

# 5 Top Reasons Qigong May be Right for Your Special Needs Child

**Autism Parenting**  
Magazine

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Parents often struggle with choosing from the myriad of therapies available. I remember the intense feeling of being crushed by too much information coming at me all at once. Those were the early days following my son's diagnosis with autism. I waded through it all, found what I thought were the best available therapy options for us and recruited the dream team of therapists that would accompany us on our journey. Over the years I made sure to keep up with all the relevant information about autism. I was pretty confident there wasn't an excellent therapy option I had not heard of.

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So when my son's occupational therapist called to talk about a kind of [massage](#) with an unusual name that had something to do with Chinese medicine, I was less than enthusiastic. She thought my son would be a good candidate and needed my consent and to train me in this vague massage. I was skeptical but agreed to talk more about this therapy in person.

A week later I arrived for our appointment with my well-thumbed copy of Qigong massage for your child with autism by Dr. Louisa Silva. Having also read all the original published research studies, I no longer wanted to hear more about the therapy and couldn't wait to start the training. I was now convinced that [Qigong](#) (pronounced chee-gong) Sensory Treatment (QST), or qigong massage, was a great therapy for my son. After completing a few questionnaires about my son's development, his sensory profile, my stress level and my priorities for the therapy, we were ready to begin.

The massage was surprisingly easy to learn. It consists of patting and pressing movements with a cupped hand over the child's clothing and takes about 15 minutes to complete. Initially, my son was not always an eager participant. I persisted with it because I knew that the massage works. I had seen the results of the well-controlled research studies.

After five months, the changes in my son were incredible. They transformed our family's life. He started sleeping through the night which meant that I was getting enough sleep for the first time in more than six years. His total autism score improved by 43%, his sense and self-regulation score improved by 55%, both greater than the average improvements observed in the research studies. Moreover, not only did his auditory sensitivity decrease, his verbal language increased and his sensitivity to touch improved so much that he started wearing socks for the first time. He still does, more than three years later. My stress level dropped. The biggest impact on my stress was that my son almost completely stopped hitting his teacher. He went from hitting several times a day to weeks then months of no hitting at all. I stopped worrying about him being kicked out of the [best school available for him in our city](#). My house became a lot messier since I was no longer up most nights cleaning because the worrying made sleep impossible.

I was so overjoyed with QST that I couldn't keep this knowledge to myself. I wanted the people on waiting lists for government services to know that they could start doing something relatively inexpensive and easy for their child. QST was a breakthrough therapy for autism that empowered parents to transform their families and yet I had never heard of it. Since there was only one trained therapist in Canada at the time, I felt compelled to learn as much as I could and trained as a therapist.

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There were several reasons why I was so impressed with QST:

## 1. QST is evidence-based

This means that well-designed research studies published in scholarly journals have shown that QST is effective in improving key areas of autism:

- Improves all aspects of autism, language, behavior and sensory difficulties
- Reduces parental stress by 44%
- Decreases autism severity by 32%
- Children are more affectionate with their families, more sociable and more open to new experiences

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Like many parents, when my son was diagnosed, I struggled with choosing from the myriad of available autism therapies. Which ones would actually help him? Often, the only "proof" I had was the changes the therapists told me they had seen in their clients. Later when I met more families affected by autism, what other parents told me. As a scientist, anecdotal evidence of a therapy's usefulness was not enough for me to invest money and time on it. I needed unbiased assessments of a therapy's effectiveness. The only available true test is a well-designed research study that is published in peer-reviewed scholarly journals.

While I am happy to share with other parents the changes I observed in my own sons following QST, I always point to the research studies as being more reliable evidence of its effectiveness.

## 2. QST is a family-based therapy

Following a child's autism diagnosis, many parents (myself included) often feel unknowledgeable, disempowered and helpless. QST gives parents their power to parent back. With a little help, parents do the massage and see the positive changes it makes to their child and their family. At the beginning, some children may not like the massage and parents are trained how to respond appropriately. The massage gradually becomes enjoyable for both the parent and child. Often, children start asking for it.

Not only does QST improve the core challenges of autism but it also decreases parental stress, improves parental mental health and improves the parent-child relationship. QST empowers parents by placing them at the centre of their child's therapy.

## 3. QST is a breakthrough therapy for autism

QST is an important new advance in autism therapies for several reasons:

- It is the first treatment that improves all aspects of autism; sensory, behavioral, language and also reduces parental stress
- It is consistently effective for all children affected by autism whether moderately or severely
- It is the first treatment that effectively decreases the sensory challenges in autism

## 4. QST is relatively inexpensive

Qigong massage is relatively inexpensive. Parents often have to pay privately for therapy and insurance coverage is insufficient. With QST, parents can choose how they work with the therapist. This is because there are two intensities of QST that are available:

Firstly, the QST dual parent and therapist intervention in which that parent's daily massage is augmented by the therapist's more intensive therapy. The therapist's intervention however, is only for a limited time, thus reducing the financial burden associated with private therapies.

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Secondly, the QST parent intervention in which parents are trained to give the massage daily, and the therapist never works directly with their child.

Visit the Qigong Sensory Treatment Institute's website to find a certified QST therapist in your area: <http://qsti.org>

Where no therapists are available, parents have bought the QST book which has a training DVD included, formed small training and support groups and successfully used QST. Thus in some instances, the cost of QST can be minimal.

## 5. QST relieves the stress of waiting for government services

In Montreal where I live, families routinely wait for up to 24 months for government-provided [autism therapy](#). This is despite the fact that the benefits of early intervention are well-known. It is agonizing time for families who can't afford the prohibitive costs of private therapy. QST, an effective, low-cost, parent-delivered therapy can be a godsend for these families.

QST is a breakthrough [autism therapy](#) and yet many people have never heard of it, I certainly hadn't. I was impressed by not only it's effectiveness for individuals with autism but also by the fact that it puts parents at the centre of their children's therapy. Parents feel empowered when they can take direct credit for their child's progress. Through QST, they learn how to harness the power of touch to help their children. I never imagined that I would straddle the fence one day: a parent and therapist of children with autism. It took a unique therapy that is accessible to most parents but only if they know about it.

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