

# **SPECIAL REPORT**

## **The Five Biggest Mistakes Parents Make When Choosing a Treatment Program for Their Child & How YOU Can Avoid Them**



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# **The Five Biggest Mistakes Parents Make When Choosing a Treatment Program for Their Child & How YOU Can Avoid Them**

Congratulations on choosing to download this special report from Horizons Developmental Remediation Center. Just the fact that you are reading this right now indicates that you are deeply committed to the growth and development of your child and family. You are invested in learning everything you can about how to help your child overcome the obstacles that their disability has created and in making the best treatment decisions possible.

It is a confusing and sometimes scary place out there in the world of disability treatments! Everywhere you turn there is new and different information, people telling you this is better than that, well-meaning individuals giving you advice — and you feel stuck in the middle of it all trying to make sense of something you never dreamed you'd have to think about. You are not alone — this is a very common feeling among parents of children with disabilities.

Take a deep breath, try to relax, and trust that the information you are about to read is designed to help you avoid the mistakes parents often make when selecting treatment options for their children. The information contained in this report comes from over a decade of experience working with families affected by various disabilities, and observing the challenges they have faced in making the same kinds of decisions you are facing. Just knowing about these mistakes and how to avoid them will make you a much more informed decision-maker, and a better advocate for your child's and family's needs.

So what are the five biggest mistakes parents make when choosing a treatment program and how can you avoid them? Let's look at them one at a time.

### **1. Not considering the needs of all family members**

When a child receives a diagnosis of any condition, it has a tendency to take over the family's life. Parents become driven to find all the information they can, including the best treatment options available. This search often involves numerous hours spent researching on the internet, at the library, talking with agencies, attending appointments with "experts," and pursuing any other opportunity that presents itself. Throughout this process it is easy to lose sight of the needs of everyone in the family, which often includes siblings. The process of seeking out treatment for a child with impairments can be confusing, overwhelming, and discouraging for parents; and family life as a whole can suffer.

When investigating treatment options, it is critical to keep the needs of the entire family in mind. It is not uncommon for parents to sacrifice many things, including quality time for themselves and their other children, for the sake of accessing treatment. The most important thing all children need, including those with impairments, is a safe, secure, calm, and loving home life with family members who can relax and create an atmosphere that promotes everyone's growth and development. Too often we see families who are fragmented and in crisis as a result of going to various therapies, having multiple therapists in the home, and living in constant stress over their child's disability. Your other children should not be growing up in the back of your car or in a waiting room as you shuttle your child with impairments all over town to therapy sessions. It doesn't matter how good the time in therapy is that type of family life is not good for anyone!

So, the first mistake to avoid is sacrificing your family's life in the name of treatment. You must consider the needs of yourself, your spouse, and ALL of your children in the decision-making process. Look for treatment options that allow you to spend time together as a family, do not require frequent lengthy commutes, and allow you to pursue your own interests and those of other family members. ***No matter how good a treatment option sounds, you must think twice about it if your personal and family needs cannot be met while pursuing it.***

## 2. Giving up parenting role

As you investigate treatment options, you must never lose sight of the fact that you are your child's parent. Parents need to be the most important people in a child's life. Therapists, professionals, or other caretakers should never take that primary role away from any parent.

It is easy to feel as if other people know more than you and can do a better job at helping your child. In fact, some programs and professionals will make you feel that way by telling you that you need to turn your child over to them for hours and hours at a time so they can "do something" for your child. Think about how ridiculous that sounds! You may not be an expert on the disability with which your child has been diagnosed, but you most certainly are the expert on your own child.

It is critical that you find treatment options that allow you to be the most important adult(s) in your child's life and provide you with support and education to maintain that role to the best of your ability. At the end of the day, it does not matter how much a child is able to do in a therapy session if they cannot build and maintain relationships and skills in their real lives. Research in child development tells us that the relationship between parents and children is essential for growth and development. Without those primary relationships firmly established, children lack the foundations for cognitive, social, emotional, and communication growth. ***Treatment must involve you as parent(s) as the primary adult(s) responsible for your child's development.***

### **3. Focusing on surface issues instead of core issues**

It is easy to see the problems a child is exhibiting on the surface — outbursts, poor handwriting, limited verbal communication, clumsy, oppositional, etc. What you have to avoid, however, is the urge to take these problems at face value and assume that what you are seeing is the thing that needs to be treated.

