

Behavioural Strategies for Autism (New Horizon)

Behavioural treatments have been created to help children in the autistic spectrum build skills that do not develop automatically, and reduce behaviours that interfere with learning and communication.

Here are twelve common types of strategies:

1. *Analysis of the applied behaviour* – Cyprus

Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA) has been shown to help individuals with autism to develop the necessary skills and minimise unwanted behaviours, such as self-harm. Its effectiveness is supported by hundreds of studies. ABA is an evidence-based behavioural therapy that can take many forms, but all of them are based on the same simple concept: reinforced behaviours will increase, non-strengthened behaviours will be reduced and eventually disappear.

More information available at: <https://childrensupportolutions.com/what-is-applied-behaviour-analysis/>

2. *Mindfulness-based Stress Reduction for Adults with ASD (MBSR)*- Cyprus

It is common for adults with ASD to experience depression and distress. The rumination is one of the factors that contributes to the development of depression. The MBSR provides opportunity to adults with ASD to focus their attention to the present moment. Doing so prevents their ruminative thoughts and emotions.

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0891422212002156>

<https://www.autismandmindfulness.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Mindfulness-in-ASD-autism-advocate.pdf>

3. *Self-management technique* - Romania

Self-management is a technique which can easily be used for adults with ASD. In general terms, self- management aims to increase independency through the self-regulation and decrease prompt dependency. Self-management interventions teach learners to distinguish appropriate and inappropriate behaviours, keeping track and recording their own actions, and reinforcing themselves for the appropriate behaviour.

<https://www.unl.edu/asdnetwork/self-management-individuals-asd>

4. *Video Self-Modeling (VSM):* **Romania**

The video self-modelling uses the self-video of adults with autism. In that video, adults with autism are the models themselves and they are videotaped while performing the targeted behaviour. The effectivity of VSM are supported by various studies. For example, a study found that VSM is an effective method in teaching job skills.

<https://www.hindawi.com/journals/crinm/2014/425897/>

5. *Face Your Fears (FYF) –* **Russia**

Facing Your Fears is a group cognitive-behavioural treatment designed to help young adults with ASD who in turn have symptoms of anxiety.

How it works: Facing Your Fears helps adults learn to identify their concerns and develop healthy adaptation strategies they can rely on when they feel anxious. Adults also have the opportunity to practice these new strategies within their group. In addition to the adults, there is a separate group for parents to learn how to help their child with ASD and the anxiety that accompanies it.

More information available at: <https://bit.ly/3GOcvHR>

6. *Speech Therapy –* **Russia**

Speech-language therapy addresses challenges with language and communication. It can help people with autism improve their verbal, nonverbal, and

social communication. The overall goal is to help the person communicate in more useful and functional ways. Communication and speech-related challenges vary from person to person. Some individuals on the autism spectrum are not able to speak. Others love to talk, but have difficulty holding a conversation or understanding body language and facial expressions when talking with others.

A speech therapy program begins with an evaluation by a speech-language pathologist (SLP) to assess the person's communication strengths and challenges. From this evaluation, the SLP creates individual goals for therapy. Common goals may include improving spoken language, learning nonverbal skills such as signs or gestures, or learning to communicate using an alternative method (such as pictures or technology). Examples of the skills that speech therapy may work on include a) strengthening the muscles in the mouth, jaw and neck, b) making clearer speech sounds, c) matching emotions with the correct facial expression, d) understanding body language, e) responding to questions, f) matching a picture with its meaning, g) using a speech app on an iPad to produce the correct word, and h) modulating tone of voice.

More information available at: <https://www.autismspeaks.org/speech-therapy-autism>

7. Occupational therapy – Romania SC Psiho

Occupational therapy, known as OT, is designed to help children acquire the skills needed to perform the activities, or “occupations,” of daily life.

Occupational therapists work with children to develop a variety of skills or skills. This may include thin and thick motor skills, help with feeding problems or sensory problems, or with the development of essential self-help skills, such as brushing your teeth, dressing, going to the bathroom, and more.

