

MeBe's

Ultimate Resource Guide on Autism

Receiving an autism diagnosis can bring a mix of emotions and questions.



This guide was created to help families access resources, make informed decisions, and navigate their journey with confidence.



Trusted guidance, resources, and support for families navigating autism.



Evidence-Based
Information



Practical
Strategies



Caregiver
Wellness



Resources &
Next Steps

Trusted Sources on Autism



Understanding autism can help you make informed decisions about services, supports, and opportunities that help your child learn, grow, and thrive.



Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

The CDC provides information on Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), including signs, symptoms, and current data.



National Clearinghouse on Autism Evidence & Practice

A research center that reviews and disseminates evidence-based practices for supporting individuals with autism.



Association for Science in Autism Treatment

Provides education on evidence-based autism treatments and combats misinformation.



Autism Society

Connecting families to advocacy, education, resources, and support.



Getting Started

With the right resources and support, families can navigate challenges and celebrate progress throughout their child's journey.



FROM EVALUATION TO NEXT STEPS

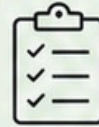
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Review your child's evaluation report and explore services that match their needs.

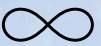


2



Create a checklist of services and supports to help you find the best fit for your child's needs.

Therapy & Support Options



Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) - Focuses on improving behavior, communication, and life skills through reinforcement strategies.



Speech Therapy (SLP) - Develops communication, language development, and speech clarity.



Occupational Therapy (OT) - Assists with motor skills, sensory integration, and daily life skills.



Developmental Therapy (DT) - Promotes cognitive and social-emotional development.



Physical Therapy (PT) - Supports gross motor skills, coordination, and strength.



Multi-disciplinary Services - Coordinated services that support your child's overall development.

Where To Begin



Finding the right services starts with understanding your options and asking the right questions.



IDENTIFY QUALIFIED PROVIDERS

1

Ensure that therapists are licensed and have experience working with children with autism.

2

For ABA therapy, confirm the provider has Board Certified Behavior Analysts (BCBAs) overseeing treatment.

3

Speech Therapists should be certified through ASHA (American Speech-Language-Hearing Association).

4

Occupational Therapists should be certified through AOTA (American Occupational Therapy Association).



CONSIDER THE THERAPY SETTING



Home-based Therapy

Personalized attention, integrates therapy into daily routines.



Clinic-based Therapy

Structured environment with specialized equipment and peer interactions.



School-based Therapy

May be included in an Individualized Education Plan (IEP).



Teletherapy

Builds skills in everyday environments with active caregiver involvement.



TOUR THE FACILITY OR OBSERVE A SESSION



Watch how the therapist interacts with your child.



Do they use individualized strategies based on your child's strengths and needs?



Is the environment structured and engaging?

Exploring Options



Understanding your child's needs can open the door to new supports, resources, and opportunities.



ASK THE RIGHT QUESTIONS

1



What experience do you have working with children with autism?

2



What age ranges do you work with?

3



What is your therapy approach, and how is progress measured?

4



How do you involve parents in therapy sessions?

5



What is the expected duration and frequency of therapy?

6



Are there any waitlists, and what is the availability of services?



CHECK INSURANCE AND FUNDING OPTIONS



Confirm whether your insurance covers autism-related therapies.



Look into Medicaid waivers, state programs, and nonprofit organizations that offer financial assistance.



Inquire about school district support (IEP or 504 Plan) for in-school services.



MONITOR PROGRESS AND ADAPT AS NEEDED



Set realistic goals with therapists and actively track progress over time.



Be open to adjusting services and supports as your child's needs change.



Maintain open communication with providers and seek second opinions when needed.

SECTION THREE:
BUILDING A SUPPORT SYSTEM

Building Your Child's Support Team

Medical, therapeutic, and educational supports work together to help your child thrive.



MEDICAL & THERAPEUTIC SUPPORT



Developmental Pediatricians:
Oversee medical aspects of autism, including co-occurring conditions (e.g., ADHD, epilepsy, sleep disorders).



Psychologists & Counselors:
Support emotional regulation, social skills, and mental health.



Behavior Analysts (BCBAs):
Provide behavior-based interventions tailored to the child's needs.



Speech-Language Pathologists (SLPs):
Assist with communication development.



Occupational Therapists (OTs):
Help with sensory processing, motor skills, and daily living activities.



