

TRANSFORMED THERAPY & WELLNESS CENTER

FREE DOWNLOAD

5 Things Every Parent Should Know Before Starting Therapy

The Family Guide to Inclusive, Neurodiversity-Affirming Care

INSIDE THIS GUIDE

- ◆ The difference between affirming vs. traditional therapy
- ◆ Questions to ask your provider before starting
- ◆ What a neurodiversity-affirming session actually looks like
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Therapy that transforms. Care that connects.

A Note From Our Founder

If you're reading this, you're probably somewhere in the exhausting process of figuring out what your child needs — and how to get it for them.

Maybe you've already been through evaluations, waitlists, and providers who didn't quite fit. Maybe you're just starting out and trying to understand what 'therapy' actually means. Either way, this guide is for you.

As a Speech-Language Pathologist, I've sat across from hundreds of families who felt overwhelmed, dismissed, or just plain confused by the systems they were navigating. One of the most powerful things I could do was give them information — clear, honest, jargon-free information that helped them walk into their next appointment with confidence.

That's what this guide is. Five things I wish every parent knew before starting therapy. Not because the process is hard — but because you deserve to go into it informed, empowered, and clear on what good care actually looks like.

At Transformed Therapy & Wellness Center, we believe you are your child's best advocate. This guide is designed to help you be exactly that.

With warmth,

Dr. Imani Khan

Founder & Speech-Language Pathologist

Transformed Therapy & Wellness Center · Chicago, Illinois

THING 1 OF 5

Affirming Therapy and Traditional Therapy Are Not the Same Thing

Understanding the difference can change everything about how your child experiences care — and how much progress they make.

What is traditional therapy?

Traditional therapy models were built around the idea that the goal of intervention is to make a person appear and behave as 'normal' as possible. In speech therapy, this might mean drilling a child to produce sounds or words that match neurotypical norms. In behavioral therapy, it might mean eliminating behaviors without exploring why they exist. The focus is on compliance, conformity, and correction.

What is neurodiversity-affirming therapy?

Affirming therapy starts from a completely different premise: that neurological differences — autism, ADHD, dyslexia, sensory processing differences — are natural variations in human development, not deficits to be fixed. The goal isn't to make your child look neurotypical. The goal is to help them thrive as themselves.

Traditional: May use reward/punishment systems to change behavior

Affi

Why this matters for your family:

Research increasingly shows that children who receive affirming care develop stronger self-advocacy skills, better mental health outcomes, and more authentic relationships than those who are pressured toward conformity. They also tend to make faster and more sustainable functional progress — because they're not spending their energy masking or complying.

Ask any provider directly: 'Is your approach neurodiversity-affirming? If not, can you clearly explain their philosophy and how it shapes their session? If they seem uncomfortable, term or defensive about it, that's important information.'

THING 2 OF 5

The Questions You Ask Before Starting Matter as Much as the Therapy Itself

A great intake call tells you almost everything you need to know. Here are the questions that reveal whether a provider is the right fit.

Many families accept the first available provider because the waitlist is long and they're desperate to start. But a poor fit can actually set your child back — or worse, leave them with negative associations with therapy that take years to undo. Taking 20 minutes to ask the right questions upfront is one of the most important things you can do.

Questions to ask about philosophy and approach:

1. Is your approach neurodiversity-affirming? How does that show up in sessions?
2. What does a typical session look like for a child like mine?
3. How do you handle it when a child is dysregulated or refuses to participate?
4. Do you use any aversive techniques or punishment-based methods?
5. How do you incorporate the child's own interests and preferences into therapy?

Questions to ask about collaboration and communication:

1. How often will you communicate with me about progress?
2. Will you collaborate with my child's school, other therapists, or their pediatrician?
3. How do I share concerns between sessions?
4. Can I observe sessions or be involved in the therapy process?
5. How do you handle it if something isn't working?

Questions to ask about logistics:

1. What is your cancellation policy?
2. Do you accept insurance, or are you private pay? Do you provide superbills?
3. What is your caseload size — how many clients are you currently seeing?
4. How long do you typically work with a client before transitioning or discharging?
5. What would success look like for my child at 3 months? At 6 months?

How a provider responds to your questions is as important as the questions themselves. A provider who welcomes your questions, speaks to you as a partner, and takes time to listen before the first session is a very good sign. If you feel rushed or dismissed, that's a red flag.

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What a Neurodiversity-Affirming Session Actually Looks Like

Great therapy doesn't look like drills at a table. Here's what to expect — and what to watch for.

One of the most common things parents tell us is that they're not sure if what they're seeing in therapy is 'normal.' Sessions can look surprisingly unstructured, play-based, or child-led — and that can feel counterintuitive when you're expecting something that looks more like school.