Sometimes that can be the case; but many times there are more foundational issues that are causing the surface-level symptoms we see daily. We refer to these as the “core” or “root” problems, and if you really want to help your child overcome their difficulties then you must look at treating these core problems.

A child with autism who is nonverbal, for example, has a problem that is visible — s/he is not speaking. It seems obvious to focus on getting the child to talk, and parents are often told to look for a speech therapist to teach their child to speak. The problem with this approach is that it does not take into account why the child is not talking. It fails to investigate whether missing developmental foundations are creating the surface problem of lack of speech. In the case of this child with autism, there are a number of social and communication foundations that require development before words can be used effectively. If that factor is ignored the child may learn to say words but will not be able to effectively use those words to communicate.

The same is true for a child who exhibits problematic behaviors. The first response may be to hire a behavior therapist to treat the behaviors because

those are what everyone sees on the surface. There are many more foundational or root issues that require investigation before deciding that behavior therapy is the right choice for this child. How is her sensory system functioning? Does she have adequate developmental foundations for emotional regulation? Are the communication and cognitive abilities in place that allow for understanding of the environment and communicating appropriate responses to it? If we fail to examine these areas we may very well treat the thing we see on the surface without resolving the problem at all because we have not addressed the real underlying problems.

It is essential that you find professionals who can help you identify what the core issues of your child's difficulties are, and steer you in the right direction to treat them. By focusing only on surface level problems — my child doesn't talk; my child throws temper tantrums; my child won't eat — you risk merely compensating for the problems instead of meeting your goal of remediating (or correcting) the real issues. ***Seek out information and people that can help you identify the core deficits of your child's difficulties and get you on the path to treating them.***

#### **4. Looking for quick fixes**

Let's face it — we all want a quick fix for the problems we face! Having a child diagnosed with a disability is no different. You want to take care of the problem as quickly as possible for the sake of both your child and family. There are a

number of reasons why you need to avoid the urge to look for the quickest possible solutions to your child's developmental problems.

When we are dealing with developmental issues involving the brain — and they all involve the brain — we have to recognize the amazing power it has to grow new connections continually. The process of treatment for developmental and neurological disabilities is a process of growing the brain connections required for appropriate functioning. These connections are not formed overnight! It takes time for the brain to develop new pathways based on experiences and interactions. The reality is that the brain needs time to take in experiences, make sense of them, and integrate them into pathways that are useable again in the future. When we try to flood the system with input, it tends to shut down and not retain anything meaningful.

Do not allow yourself to believe false information about there being a “window of time” or a certain age limit for learning and growth to occur. This is some of the most false and damaging information out there in the world of developmental disabilities. Research has continued to demonstrate that the human brain has the capacity to grow, learn, and change throughout the lifespan. The capacity for forming new connections is not age-dependent. You may have been told that you need to get your child doing certain things by a certain age, or else they will never be able to do it. This in and of itself creates a crisis mentality surrounding speed, and the need to accomplish certain things on a specific timeline. What about those of you whose children are already past that age? You may have

been led to believe there is no hope for your child. The reality is that your child can learn and grow and make significant changes regardless of age!

Another problem with focusing on the speed factor in treatment is the risk of overwhelming your child and pushing him or her beyond what s/he can competently manage. New skills need to be learned in supportive and competence-producing ways if they are going to be internalized and useable. Trying to force a child to learn and use information and skills generally leads to a child who feels unsupported and incompetent. Even if you succeed in getting children to produce responses in this manner, the meaning is not necessarily there; and the child's ability to generalize the learning to real life may be limited.

