The stronger you become in your own resilience and understand your own triggers and sensitivities - the more you will be able to help your child.

At My Therapy House®, all of our staff receive supervision in a professional way from therapists outside of our organisation as well as seek mental health support to work on their own profiles so they can best support the clients and families they work with.

It is important that the practice you choose for your child, also understands the importance of mental health support for the parents as well as for themselves.





## SOME USEFUL CONTACTS

**PLACE:** SA Child and Youth Health  
**FOR:** All aspects of parenting  
**WEBSITE:** <http://www.cyh.com>

**PLACE:** Parent Helpline South Australia  
**FOR:** Parent Support  
**PHONE:** 1300 364 100  
**WEBSITE:** [SA Parent Helpline](http://www.parent-helpline.com.au)

**PLACE:** Relationships South Australia  
**FOR:** Relationships and Family Support  
**PHONE:** 1300 364 277  
**WEBSITE:** <http://www.rasa.org.au>

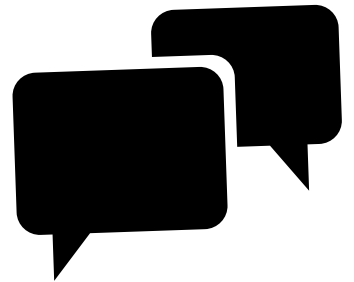
**PLACE:** Kids Help Line  
**FOR:** Mental Health Support for Kids  
**PHONE:** 1800 55 1800  
**WEBSITE:** <https://kidshelpline.com.au/>

**PLACE:** 13 SICK  
**FOR:** After-hours family medical care  
**PHONE:** 13 7425  
**WEBSITE:** <https://homedoctor.com.au/>

**PLACE:** BeyondBlue  
**FOR:** Mental Health Support  
**PHONE:** 1300 22 4636  
**WEBSITE:** <https://beyondblue.org.au>

**PLACE:** National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS)  
**FOR:** Support and access to disability services  
**PHONE:** 1800 800 110  
**WEBSITE:** <https://www.ndis.gov.au/>

**PLACE:** Autism SA  
**FOR:** Autism services and advocacy  
**PHONE:** 1300 288 476  
**WEBSITE:** <https://www.autismsa.org.au/>





# Chapter Seven

## IN A NUTSHELL

Starting the therapy journey can be overwhelming for you and your child. It is important you find the right medical, therapeutic, educational, and social support for your child and yourself. This could take time. It's OK if, for the first 18 months (or more), you work on navigating through the complex world of any diagnosis, therapies, supports and the NDIS.

This is a long distance journey where you need to learn to listen to your own gut feelings. If something doesn't look, sound, or feel right let it go and move on. The right approach and therapist will appear at the right time.

Believe in yourself as your child's parent and think about who your child is and what approach is the best approach for your child's profile. Will your child run into the therapy sessions and want to stay in the room, or will you need to take them in kicking and screaming? If it's the latter, then maybe that approach isn't the right approach or therapist isn't the right one for your child. Children are intelligent beings, and innately they know what they need. They are highly sensitive and can feel people and situations around them, although they may not be able to understand them yet.

The most important thing is that your child has space and time to be a child; to have fun, find joy, find themselves while developing skills, and that you make time for yourself to regroup and recuperate when needed as your child's biggest fan.

Close your eyes, take a breath and think about all the things you are learning by being the amazing parent you are to your beautiful child. He or she is in your life for a reason. Embrace the journey and seek support when needed. And if you don't know or don't understand: stop, ask and listen. The answers will reveal themselves!

Thank you to all the families and children who have gone before and helped us learn so much about helping and supporting other families and children. Thank you to our mentors and for all the training we have had. One never stops learning. We see this booklet as an ongoing project, and hope it continues to evolve and develop along with our skills and knowledge, as our experiences grow.



**MY THERAPY HOUSE**  
Opening doors in communication and relationships