

Why CBT may not be the best therapy for all autistic people.

By

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This signposting document arose as we are both often asked if Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) is the best route for autistic people who may be looking for some support. We decided to compile a list of research we have both found valuable so far to signpost people towards. Many people do find CBT to be really helpful and we are not advocating against it in all situations but it is worth considering if it is the best option for you or the autistic person you are supporting. We hope you find this a useful starting point.

My background is SEN teacher, and I have since set up Autistic Realms to help develop a better understanding of autism and mental health for young people and their families (I am not a mental health professional or therapist). Viv's background is in the management of forensic teams in prisons and the community, and she now specialises in autism advocacy and delivering training to support the understanding of autistic burnout.

There is a growing amount of research and evidence from the lived experience of autistic people sharing stories in their communities who have said that CBT has not had the best outcomes for them and has not been very effective. The reasons for this can be complex but in summary:

“CBT does not take into account brains that process thoughts, feelings and emotions differently to the neuromajority. It is also top-down therapy and autistic people are bottom-up thinkers. CBT doesn't take into account alexythemia or interoception differences, sensory trauma, social communication differences, masking or environmental triggers that many autistic people may experience.” (Viv Dawes, 2024)

This is a live and working document listing some of the research and resources that we have found personally valuable. We hope that this will support you if you need to advocate for yourself or a loved one and make a more informed decision as to the best route to take.

The following list is supporting the idea that CBT may not be the best therapy for all autistic people, there is a wealth of other research that argues against this too!

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- Nicholls, A. (2024, January 1). *Why Doesn't Standard Talking Therapy Work for Autistic People?* Dr Alice Nicholls. <https://www.dralicenicholls.com/why-doesnt-standard-talking-therapy-work-for-autistic-people/>
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- Stimpunks Foundation. (2023, May 26). *Cognitive Behavioral Therapy - Stimpunks Foundation*. <https://stimpunks.org/glossary/cognitive-behavioral-therapy/>
- Treating anxiety - Autism | Autistica*, (2023, November 24). Autistica. <https://www.autistica.org.uk/our-research/research-projects/anxiety-treatment-autistic-adults>
- Wise, S. J. (2022). *The Neurodivergent Friendly Workbook of DBT Skills*.

Wong, A. (2022, January 9). How CBT harmed me: The interview that The New York Times erased. *Disability Visibility Project*. <https://disabilityvisibilityproject.com/2021/11/11/how-cbt-harmed-me-the-interview-that-the-new-york-times-erased/amp/>

Websites and organisations that may also be of interest:

[Academic Autism Spectrum Partnership in Research and Education – Academic Autism Spectrum Partnership in Research and Education \(aaspire.org\)](#)

[AMASE – Autistic Mutual Aid Society Edinburgh](#)

[Aucademy](#)

[AUsome Autism Training.\] Challenging your thinking on autism \(ausometraining.com\)](#)

[Autistic Realms](#)

[The Autistic Advocate - Kieran Rose](#)

[Autistic Adults' Experiences of Counselling – Autistic Mental Health](#)

[Autistic Parents UKAutistic Parents UK](#)

[Autistic Self Advocacy Network \(autisticadvocacy.org\)](#)

[I CAN Network – I CAN Network is Australia's largest provider of Autistic-led group mentoring programs, training and consultancy.](#)

[Neurodivergent Practitioners Directory](#)

[Therapist Neurodiversity Collective - Therapy, Advocacy, Education \(therapistndc.org\)](#)

[THINKING PERSON'S GUIDE TO AUTISM — Autism news and resources: from autistic people, professionals, and parents \(thinkingautismguide.com\)](#)

[Thriving Autistic](#)

[Viv Dawes Autistic Advocate](#)

