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Resources for People with Autism Spectrum Disorder in Arizona

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a condition characterized by communicating, behaving, and learning in ways that are different from most other people. ASD now includes conditions such as Autistic Disorder and Asperger Syndrome that used to be diagnosed separately.

About 1 in 59 children in the US are affected by autism, according to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC). The symptoms of autism appear in infancy and include delays in basic areas of development, such as learning to talk, move, and interact with others. It is a spectrum condition, which means some people are affected more than others.

Developmental milestones are things most children can do by a certain age. For example, most babies can smile by the age of two months and roll over by six months. The CDC has checklists for various ages [here](#).

If your child misses any of the milestones or if you think your child may have autism or any other developmental delay, it is important to have an assessment as soon as possible, because:

- an official diagnosis will smooth the way to start services, and
- intervention is likely to be more effective when it is provided earlier.

The links below are to services found in the 2-1-1 Arizona database. Click on a link and then add a location under Custom Search on the right.

INSURANCE:

- Your child may be eligible for [AHCCCS](#) (Arizona Health Care Cost Containment System), the state-run Medicaid program. AHCCCS can pay for doctor's office visits, physical exams, immunizations, prescriptions, crisis intervention, and counseling. Click [here](#) for more info.
- If you have private insurance, call for a referral to a local pediatrician.

ASSESSMENT:

Make an appointment for a developmental assessment or evaluation with your child's pediatrician or click [here](#) to find a clinic.

DIAGNOSIS:

If your child is diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder, there are several state programs available to help your child thrive.

STATE PROGRAMS:

- **Arizona Early Intervention Program (AzEIP)** is for children age 36 months and younger. This program provides services for infants and toddlers with developmental delays or disabilities and their families. If your child is eligible, family members and providers work as a team to support your child's development. They will help create an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) that outlines the services your child needs. Determining a child's eligibility, developing the IFSP, and coordinating services are free. For other services, families with an income of 200% or more of the Federal Poverty Guidelines (FPG) will have to pay a Family Cost Participation fee. Click [here](#) to find an AzEIP provider.
- **DES Division of Developmental Disabilities (DDD)** provides services for people with developmental disabilities who are age 3 and older. Support Coordinators (also known as case managers) connect clients to services in their home or the community through a large network of contracted providers. Click [here](#) for the eligibility office.
- **Arizona Long Term Care System (ALTCS)** provides long-term care for people who need ongoing services at a nursing facility level of care and are disabled, blind, or age 65 and older. They must also be on low income. Services can be provided in the home or in a facility at little to no cost. Click [here](#) for the eligibility office.

THERAPIES:

There are a variety of therapies to consider. Every child is different and you can decide what will work best for your child.

- **[Physical therapy](#):** Uses specially designed exercises, heat, cold, and massage to improve circulation, strengthen muscles, and increase mobility. This may be helpful for someone with poor balance or coordination, difficulty in moving through the environment, muscle weakness, or pain.
- **[Occupational therapy](#):** This is similar to physical therapy but it also teaches people how to change their movements so they can take care of themselves. The focus is on improving the ability to do activities of daily living (ADLs) such as bathing and getting dressed.
- **[Speech Therapy](#):** The focus is on enhancing or restoring communicative skills. The emphasis is on helping with pronunciation, stuttering, and voice problems where the loudness or quality of voice is affected.
- **Vision therapy:** This is also called visual training or vision training, and is a type of physical therapy for the eyes and brain. The development of vision is the learned process of seeing, observing, visualizing, remembering, and learning. Even if a child has 20/20 vision, they may have trouble getting their eyes to focus or track objects. Using

exercises, various instruments, and computer programs, the goal is to train the eyes to work together more efficiently and process visual information more accurately.

- [Music therapy](#): There is no musical ability required to benefit from this therapy. It involves listening to, moving to, singing, and creating music. The sounds and rhythm can be used for stress reduction and calming; to increase or maintain physical, mental, social, and emotional functioning; and to promote movement for physical rehabilitation.
- [Equestrian Therapy](#): Riding and caring for horses provides an experience that helps improve communication, social skills, self-awareness, empathy, and motor skills. People learn about themselves and others by participating in activities with the horses, and then discussing feelings, behaviors and patterns.
- [Applied Behavior Analysis \(ABA\)](#): This intervention is based on the theory that behaviors that are rewarded are more likely to be repeated. It is designed to teach skills, from basic ones such as eating and dressing, to more complicated skills such as social interactions. It can also be used to correct inappropriate, repetitive, and aggressive behaviors.
- [Social Skills Training](#): These are classes to improve the skills people use to create positive relationships with others. They can help with conversational skills and understanding social cues. This includes politeness, cooperation, taking turns, body language, eye contact, using appropriate language, and other interactions.
- Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT): This is a form of short-term counseling that helps people understand the negative thoughts that influence their behaviors. It focuses on solutions, and can help address anxiety and other personal challenges.
- [Medication](#) can help manage symptoms like anxiety, depression, attention deficit, and hyperactivity that can be associated with autism.

ACADEMIC SUCCESS:

- The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) mandates a public education for all eligible children. It also makes the school responsible for providing necessary supports and services.
- When you enroll your child in public school, you can work with the school district to develop an Individualized Education Program (IEP). The IEP will be designed to meet the needs of your child.

OTHER TIPS:

- Reduce sensory overload: Some people are hyperaware of sounds, sights, touches, and smells, and can become overstimulated. Avoiding such things as bright lights, loud sounds, scented products, and scratchy clothing can reduce these feelings.
- Visuals: Pictures can serve as reminders about household rules, steps to take for an activity, and where certain things go.
- Consistent schedule: Keep regular times for getting up, meals, etc.
- Use clear, direct, and concrete language: Figurative speech and phrases such as “the early bird catches the worm” can be difficult to understand.

GET INFORMATION:

Navigating the system of services can be overwhelming. If you have questions about how to take the next step, get [Information about Autism](#).

GET SUPPORT:

There are [Support Groups](#) for people with autism and their families.

KEEP RECORDS:

Keep a folder with all of your child's information in one place. This will allow you to track appointments, behaviors, tests given, and the results. This will be vital in measuring progress and advocating for the services your child needs. Many parents find it useful to keep one email folder with all electronic communications plus a three-ring binder for paper copies.

SPECIAL DIETS:

Some parents have found that removing gluten, milk products, or sugar relieves some autism symptoms. Check with your doctor before changing your child's nutrition plan.

SOURCES: American Psychiatric Association; Arizona Department of Economic Security (DES); Arizona Department of Education; Arizona Supreme Court - Dependent Children's Services Division; United States Department of Health & Human Services - Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC); United States Department of Health and Human Services - National Institutes of Health; United States Department of Justice - Civil Rights Division, Disability Rights Section

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