A third problem with focusing on speed is the crisis mentality that it tends to create. Think about the difference between a marathon and a sprint. In a marathon you are always thinking about the long haul — planning ahead and pacing yourself appropriately based on the long journey ahead. In a sprint your main objective is to get going as fast as you can and maintain that intense speed for a very brief period of time. Imagine starting out in sprinting mode, only to find out that you are actually in a marathon. How long do you think it will take before you get burned out from running so fast — or worse yet, give up or pass out?

Speed can be conducive to some activities in life; but working on your child's disability is not one of those activities. If you start out in sprint mode, you will burn out very quickly and become extremely discouraged upon discovering that

you are actually running in a marathon. Be wise from the start — recognize that the process of improving your child's functioning is going to be a longer-term goal, and plan accordingly. Do not allow yourself to get wrapped up in crisis about how quickly you are or aren't accomplishing your goals. ***Allow yourself to slow down and stay out of crisis so you can make sound decisions for your child and have the energy to run the entire race with them.***

## **5. Not focusing on quality of life goals**

When we first have children, sometimes even before we have them, we dream big dreams for them. We think about the kind of life we will have together as a family and then, eventually, the kind of life they will have as they grow up and leave home. For the majority of us, those dreams are focused on things that are commonly referred to as “quality of life” indicators such as relationships with family and friends, meaningful and rewarding employment, enjoyable leisure opportunities, independence, and a positive self-esteem. These are the kinds of things we deem important in our own lives and, therefore, value for our children.

When a child is diagnosed with a disability, there is often a tendency for parents to lose focus on the big picture of quality of life and focus on accumulating skills in the here-and-now. While this may seem logical — you want to start helping your child learn to do things as soon as possible — it is critical to keep the desired outcome of quality of life in the forefront of your mind. Too often we see families who have pursued all kinds of treatments that helped their children learn

many skills, but they are still looking for something significant to address the barriers to a satisfying quality of life. It does not matter how many discrete social skills you have memorized, or how much math you can do, or how many words you can say if you cannot maintain a genuine friendship, hold a job, or carry on a meaningful conversation. This is the difference between focusing on teaching a child discrete skills outcomes and focusing on quality of life outcomes.

Before you pursue treatment options (or additional treatment options) stop and consider what quality of life means for you and for your child. What do you really want to accomplish through treatment? Do not be limited by what professionals say you can expect from the treatments they offer. Think about what a satisfying quality of life would look like for your family right now, and then what it would look like for you and your child in the future. Now take those things that you would like to accomplish and seek out treatment options that help you achieve those things. These are the things that are going to help your child and family in the short and long term, and make a meaningful difference in your lives. Do not allow yourself and your child to be shortchanged by fancy bar graphs and booklets full of data on the “skills” your child has learned. ***You must constantly ask yourself this question in order to make treatment decisions for your child that make sense; “How is this impacting my child’s quality of life and our family’s quality of life now and for the future?”***

## **Remember:**

**Your entire family matters!**

**Your role as a parent is critical!**

**Focus on the root of the problems!**

**Commit to the long-term!**

**It's about quality of life!**

Now you know all about these five common mistakes parents make and how you can avoid them. You are now armed with information that will help you be a more effective decision-maker for your child and feel more empowered as a parent!

## **Are you ready to change dramatically your child's and family's lives for the better, but aren't sure exactly how to get started?**

Choose the simple route and avoid the mistakes and stress most parents experience when selecting a treatment program by contacting our team at Horizons DRC to discuss your needs and goals. Our professionals will get you started on the right path for you, your child, and your family. You can rest assured that the information and treatment you receive at Horizons will help you avoid the five mistakes most parents make when choosing treatment options for their children. We know that you want to treat the core issues of your child's disability while building and maintaining a satisfying quality of life for your entire family now and into the future. Allow us to help you get on the path toward treatment that will benefit you and your child for the long-term. ***Get all the information you need to get started today*** by visiting our website

[www.horizonsdrc.com](http://www.horizonsdrc.com), emailing [info@horizonsdrc.com](mailto:info@horizonsdrc.com), or calling us at 1-616-698-0306.

We look forward to having the opportunity to help you and your family soon!



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