

YOUR CHILD'S HEALTH Continuing a five-part series covering everything from common ailments to tantrums. Part Four: Complementary therapies. Three families talk to Cassandra Furdine about the benefits of going beyond mainstream medicine.

Parents don't have to be helpless

WHEN a child has a problem, the sooner he or she gets help, the better. But where from? If schools, doctors and psychologists can't provide the solution, parents are thrust into a world of expensive experimentation. And the already bewildering variety of therapies on offer is growing as we learn more about the interaction between mind and body.

Often, the most dramatic improvement is seen in those children with the most severe problems. But what works brilliantly for one child may make only a marginal difference or none for another. No one wants to add to a child's problems by making him feel like a guinea pig, so parents must choose wisely. In each of these three families, a child's life has been transformed by the parents tracking down the right treatment.

Music therapy hits the right note

ANDREW SCOTT'S parents became aware that he had a problem when he was two: at nursery, he didn't speak as well as other children. The nursery was so concerned that the Scotts were put in touch with a speech therapist and a child psychologist.

"When the speech therapist saw him, she called my husband, Peter, to say she thought Andrew was autistic," says Liz, his mother. "It was a horrifying label to have attached so casually to a child. Every further communication was similarly negative. The therapist didn't suggest any exercises for us to do, and we saw six different therapists in four years."

The Scotts never believed their son was autistic. Although he acted up in class, he was sociable at home. He did throw tantrums, but only if he was frustrated. Liz was convinced Andrew had hearing difficulties: he wasn't deaf, but he couldn't hear the difference between "coal" and "goal". When he had a hearing test, however, she was told he was "fine".

Andrew, now 10, was disruptive at school and, even though he was doing well academically, was thought to have concentration problems.

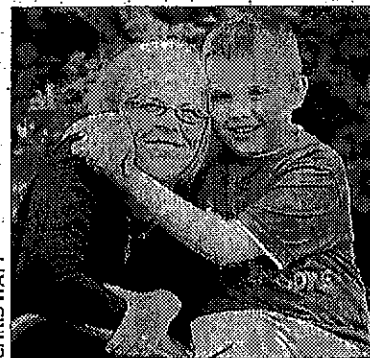
"We thought it might be Attention Deficit Disorder. We changed his diet – he reacts to additives – and tried fish oils. This helped, but didn't solve the problem."

Eventually, Liz took him to the Sound Learning Centre in north London. "They found that certain pitches caused him pain and he couldn't

distinguish certain sounds or hear where some were coming from."

Andrew was put on an Auditory Integration Plus programme, of ten 20-minute sessions on consecutive days. He listened to music that had been modified to stimulate the ears into picking up the missing frequencies. He was also given light therapy for depression.

"We noticed the difference



Andrew Scott with mother Liz

right away," says Liz. "He had vivid dreams and he started trying new foods. Many children stick to a limited diet as a security blanket."

He now finds listening to teachers and mixing with other children less exhausting, no longer feels stupid and isolated, and his speech is still quite hesitant and slightly slurred, but his vocabulary is wider. "Some say he has just matured, but I find it too coincidental."

Andrew's verdict? "I feel like a caterpillar that has turned into a butterfly."

● The Sound Learning Centre: tel 020 8882 1060; www.thesoundlearningcentre.co.uk