

Five Things To Do After an Autism Diagnosis

Focus on these initial steps to get the help you need for your child.

Getting a diagnosis of autism or other disabilities for your child can be emotional, stressful, and overwhelming. In many cases, parents may have suspected for some time that something might be different about their child, but that doesn't make the news easy to hear. It is a lot to process and it's easy to get lost wondering what to do next.

You might worry about the challenges ahead, and difficulties you and your child might face. The truth is a diagnosis is not the end. It is the beginning. What at first might seem like difficult news can, in fact, lead you to the help your child needs to thrive.

With a diagnosis, you have an understanding of what your child is dealing with. From there, you can start to make plans to support him or her. Help is out there, and a better life awaits. You just need to walk the path. Here are five steps to start your journey.

1. Identify Recommended Interventions:

In the early stages, it's important to know what types of interventions, therapy, and other support your child needs. He or she might need behavioral therapy, occupational therapy (OT), speech, or a mix of things. Ask your doctors and case workers lots of questions. Do your own research. Take the time to learn about your child's diagnosis and understand what each of these therapies can do, where they overlap and where they don't. This will help you seek out the assistance you need.

2. Talk To Your Insurance Company:

Once you know what types of interventions are required, contact your insurance provider. Find out what is covered by your insurance and what might be out of pocket. If you have a network plan, it will be important to search therapists and providers that are in-network. Find out whether these services are set up with copays or if you must meet a deductible. Diagnoses of things like autism and ADHD generally fall under behavioral health, so before spending time on hold with your insurance company's general health department, listen for an option for behavioral health and connect directly with them. Knowing what your coverage and benefits are will help you when seeking providers and allow you to plan financially.

3. Explore Financial Support Programs:

There are numerous federal, state, and local programs that are designed to help children with special needs. The application processes can often take time, so it's good to ask questions early and find out what you qualify for. Locate your local Community Centered Board (CCB) and enlist their assistance. There are special waiver programs to help with equipment and therapy, and there are also programs through Medicaid that can provide support to families. Colorado even has a Medicaid buy-in program that can be very helpful for families that qualify based on income.



4. Find the Right Providers:

After you have a plan for the type of treatment required and understand your insurance and support, the next big step is to find the right providers. There are many options out there, but it's important to identify providers that align with your family's needs and therapists who understand and connect with your child. Ask questions. Set up interviews. Whether you are seeking out services that are in-center or delivered in your home, it's important to find the right fit for your child and your family.

5. Advocate for Your Child:

Once therapy is underway and the initial steps are taken care of, keep in close communication with the therapists and providers working with your child. Make sure you understand what's working and what's not, and don't be afraid to speak up if you feel something isn't right. It's OK

to speak up and ask for a change if things don't seem to be working out. It's not personal, it's just about giving your child the best opportunity to succeed. You are your child's most important advocate.

This can feel overwhelming, particularly during the emotional time following a diagnosis. Sometimes it can feel like you're walking blindfolded through a forest, but remember that there are many resources and support services out there. Seek out parental support groups, local organizations, and services that can help guide you.

In the end, all the effort will pay off. Research shows that early intervention for children with disabilities like autism and ADHD can make a tremendous difference in their overall development and socialization later in life. Stay positive and take it one step at a time. Before you know it, you'll find yourself in a much better place.