Physical Therapists (PTs):
Assist with coordination and movement challenges.



TIP:

Keep a record of all therapy sessions, progress reports, and recommendations to ensure continuity of care.



EDUCATIONAL SUPPORT



Special Education Teachers:
Help create an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) or 504 Plan for school accommodations.



Paraprofessionals & Aides:
Provide additional classroom support when needed.



School Therapists (SLP, OT, PT):
Support developmental needs within the school setting.



Social Workers & Counselors:
Assist with emotional well-being and coping strategies at school.



TIP:

Regularly attend IEP meetings to ensure the educational needs are being met.

SECTION THREE:
BUILDING A SUPPORT SYSTEM

Connecting With Others

Local programs and support networks can help families thrive.



SOCIAL & COMMUNITY RESOURCES



Support Groups for Parents

Connect with other families who understand your journey and can offer encouragement and advice.



Social Skills Groups

Help your child practice social interaction, communication, and friendship in a supportive environment.



Recreational Programs

Engage your child in fun activities that promote growth, confidence, and inclusion.



Religious or Cultural Support

Find faith-based or cultural communities that align with your values and provide meaningful support.



ADVOCACY & LEGAL SUPPORT



Autism Organizations

National and local organizations provide education, resources, advocacy, and connections to support you and your child.



Disability Advocates

Advocates help you navigate systems, understand your child's rights, and ensure access to appropriate services and supports.



Financial Planning

Explore grants, trusts, scholarships, and financial planning resources to secure your child's future and reduce stress.



Look for autism-friendly activities, sensory-friendly events, and inclusive community programs.



Stay informed about disability rights, insurance coverage, and government support programs.

Building Meaningful Connections

Strong peer connections foster confidence, friendship, and community.



PEER & FRIENDSHIP NETWORKS



Inclusive Playgroups

Provide a structured, supportive way to interact with peers.



Buddy Programs

Pair children with supportive peers to encourage social connections.



Understanding Teachers & Classmates

Promote inclusion and friendship in school.



BUILDING A SUPPORT SYSTEM OVERVIEW



Stay Connected

Join online forums, local groups, and attend autism-related events.



Be Proactive

Seek early intervention and adjust supports as needs change.



Prioritize Self-Care

Parents and caregivers need support too—respite care and counseling can help prevent burnout.



FRIENDSHIP TIP:

Encourage friendships based on shared interests, and teach social interaction strategies.



CAREGIVER TIP:

Connect with family, friends, therapists, and community supports to strengthen your family's journey.

SECTION FOUR: ADVOCATING FOR SERVICES

Know Your Child's Rights

Advocating for your child's
educational and therapeutic services



UNDERSTAND YOUR CHILD'S RIGHTS: IDEA & SECTION 504

1



Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)
Guarantees a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) for children with disabilities.

2



Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act
Ensures that children with disabilities receive necessary accommodations in public schools.

3



Early Intervention Services (Part C of IDEA):
Provides therapy for children under age 3.

4



Special Education Services (Part B of IDEA):
Covers children ages 3-21, including access to IEPs and related services.

GOVERNMENT & LEGAL RESOURCES



U.S. Department of Education - IDEA
Provides official information on IDEA, including regulations and resources.



U.S. Department of Education - Office for Civil Rights (OCR) - Section 504 - Offers an overview, FAQs, and case examples related to Section 504.



Center for Parent Information & Resources (CPIR) - IDEA - Offers fact sheets, toolkits, and explanations of IDEA provisions for parents and educators.



National Center for Learning Disabilities (NCLD) - Provides guides and toolkits for understanding special education laws



CHILD



RIGHTS



SERVICES



SUPPORT



Stay Organized:
Keep copies of evaluations, IEPs, progress reports, and correspondence.



Know Timelines:
Learn your state's timelines for evaluations, meetings, and appeals.



Ask Questions:
Don't hesitate to request clarification about services, goals, or decisions.

ADVOCACY TIP:

Know your child's rights and advocate with confidence.

