

Therapies tried and tested

Many therapies support autistic children's development. But how can we know which ones to try? To help, Fiona McNeill presents some popular treatments, with parents' opinions on how well their children fared

Re:Start



Developed by Dr Stella Acquarone, (left) who is qualified in adult and child psychotherapy and has a PhD in

Psychology, Re:Start is an intensive programme that addresses challenging behaviour in youngsters of all ages, but particularly those under the age of three. Dr Acquarone believes it's essential to spot potential difficulties in children as early as possible.

She works with the whole family, helping members to bond and enjoy being together. Her methods are also successful, she says, in helping kids with ASD – even before a diagnosis. Using the therapy, they learn strategies to help support emotional regulation and avoid meltdowns, which for some young people can involve self-injurious behaviour. Dr Acquarone's book, *Changing Destinies*, describes the

Re:Start programme and is available from her website.

A parent's experience:

Sixteen-year-old Valentino, the son of TV and radio presenter Melanie Sykes, has autism and ADHD. Sykes took him to see Dr Acquarone when he was a toddler because



he wasn't speaking and his eye contact was poor. Within a week of starting the therapy, she says, Valentino's language came back and he started to communicate more readily.

"It's all about family dynamics. We learned that you have to work with what your child is showing you and what they are capable of, not what you think they should be," she says. "Really, that's how all children should be parented. When we started to follow Dr Acquarone's advice, Valentino's character and personality emerged."

● www.infantmentalhealth.com

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Fan of Re:Start: TV and radio presenter Melanie Sykes (below) says it helped her son Valentino's language to come back



Therapy for all occasions: ABA is even being used during this weight training session

Brick-by-Brick



Brick-by-Brick therapy uses a well-known brand of coloured building blocks and aims to improve social and communication skills. Children use the bricks to build simple or complex structures one-to-one or in a group, prompted by a therapist.

Practitioner Erin Valente (above), an early-intervention therapist in London, says Brick-by-Brick is useful for children who are shy, or have language difficulties or neurological conditions such as ASD. "It can help with turn-taking and sharing," she says. "It also helps with expressive language and sharing ideas. These skills are easily transferred to other areas in life."

Parents' experiences:

"By focusing on an activity he enjoys, our son's social and communication skills have improved greatly," say one mum and dad.

Another parent comments that there have been many positive outcomes from Brick-by-Brick therapy, noting that their child has become more confident socially, especially in group and partner work at school.

"The teachers now say he is popular with other children, whereas before he was isolated socially for many years," the parent says. "He's more tolerant of other people's views and more patient and more considerate and helpful towards others."

● www.hatchlingslondon.co.uk

Applied Behavioural Analysis (ABA)



According to practitioner Risca Solomon (left), ABA is a method of understanding difficult or challenging behaviours and replacing them with more helpful ways of interacting with the world.

Although ABA principles are used in schools, businesses and prisons, they are often particularly effective with autistic people, she >>