More information available at: <https://www.autismspeaks.org/occupational-therapy-ot-0>.

8. *Virtual Reality Job Interview Training- Romania SC Psiho*

Individuals with ASD experience difficulties at job interviews. According to a study, individuals with ASD find it challenging to answer questions directed during the interviews. Moreover, this challenge creates anxiety among individuals with ASD.

The virtual reality job interview enables adults with ASD to practice job interviews in a virtual environment. Instead of only providing pre-employment information to the adults of ASD, virtual reality job interview enables them to put these knowledge into practice.

<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/24803366/>

<https://news.umich.edu/virtual-training-gives-young-adults-with-autism-stronger-interview-skills-to-obtain-jobs/>

9. *Music Therapy: Italy*

Music therapy enables adults with ASD to improve communication skills, social development, self-expression, emotional support, cognitive development, empowerment and creativity.

Research in the field of people with autism presents numerous contributions regarding the effect of music on these psychopathologies. This is because there are several techniques that have a positive influence on the symptoms in people with autism, see for example the contribution offered by Baker (1982) in "The use of music with autistic children" (Baker, 1982)¹, or by Nelson et al., (1984) in "Music activities

¹ Baker B.S. The use of music with autistic children. *Journal of Psychosocial Nursing and Mental Health Services*, 20(4), 1982, pp. 31-34.

as therapy for children with autism and other pervasive developmental disorders” (Nelson et al., 1984)².

According to the authors, the activities and techniques that incorporate musical stimuli play an important role in the therapy of people with autism as these techniques can, for example, facilitate communication, and in particular the mode of expression and the ability to understand, aspects that we know to be compromised in autism as well as can discourage isolation and consequently actively involve the individual (Thaut, 1984)³, and decrease stereotyped behaviors (Soraci et al., 1982)⁴.

The communication difficulties of an autistic subject seem to reside in the fact that he fails in the manipulation of symbols or symbolic representations for which the autistic language is often characterized by stammering, silence, limited communicative intent or non-communicative speech (Nelson et al., 1984)⁵. In this regard, the techniques of music therapy aim to stimulate the cognitive processes of symbolization

² Nelson D.L., Anderson V.G., and Gonzales A.D. Music activities as therapy for children with autism and other pervasive developmental disorders. *Journal of Music Therapy*, 21(3), 1984, pp. 100-116.

³ Thaut M.H. A music therapy treatment model for autistic children. *Music Therapy Perspectives*, 1(4), 1984, pp. 7-13.

⁴ Soraci Jr, S., Deckner C. W., McDaniel C., and Blanton R. I. The relationship between rate of rhythmicity and the stereotypic behaviors of abnormal children. *Journal of Music Therapy*, 19(1), 1982, pp. 46-54.

⁵ Nelson D.L., Anderson V.G., and Gonzales A.D. Music activities as therapy for children with autism and other pervasive developmental disorders. *Journal of Music Therapy*, 21(3), 1984, pp. 100-116.

and verbal understanding, allowing to meet the desire and the need to communicate (Thaut, 1984)⁶.

Isolation and social withdrawal for many years have been seen as the primary characteristics of autism, as it comes from the fact that the intensity can vary from case to case (Thaut, 1984)⁷. Consequently, being able to interrupt social isolation to actively involve the autistic individual can be fundamental for solving most of the perceptual and cognitive problems that I experience. In this regard, music therapy can act as an intermediary with the therapist for the construction of a first point of contact.

As for the ability of music therapy to reduce stereotyped behaviors, it is based on the fact that it is able to break stereotyped motility patterns thanks to rhythmicity.

According to music therapist Janet McLachland, music is able to offer a unique way to connect, celebrate and empower the individuality of autistic people. He, in the charity of music therapy "Nardoff Robbins Scotland" proposed to use music therapy to intervene on people with ASD (McLachlan, 2016)⁸.

In particular, within the center, music therapy takes place in 1: 1 sessions in small groups on a weekly basis where the music therapists adopt an individualized approach, aimed at satisfying the needs of each individual, in order to pursue the construction of a relationship. therapeutic through music that can be set live or created

⁶ Thaut M.H. A music therapy treatment model for autistic children. *Music Therapy Perspectives*, 1(4), 1984, pp. 7-13.