SECTION FOUR:
ADVOCATING FOR SERVICES

Securing School Support



IEP

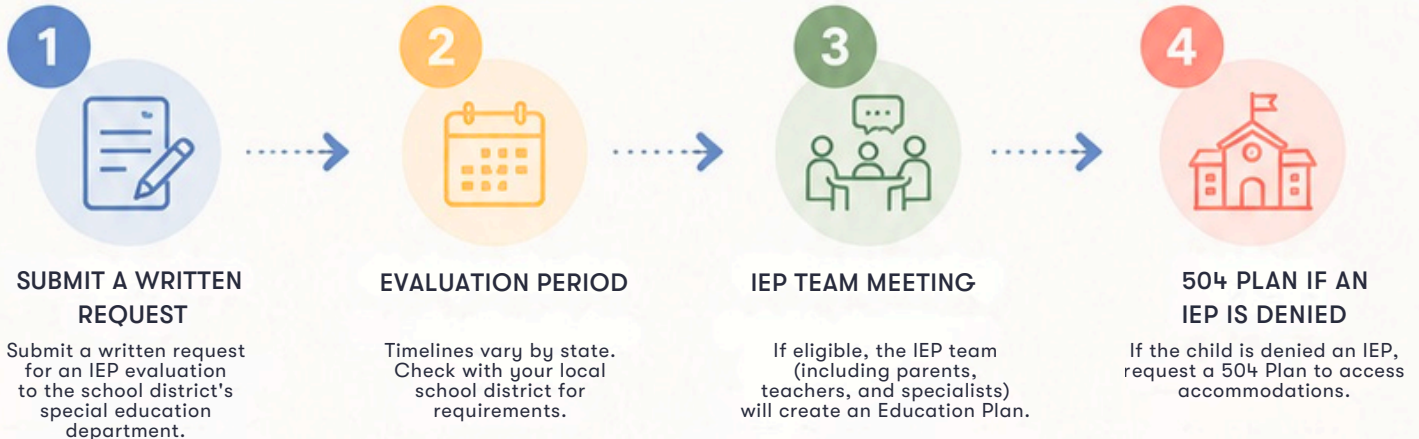
IEP: A legal document outlining specialized instruction, services, accommodations, and goals tailored to a child's educational needs.



504 Plan

504 Plan: A plan that provides accommodations and supports to help a student access learning, such as sensory breaks, extended test time, or assistive technology.

STEPS TO REQUEST AN INDIVIDUALIZED EDUCATION PLAN OR 504 PLAN



SCHOOL DISTRICTS FOLLOW STATE-MANDATED TIMELINES



TIP: KNOW THE LAW

Read up on IDEA and Section 504 to understand what schools are legally required to provide.



