

5 Things Every Parent Should Know Before Starting Therapy

Starting therapy can be overwhelming — especially when you're trying to find the right fit for your child or family. This guide outlines five essential things to know and questions to ask so that your journey starts with clarity, confidence, and care.

1. The Difference Between Affirming vs. Traditional Therapy

Traditional therapy often focuses on fixing deficits or normalizing behavior. In contrast, affirming therapy centers the client's identity, strengths, and autonomy. This is especially important for neurodivergent individuals and families from diverse cultural backgrounds.

Affirming therapy means:

- Respecting cultural, linguistic, and neurodivergent identities
- Co-creating goals that matter to the client and family
- Prioritizing function and quality of life over compliance

2. Questions to Ask Your Provider Before Starting

Don't be afraid to ask direct questions. A good provider will welcome them.

Sample questions:

- How do you incorporate a child's culture, language, and identity into therapy?
- What is your stance on neurodiversity and affirming care?
- Do you offer bilingual or translation services?
- How do you include families in goal-setting and progress updates?

3. What a Neurodiversity-Affirming Session Actually Looks Like

In an affirming session, you might see:

- A child stimming freely or using AAC to communicate
- A therapist following the child's lead rather than directing every activity
- No forced eye contact or compliance-based prompts
- Tools and toys that reflect cultural and sensory diversity
- Shared decision-making and goal reviews with families

4. How to Advocate During IEP or Clinical Meetings

You are the expert on your child. You have the right to speak up and shape their care.

Tips for advocating effectively:

- • Bring notes or a list of your concerns and goals
- • Ask for clarification on jargon or decisions
- • Request that your child's strengths are highlighted, not just deficits
- • Refer to your rights under IDEA, ADA, or other laws

5. Tips for Choosing the Right Clinic for Your Child or Family

When exploring providers, look for:

- • A clear commitment to affirming, inclusive care
- • Multidisciplinary teams that collaborate and communicate
- • Flexible intake processes and transparency about services
- • Opportunities for family involvement and education
- • A willingness to individualize care — not standardize it

Therapy should be a partnership — not a prescription. The more informed and empowered you feel at the start, the more effective and meaningful your child's care can be.