⁷ Thaut M.H. A music therapy treatment model for autistic children. *Music Therapy Perspectives*, 1(4), 1984, pp. 7-13.

⁸ McLachlan, 2016. *Music therapy and autism*. In <https://www.autism.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/professional-practice/music-therapy> Consultato in aprile 2022.

by means of instruments, songs and by means of musical technology (McLachlan, 2016)⁹.

There is a lot of research evidence to support this, which highlights the actual results of the impact of music therapy on ASD. In this regard, always according to McLachlan (2016) the areas that have a positive impact of music therapy for an autistic person include the enhancement of creativity, empowerment, communication skills, social development, emotional and cognitive development and expression. of himself (McLachlan, 2016)¹⁰.

Given the individual differences for the autistic population, it is good to keep in mind that universal therapeutic rules may not be applicable, as these must be adapted to the individual situation. In fact, while on the one hand an individual can respond positively to the application of a certain technique, on the other hand another individual could be damaged. Even music therapy could actually stimulate the creation of modern rituals or generate a sensory overload, for this reason the sessions must be carefully structured and controlled. In this regard, Juliette Alvin (1991) reports some contraindications of music therapy with autistic people: in fact, music could itself become an obsession that strengthens self-isolation and social withdrawal, making autistic individuals unaware of their environment, leading them to lethargy (Alvin, 1991)¹¹.

Furthermore, it is essential to emphasize that the music therapist must be competent and prepared in carrying out the activity with these individuals, since if

⁹ Ibidem.

¹⁰ Ibidem.

¹¹ Alvin. *Music therapy for the autistic child*. Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1991.

music is applied improperly or therapeutically in an inappropriate manner, it can hinder or even prevent the success of the treatment.

10. Art Therapy: Italy

Many people with ASD are more likely to think in visual terms. Art therapy can enable adults with ASD to process information in an efficient way and express their ideas or emotions through drawing. Art therapy helps adults with ASD to access their emotions and work on to replace maladaptive ones with adaptive ones. In addition to this, art therapy leads improved ability to recognize and respond facial expressions which is a necessary element in the work environment.

One of the hallmarks of autism spectrum disorders is the difficulty in communicating. Against this, some individuals have a great ability to think visually in images, so they can express their experiences and their will through drawing or other artistic means.

In fact, art does not require the ability to interact verbally but on the other hand it opens the doors to communication.

Art therapy is a tool that can help individuals with autistic disorder get in touch with their emotions. In particular, the evidence suggests that this technique allows to improve the ability to think and imagine symbolically, to respond effectively to facial expressions, to improve motor skills to improve the ability to solve sensory problems. (Jo Rudy, 2021)¹².

11. Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT): France

CBT helps adults with ASD to identify the link between their thoughts, feelings, and behaviours. Specifically, it can directly be applicable to adults with ASD

¹² Jo Rudy, L. *How art therapy helps people with autism. A risk-free way to help your child connect with emotions*, 2021. In <https://www.verywellhealth.com/art-therapy-for-autism-260054> Accessed on april 2022.

who experience difficulties in understanding, managing and expressing emotions. Indeed, CBT has been found to be an effective method in changing the way a person thinks and acts when he/she experiences anxiety and depression (Clark, 2011). Moreover, CBT enables adults with ASD to develop healthy coping strategies to apply in situations where anxiety occurs.

12. Relationship Development Intervention (RDI) – France –Please adjust it according to adults with parents

Relationship Development Intervention (RDI) is a family-based, behavioural treatment which addresses the core symptoms of autism. It focuses on building social and emotional skills. Parents are trained as the primary therapist in most RDI programs. RDI helps people with autism form personal relationships by strengthening the building blocks of social connections. This includes the ability to form an emotional bond and share experiences with others.

More information available at: <https://www.autismspeaks.org/relationship-development-intervention-rdi-0>.