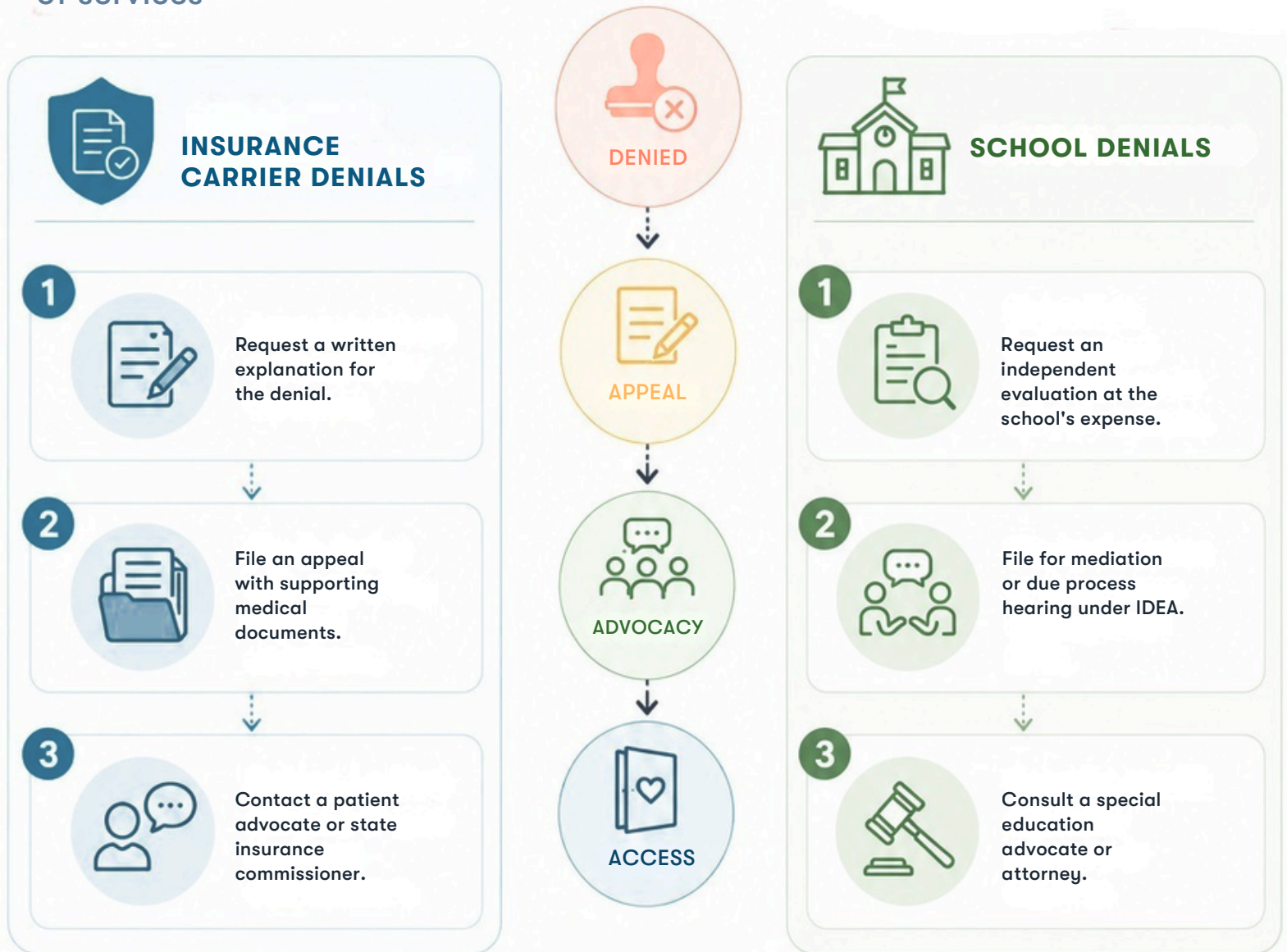
TIP: BRING SUPPORT

Bring an advocate or therapist to IEP meetings to strengthen your case and provide a clinical perspective.

EVALUATION → PLAN → SERVICES → PROGRESS

When Services Aren't Approved

Steps to appeal a denial of services



If your child is denied therapy coverage or school accommodations, don't give up.

Request written explanations, gather supporting documents, and seek advocacy support to appeal and fight for the services they deserve.



Finding Funding



FUNDING SOURCES



MEDICAID & MEDICAID WAIVERS

Some states cover ABA therapy, speech therapy, and occupational therapy for children with autism.



RESOURCES



FUNDING PROGRAMS



THERAPY ACCESS



CHILD PROGRESS



STATE DISABILITY PROGRAMS

Many states have funding programs for respite care, assistive technology, and early intervention services.



INSURANCE MANDATES

Some states require private insurance to cover autism-related services.



NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS

National, state, and local nonprofit organizations may offer grants, scholarships, or funding assistance programs.

HOW TO FIND FUNDING

1



Review national and local funding resources.

2



Contact your state's Department of Health & Human Services (DHHS) for Medicaid Waiver programs.

3



Ask local autism resource centers about funding assistance.

4



Look into grants and scholarships for therapy costs.

FUNDING TIP 1

Keep all medical and therapy documentation.
Many funding programs require detailed paperwork.

FUNDING TIP 2

Organize records in one place.
Quick access can save time when applying for funding.

What Behavior Can Tell Us

How Tracking Behaviors Can Help



Keeping track of your child's behaviors and responses can help you identify patterns, triggers, and what strategies work best.



Understanding your child's behaviors can help you better support their needs and collaborate with their care team.

BEHAVIOR DETECTIVE TOOLKIT



1

Use a Behavior Log or Journal

Note when challenging behaviors occur, what happened before, and how your child responded.



2

Use an ABC Chart:

Antecedent

What happened before the behavior?



Behavior

What did your child do?



Consequence

What happened after?



3

Identify Sensory Triggers

Certain sounds, lights, or textures might cause discomfort or meltdowns.



4

Monitor Emotional & Social Cues

Track how your child reacts to different people, routines, or situations.



5

Use Behavior Tools

Monitor progress, identify patterns, and share information.



EXAMPLE: GROCERY STORE MELTDOWN

If your child has meltdowns at the grocery store, note the time, environment, and possible sensory overload (crowds, loud noises, bright lights).



