

Introduction

In today's society we are lucky to have a wide range of specialists and professionals to whom we can turn for help. However, as the list of options grows, so does the confusion. This brochure looks at specialists a child with Asperger's Syndrome may encounter, and provides a brief description of what that specialist does. Hopefully this will help you decide how to get the best help for your child.

Family Doctor (GP)

Your family doctor is normally your first port of call if you have concerns about your child. As they hold copies of all your child's reports, they can look at the overall picture. They can refer you to specialists and can contact them on your behalf. They should know about services and benefits that are available to you.

Paediatrician

A paediatrician is medical doctor who specialises in diagnosing and treating children. They have extra training in medical and developmental issues specific to children.

Developmental Paediatrician

A developmental paediatrician specialises in the diagnosis and treatment of developmental conditions that child may have, such as Asperger's Syndrome.

Plunket Nurse

A plunket nurse is a medical nurse who has undergone further training in the care of babies and young children. They check growth, development and general health. They offer advice on issues like managing sleeping, eating, behaviour and toileting.

Public Health Nurse

Public Health Nurses have training and experience in child health nursing. They visit families at home to follow up on health or development concerns. They can assess your child's needs and make a referral to specialists or other professionals.

Dietician

Dieticians specialise in human nutrition. Children with AS may go to them to help formulate a healthy diet that takes into account taste sensitivities or to plan a special diet such as the casein-gluten free diet.

Clinical Psychologist (Child Specialist)

A clinical psychologist specialises in learning how the feelings, thoughts, actions, beliefs, culture and family of a person affect the way they live. The clinical psychologist's role encompasses assessment of an individual as well as formulating and devising an individual treatment plan to address a range of emotional, behavioural and developmental difficulties. They may work with a child with Asperger's to help them develop and/or with the parents to help them work through the many intense emotions they may be feeling. They can provide explanations of a child's behavioural needs to others involved with the child's care.

Educational Psychologist

Educational psychologists are usually teachers who have received specialised training in psychology. They assess behavioural needs in an educational setting. They can undertake educational and cognitive assessments, and work with the school to provide assistance to the child. They can help with funding applications and the organisation of IEPs. They are usually part of the Ministry of Education's Group Special Education services.

Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist

A psychiatrist is a medical specialist. They look at the mental health needs of a person (or child). They can analyse whether problems your child is having are due to an emotional, developmental, physical or mental health disorder. They can work out what help your child will need, which may involve medication, and they can undertake individual therapy. A psychiatrist usually works with a team including psychologists and other therapists.

(Child) Psychotherapist

Psychotherapists look into the emotional reasons behind a person's behaviour. They will often use play and toys to understand how a child is feeling and how this is affecting behaviour. They undertake individual therapy with the child and work with parents and caregivers.

Counsellor or Family Therapist

A counsellor will listen to issues you or your child are having and help find solutions. They can help you to adjust to changes and manage feelings you are having. Family therapists specialise more in helping families work through relationship issues.

Audiologist

Audiologists assess hearing. They can help you determine if your child's hearing issues are due to hearing loss or sensory difficulties related to Asperger's Syndrome. Some can help you work out if your child is processing sounds correctly.

Speech / Language Therapist

Speech language therapists assess and advise on communication skills and related disorders. These include difficulties with speech, language, fluency, voice and swallowing. Some children may need alternative forms of communication such as signs or symbols. Some may need help in the way they use their language in social interactions. The speech language therapist can set up programmes to help improve these skills.

Occupational Therapist

Occupational Therapists, often referred to as OTs, look at a child's safety and independence with daily living skills (eg self care, play, fine motor skills). They can look at coordination of both fine and gross motor skills, posture, handwriting, hand-eye coordination, sensory issues and at times environmental adaptations. They may recommend activities, exercises, special equipment or use of toys to help in these areas and offer a course of therapy.

Physiotherapist

Physiotherapists look at how a child interacts physically with their environment and assesses motor skills. They can then design exercises and activities that help develop physical movement skills, and they may offer a series of therapy sessions. They will often make use of special equipment during these exercises and activities.

Visiting Neurodevelopmental Therapist (VNT)

Visiting Neurodevelopmental therapists are trained occupational therapists or physiotherapists who specialise in helping young children (0-5yrs) with developmental problems. They work collaboratively with the Special Education Early Intervention Team. Therapists visit families at their home or in the preschool environment for assessments and to offer support, therapy and advice.

Cognitive Therapist

Cognitive therapists focus on thinking, reasoning and understanding (cognitive) skills. They can devise activities (including computer assisted activities) that help develop these areas. They may also help with memory, problem solving, spatial concepts, sorting, paying attention, and understanding of cause and effect. In New Zealand specialist cognitive therapists are rare, however psychologists, occupational therapists and early intervention teachers can also provide a similar service in addition to other therapies.

Music Therapist

Music therapists use a variety of musical experiences to aid a child's creative, social, emotional and cognitive development. These activities are usually done to complement, not replace, other therapies. Once again, such specialists are rare in New Zealand.

Early Intervention Teacher

Early Intervention Teachers work with children at Early Childhood Centres to ensure that they have an environment in which they can learn. They can work with both the parents and the early childhood educators to implement behavioural, learning and communication programmes designed by specialists to help get your child ready for the transition to school.

Specialists In Schools

Schools have access to Teacher Aides, Special Needs Support Workers, Resource Teachers - Learning and Behaviour, the Behaviour Education Support Teams and a range of other specialists that can come in and work with your child or child's teacher. For more information on these people see the Cloud 9 Children's Foundation brochure entitled "School Support".