

The Role of Repetitive Behaviors in Cognitive and Sensory Regulation

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DESCRIPTION

Autism therapy encompasses a wide range of interventions designed to support the development, learning, and well-being of individuals on the autism spectrum. Since autism is a spectrum condition, no single approach works for everyone. The goal of therapy is not to "cure" autism, but to help individuals thrive by building on their strengths and addressing areas where they may need support. This person-Centered approach is essential for effective and respectful treatment.

One of the most common forms of autism therapy is Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA). ABA focuses on encouraging positive behaviors and discouraging behaviors that may be harmful or interfere with learning. It involves breaking down tasks into smaller steps and using reinforcement strategies to promote progress. While ABA has been beneficial for many, it has also drawn criticism from autistic self-advocates who argue that some practices may be overly rigid or fail to respect the individuality and autonomy of the person receiving therapy. Modern versions of ABA have increasingly aimed to be more compassionate, flexible, and aligned with the person's needs and consent.

Another widely used approach is speech and language therapy. Communication challenges are a core aspect of autism for many individuals, whether that means difficulties with spoken language, understanding non-verbal cues, or using alternative communication systems. Speech therapists work to improve these skills in ways that are functional and meaningful for the individual. For some, this might mean working on conversation or vocabulary, while for others it could involve using picture exchange systems or communication devices to express needs and feelings effectively.

Occupational Therapy (OT) is also frequently used in autism treatment. OT aims to help individuals participate in daily activities by improving skills such as fine motor coordination,

sensory integration, and self-care routines. Many autistic individuals experience sensory processing differences, and occupational therapists can help them develop coping strategies and adapt environments to reduce discomfort. These therapists often work closely with families and educators to ensure that the strategies are practical and consistently applied across settings.

For individuals experiencing anxiety, depression, or other emotional challenges alongside autism, mental health therapy can be important. Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) has been adapted for use with autistic people, particularly when addressing anxiety or social challenges. Therapists who specialize in neurodiversity-affirming care focus on creating a safe, validating environment where the autistic person's experiences are understood and respected. Emotional regulation, self-advocacy, and developing a positive autistic identity are often important goals in this work.

CONCLUSION

Play therapy and social skills groups are commonly used, especially with children. These therapies aim to help children develop relationships, understand emotions, and practice interaction in structured and supportive environments. While some children benefit from group therapy to learn social norms and cues, it's essential that these efforts are not about forcing conformity but about empowering communication and genuine connection on the child's terms.

Increasingly, therapy for autism is moving toward a strengths-based and neurodiversity-affirming model. This approach sees autism not as a deficit to be corrected, but as a different way of experiencing the world. Therapy in this context becomes less about fixing and more about supporting growth, communication, independence, and well-being.

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