CROWDS

+



LOUD NOISES

+



BRIGHT LIGHTS

SENSORY OVERLOAD



CAREGIVER TIP

If a pattern emerges, adjust your child's routine to reduce discomfort or gradually expose them in small steps to increase tolerance.



Using Visual Supports

Visual supports and social stories can teach new skills, reduce anxiety, and promote independence.



VISUAL SCHEDULES

Use picture cards, apps, or whiteboards to create step-by-step routines for daily activities (e.g., morning routine, bedtime routine).

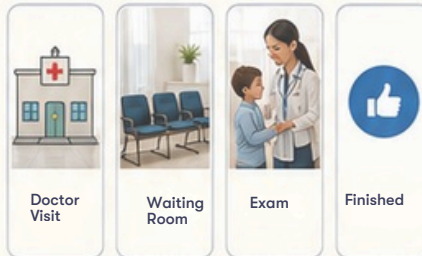


Show the sequence of activities so your child knows what to expect next.



SOCIAL STORIES

Create simple picture-based stories that explain situations like going to the doctor, sharing with friends, or handling emotions.



Keep stories short, clear, and positive to model expected behaviors.

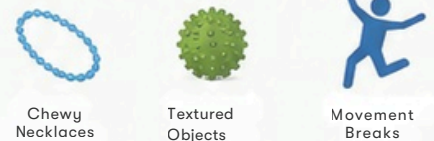


SENSORY SUPPORT TOOLS

If your child is sensitive to sensory input, sensory tools can help them feel more comfortable, calm, and ready to participate.



If they seek sensory stimulation, offer chewy necklaces, textured objects, or movement breaks.



EXAMPLE: TRANSITIONING TO SCHOOL

If school transitions are stressful, a visual schedule of the morning routine can help your child prepare for the day.



CAREGIVER TIP

Start simple and build up — not all children need the same level of structure.



Supporting Communication



Adapt Communication Methods

Since communication styles vary among autistic individuals, adapting communication to your child's needs is essential for connection and understanding.

HOW TO SUPPORT COMMUNICATION



FOR VERBAL CHILDREN



1 Clear, Direct Language

Use clear, direct language (e.g., instead of "Behave yourself," say "Please keep your hands to yourself").

"Please keep your hands to yourself."



2 Extra Processing Time

Give extra processing time—wait a few seconds before repeating a question.



3 Non-Verbal Cues

Be aware and responsive to non-verbal cues. Children cannot always produce words when they are stressed, overwhelmed, or upset.



4 Conversation Turn-Taking

Teach conversation turn-taking through modeling and play.



CHILDREN WITH LIMITED SPOKEN LANGUAGE

1 AAC Tools

Introduce AAC (Augmentative and Alternative Communication) tools like communication apps (Proloquo2Go, TouchChat).



Proloquo2Go



TouchChat

2 PECS (Picture Exchange Communication System)

Use PECS to help them express needs (e.g., showing a "snack" card to request food).



Snack Card



Request



Snack Received

THE COMMUNICATION SPECTRUM



Communication



Words



Gestures



AAC



Pictures



Facial Expressions



Body Language



Connection

Supporting Self-Expression

A calm environment, sensory supports, and emotional guidance can help them regulate and feel more comfortable.



Supporting Children During Sensory or Emotional Overload



Sounds



Lights



Textures



Emotions

↓
Self-Regulation

Communication Supports



Use gestures, sign language, or body language to reinforce meaning.



Provide a "break" signal so they can communicate when they need space.

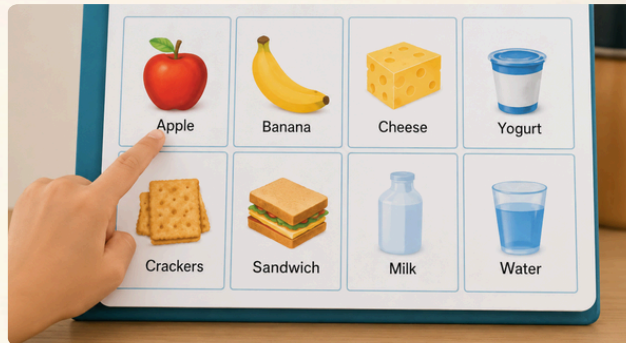


Break



EXAMPLE

If your child struggles with verbalizing "I'm hungry," using a picture-based food menu lets them point to what they want.



