

# My child has been diagnosed with Autism

## Resource guide on next steps

Receiving an autism diagnosis is not something you may have planned for your family, but it is a journey that is unique and beautiful. This is a step by step guide for your family as you start this journey. It may help make the road smoother and answer questions you have not anticipated yet. This can serve as a road map to help your family following a diagnosis.

### Step 1: Receiving the official diagnosis of autism

An autism evaluation must be made by a psychologist, psychiatrist or developmental pediatrician. We have contact phone numbers for providers on our website ([as-az.org](http://as-az.org)). If you have Arizona Health Care Cost Containment System (AHCCCS) insurance you can be seen by a behavioral health doctor. If you have private insurance covered by an employer, you can make an appointment with the list of doctors who diagnose we can provide you.

### Step 2: Check with your health insurance provider on eligibility for autism therapies

Become familiar with all different types of therapy and programs available in your area so that you can decide what will work best for your child. Some therapies you may consider are:

- Applied Behavior Analysis Therapy (ABA): the use of these techniques and principles to bring about meaningful and positive change in behavior. Through decades of research, the field of behavior analysis has developed many techniques for increasing useful behaviors and reducing those that may cause harm or interfere with learning.
- Pivotal Response Training (PRT): is a variation of Applied Behavioral Analysis (ABA) type therapy. It focuses on more comprehensive "pivotal" areas such as increasing a child's motivation to learn, initiate communication, and monitor their own behaviors.
- Occupational therapy: therapy that is focused on an individual's ability to participate in desired daily life tasks. Some examples of daily tasks include caring for one's self or others, working, going to school, playing, and living independently.
- Physical therapy: A branch of rehabilitative health that uses specially designed exercises and equipment to help patients regain or improve their physical abilities. May be beneficial if there is muscle stiffness/tightness, delay in obtaining motor skills milestones, poor balance and coordination, difficulty in moving through the environment, postural abnormalities, muscle weakness, or pain.
- Speech therapy: focus on enhancing or restoring limited or lost communicative skills or oral motor skills such as swallowing. Some individuals do well with a Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS) and others may do well with augmentative communication devices.
- Vision therapy: based on the fact that vision is learned. The ability to see and correctly interpret what is seen does not appear automatically at birth.
- Music therapy: the use of music and its elements such as sound, melody, rhythm, and harmony.
- Equine therapy: excellent therapy for addressing key symptoms: communication and social skills, lowered sensory skills, motor skills, and response to verbal cues and external stimuli. When you ride, you develop a bond with your horse and they become familiarized with your movements, attitudes and emotions, which make them extremely effective in bonding and encouraging communication and interaction.



### **Step 3: Contact the Division of Developmental Disabilities (DDD) for state funded services**

Once you have scheduled your DDD interview a coordinator will come to your house and conduct an evaluation. They can provide respite, habilitation services for your family and let you know what is available for your child. Inquire with them about therapy services they can cover to help your child. They can also schedule someone to visit your home from Arizona Long Term Care (ALTCS). ALTCS would provide insurance for your child.

### **Step 4: Ensure your child is set up for academic success**

When your child is of school age, you have the right to develop an Individualized Education Program (IEP) with your public-school district that is designed to meet the needs of your child. Every child has the right to a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE), and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) mandates a public education for all eligible children and makes the schools responsible for providing the supports and services that will allow this to happen.

If you want to homeschool or place your child in a private school program and you have attended public school for 100 days, your child may qualify for the Empowerment Scholarship Application (ESA). You may be eligible for funding if you waive the rights for your child to attend a public/charter school. Raising Special Kids is an organization that improves the lives of children and adults with special needs. They can also provide additional information on schooling options and advocacy for your child. Website: [raisingspecialkids.org](http://raisingspecialkids.org)

### **Step 5: Get involved**

Reach out for support groups of programs for your child. Do not hesitate to reach out to us here at ASSA for opportunities to get integrated into the autism community.

### **Step 6: Special diets may be considered**

The gluten free/casein free diet is the removal of all wheat protein (gluten), and milk protein (casein) from the diet. Many parents and physicians have found that implementing the GF/CF diet relieves some symptoms associated with ASD. For more information about the GF/CF diet, visit [gfcfdiet.com](http://gfcfdiet.com).

### **Step 7: Record-keeping worksheet**

We recommend creating a folder or binder to keep all your child's information in a secure place. This will allow you to track appointments, assessments administered, and results. This will be vital in measuring progress and advocating for the services your child needs. Many parents find it useful to keep an email folder with all electronic communications and a 3-ring binder for paper copies.

To learn more about your next steps, contact the Autism Society of Southern Arizona (**520-770-1541**) [www.as-az.org](http://www.as-az.org).

