



Finding A Great Therapist - And Keeping Them



Finding a therapist (speech, OT, physiotherapy, music, behavioural etc) who is right for you or your family member with Down syndrome can be daunting. You might have a new baby, or be looking for a new provider, or just looking for a change.

It is important that the therapist has the right skills, experience and personality for you or your family member. A good therapist will work with you to achieve your goals and provide guidance and advice.

Gemma Namey, DS NSW Board member, mother and Principal Solicitor at the NSW Department of Customer Service, shares with us her lived experiences and expert tips on how to find and `keep a great therapist. Some things to consider are:

- **Is the therapist NDIS registered?** [Check the NDIS website](#)
- **Are they registered** with the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA). You can check a provider's registration at www.ahpra.gov.au.
- **How much do they charge?** NDIS registered providers cannot charge higher than the prescribed rates. Check the NDIS price guide. Ask about initial assessment charges, which might be different to ongoing fees. If you do not have NDIS funding, then ask if they have different rates. You may be able to use private health insurance or [get a management plan](#) from your GP for some therapies. Also ask about cancellation fees, reporting writing and travel costs.

- **Do they have experience working with people with Down syndrome?** Not all therapists will have worked with someone who has Down syndrome. Ask how many clients they have worked with who have Down syndrome and whether they have worked with adults or children with Down syndrome. For example, an OT who has worked with people who have had a stroke is not likely going to be the best fit.
- **Ask what their speciality is or what methods they use.** For example, does the speech therapist use Key Word Sign, have they been trained in the Hanen “It takes two to talk” program, do they have experience in feeding issues.
- **Do they do home or school visits or only clinic appointments?** It is important that the therapist can fit into your family’s schedule. One option might be to do intensive sessions during school holidays, or perhaps a mixture of school visits and clinic appointments would work for you. For adults ask about any group sessions they run, for example cooking classes that might work on speech and OT skills. They might also run zoom sessions which might work if there are not many therapists in your area. Ideally you might meet face to face for a few sessions but then have sessions online.
- **Reporting on sessions.** How does the therapist report on a therapy session? This is more important for school visits, will the therapist send a report to you and the school teacher, and other therapists working with your child. Does their fee include the time for writing the report? Another option might be a quick phone call to report on the session.
- **Ask them about their experience, what interventions they use and why.** Remember, you are hiring them so pretend it’s a job interview! When did the person graduate and start practice? Have they only worked in hospital settings before? Ask for examples of how they have worked with other clients and what success they have.
- **Are they vaccinated for COVID-19?**
- **Do they have a waitlist?** If the waitlist is very long ask if they can recommend someone else who might have more availability. You might be able to be on a cancellation list

A therapist might look great on paper, have the right experience and be conveniently located. However, the person must be the right fit for your child or person with Down syndrome. If after a few sessions they are not happy and the therapist is not engaging your child or makes them uncomfortable then do not be afraid to “break up” with them.

You do not want to waste your NDIS funds on a therapist that you, or your child or person with Down syndrome is not comfortable with. Often you can tell this after a few

sessions. There is no point continuing and hoping things will improve, go with your gut and start looking for another provider.

Once you have found a therapist and they are working well with your child or person with Down syndrome, make sure the relationship continues to be beneficial. Some things to consider are:

- Ask them what goals they are working on at the moment? What is the timeframe they have for the goal? When will they know that the goal has been achieved? A general goal, such as, improve speech clarity, might be hard to measure progress, but maybe they are focusing on a particular sound. You need to know the current goals so you can work on the skills at home.
- Ask for homework! Therapy should not just happen in a weekly appointment. You need to be able to build on skills at home/school/work so that progress is made. A physiotherapist might write out an exercise program to use.
- Check in. You might have been seeing the same therapist for years, so periodically check to see what is working and what is not. It might be worth doing an assessment to see if there are any gaps in developmental milestones that might have been missed.
- If you find a good therapist then let them know you are pleased with them and happy with the progress that is being made. Give them some positive feedback, tell their manager or boss. Often people only make complaints about poor providers but don't forget positive feedback is important too.

If you are needing additional support, advice or in-school sessions, reach out to Down Syndrome NSW. We offer expert information, resources, behaviour support, inclusion workshops, school consultations and training.



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