CELEBRATE

Praise small communication victories—whether through speech, gestures, or devices. Every form of communication is meaningful.

BE A RESPONSIVE & SUPPORTIVE CAREGIVER



Be patient & flexible—your child's needs may change over time.



Encourage independence — let them attempt tasks with guidance.



Praise progress, not perfection — focus on what they are doing well.



Share successful strategies across home, school, and therapy.

COMMUNICATION TAKES MANY MEANINGFUL FORMS

Every form of communication helps children express their needs, build relationships, and participate in everyday life.

Caring for Yourself Matters

Caring for a child with autism often means balancing therapies, school, and daily life.



RECOGNIZE CAREGIVER BURNOUT



Feeling constantly exhausted



Irritability or feeling overwhelmed



CAREGIVER WELLNESS



Stress-related physical health changes



Emotional numbness or detachment



Withdrawing from friends or activities

Educate Yourself Without Becoming Overwhelmed

It's important to stay informed about autism, therapies, and educational rights, but too much information at once can cause stress and confusion.

HOW TO MANAGE INFORMATION EFFECTIVELY



Trusted Sources

Use trusted sources like the CDC, ASAT, and local autism organizations.



One Step At A Time

Take it one step at a time. Focus on what your child needs now.



Connect With Experts

Seek guidance from trusted professionals.



Limit Research Time

Set limits on research time to avoid constant stress.

Balance Starts With You

Balance looks different for every family. Focus on what is realistic for you—not what feels perfect.



Find Time for Yourself

Small, consistent habits can help reduce stress and create a greater sense of balance over time.

WAYS TO PRIORITIZE YOURSELF



Engage in hobbies or activities you enjoy.



Exercise regularly, even if it's just a short walk.



Practice mindfulness or relaxation techniques.



Maintain relationships outside caregiving.



Don't Be Afraid to Ask for Help

*Accepting support can help you be a more present and effective caregiver.
Asking for help may also reduce feelings of isolation.*

WAYS TO GET HELP



Family & Friends
Let them assist with childcare, errands, or emotional support.



Respite Care Services
Short-term care for your child so you can take a break.



Caregiver Support Groups
Local or online communities provide understanding and shared experiences.



Professional Help
Therapists and counselors can help manage stress and emotions.

Trusted Resources & Websites

Reliable sources of information, advocacy, and support for families navigating autism.



The internet is full of autism information-but not all of it is accurate. These trusted organizations provide evidence-based guidance, educational resources, and support for families.



TRUSTED AUTISM RESOURCES



CDC Autism Resources

 cdc.gov/autism

Autism signs, developmental milestones, diagnosis information, statistics, and family-friendly educational resources.



National Clearinghouse on Autism Evidence & Practice (NCAEP)

 ncaep.fpg.unc.edu

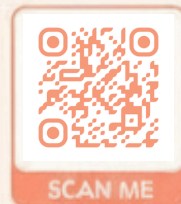
Research summaries and evidence-based intervention guidance for families and professionals.



Association for Science in Autism Treatment (ASAT)

 asatonline.org

Evidence-based treatment information and practical tools for evaluating autism interventions.



Autism Society

 autism-society.org

Advocacy, education, support groups, local chapters, and community resources.



Advocacy, Funding & Support Resources



Eligibility requirements and available benefits vary by program, location, age, diagnosis, and insurance coverage, so it's worth exploring multiple resources.



ADVOCACY & EDUCATIONAL RIGHTS



IDEA

Federal special education laws, IEPs, educational rights, and IDEA guidance.
ed.gov



Office for Civil Rights (OCR)

Section 504 protections and disability accommodations.
ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr



CPIR

Parent-friendly guidance on IEPs, 504 Plans, and advocacy.
parentcenterhub.org



NCLD

Educational rights, accommodations, and learning disability resources.
nclد.org



FUNDING & FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE



Autism Speaks

Financial aid resources and autism funding toolkits.
autismspeaks.org



Easterseals

Community programs, disability services, and respite care.
easterseals.com



UHCCF

Grants for medical and therapy-related expenses.
uhccf.org



State DHHS Programs

Medicaid waivers and disability support programs.
State-specific resources.

THESE ORGANIZATIONS CAN HELP FAMILIES ACCESS INFORMATION, FUNDING, ADVOCACY, AND EDUCATIONAL GUIDANCE.