Here's the truth: the best therapy for children often looks like play. That's not because the therapist isn't working — it's because children learn best through meaningful, motivated activity. A skilled clinician is doing a tremendous amount of clinical work inside what looks like a game.

In a great session you should see:

- ✓ The child leading or co-leading the activity based on their interests
- ✓ The therapist following the child's engagement rather than forcing attention
- ✓ Natural, functional communication rather than isolated drills
- ✓ Regulation and emotional safety prioritized before skill work
- ✓ The therapist narrating, modeling, and expanding rather than just correcting
- ✓ Genuine warmth, humor, and connection between the clinician and child
- ✓ Clear goals embedded naturally into the session activity

Green flags vs. red flags:

GREEN FLAGS	RED FLAGS
Child appears engaged and mostly willing	Child is frequently distressed, crying, or trying to escape
Therapist explains the 'why' behind activities	Activities seem arbitrary or punitive
Parent is welcomed and kept informed	Parent is excluded or discouraged from observing
Child's communication attempts are honored	Only 'correct' responses are accepted or rewarded

Stimming is allowed or redirected gently

Stimming is suppressed or punished

*It is completely appropriate to ask your therapist to walk y
and why. 'What were you working on today and how did it
should be able to answer clearly and enthusiastically.*

THING 4 OF 5

How to Advocate for Your Child During IEP and Clinical Meetings

You are the most important person in every meeting about your child. Here is how to show up prepared and make sure your voice is heard.

IEP meetings, clinical team meetings, and school conferences can feel intimidating. You may be outnumbered by professionals, surrounded by jargon, and presented with recommendations that are hard to evaluate in the moment. Many parents leave these meetings feeling like they simply agreed to things they didn't fully understand.

Here's what you need to know: you are not a guest at these meetings. You are a required participant with legal rights. Your knowledge of your child is irreplaceable clinical data. No one in that room knows your child the way you do.

Before the meeting:

- Request all documents (current IEP, evaluation reports, progress notes) at least 3 days in advance
- Write down your top 3–5 concerns or goals before you walk in
- Bring a support person if possible — a partner, friend, or parent advocate
- Prepare specific examples of what you're seeing at home
- Know that you can request an independent educational evaluation if you disagree with school results

During the meeting:

- Ask for clarification on any term or recommendation you don't fully understand
- Say 'I need more time to review this' before signing anything you're unsure about
- Ask: 'What does success look like for this goal in 3 months?'
- Ask: 'What happens if my child doesn't make progress on this goal?'
- Take notes or ask permission to record the meeting
- You do not have to agree to the IEP on the day it is presented to you

- Receive prior written notice before any change to services

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Phrases that help:

- "Can you explain what that term means in plain language?"
- "I want to make sure I understand before I sign — can I take this home to review?"
- "What data are you basing this recommendation on?"
- "What would you do if this were your child?"
- "I'd like to add a parent concern to the meeting notes."

THING 5 OF 5

How to Choose the Right Clinic for Your Child and Family

Not all practices are created equal. Here is a framework for evaluating your options and making a decision you feel confident about.

Choosing a therapy clinic is one of the most significant decisions you'll make for your child's development. It's not just about availability or location — it's about philosophy, fit, and whether the team will genuinely partner with you.

The 5 criteria that matter most:

Do they have a clearly stated, neurodiversity-affirming approach reflected throughout their website, their communication style, and the services they serve?

If your child needs more than one type of therapy, do those services work in a coordinated way? Siloed care — where your SLP has never spoken to your therapist about your child's progress. Look for practices where collaboration is built in.

Are parents treated as partners, or as people who drop the ball? What happens when families are involved in goal-setting, understanding progress, and practicing strategies at home.

Does the practice reflect and respect your family's cultural values? Are their materials available in your language? Do they demonstrate an understanding of your communication, behavior, and family dynamics?

Will you know what's happening in sessions? Will you get regular updates on your child's progress? A practice that communicates clearly and prioritizes your family's experience — not just their own.

One final thought:

The right clinic is one where your child feels safe, your family feels respected, and you feel like a true partner in the process. Trust is built over time — but you should feel the foundation of it from your very first interaction.

If something feels off, trust that feeling. You know your child. Any practice worth choosing will welcome your questions, honor your concerns, and work hard to earn your trust every single session.

You Found the Right Place.

Transformed Therapy & Wellness Center is opening in Chicago this summer.

We bring together Speech-Language Therapy, Occupational Therapy, ABA, Mental Health Counseling, Executive Function Coaching, and Academic Tutoring under one roof — with a team that truly collaborates.

Therapy
Speech-Language

Therapy
Occupational

Therapy
ABA

Counseling
Mental Health

Coaching
Executive Function

Tutoring
Academic

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Therapy that transforms. Care that connects.