

Selecting a Behavioral Services Provider

TIPS AND RESOURCES FOR PARENTS OF CHILDREN WITH AUTISM



Choosing a Behavioral Provider

When choosing a behavioral provider for your child or adult with an autism spectrum disorder (ASD), there are areas of consideration that will help you to make an effective selection. Determine the provider's qualifications and be sure you understand their governing philosophy on behavior intervention.

Searching and Qualifications

A good place to start a search is by asking other families for recommendations. Autism support agencies often keep lists of providers and may be helpful in your search. Even after contacting a behavioral provider, ask for references and then contact those references. By asking questions and listening to the experiences of others, you will get a better picture of the professional and his or her practice. A qualified behavioral provider will be someone who:

- has experience with strategies known to help teach children and/or adults with ASD.
- has experience working with people within a similar age range.
- is a Board Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA), a Board Certified Assistant Behavior Analyst (BCaBA), or is a tutor or educator directly supervised by a BCBA.

Best Practice in Behavior Intervention

Effective behavioral providers are those who understand that every person with autism is an individual. Their approach will include individualized interventions and supports that are visual and tailored to current skill levels and learning strengths. Beware of any provider who presents a general

“package” or a predetermined curriculum that is not tailored to individual needs.

Look for a provider who considers the entire family system when implementing interventions. Such an approach will take into account factors that influence the functioning of the family unit, as well as the family's priorities, values, and belief systems.

Functional Goals and Outcomes

The goals in effective behavior interventions will directly address challenges and strengths across all functional areas, including in the areas of social interaction, communication, and restricted or repetitive interests. There will be a focus on functional skills in these three core areas that can be generalized to apply in multiple settings and situations. Effective strategies will also focus on the long-term maintenance of the learned skills. Be wary of outcomes that focus solely on decreasing challenging behaviors without replacing them with appropriate behaviors.

Varied Approaches

An effective behavioral provider will:

- Use a variety of approaches and strategies that are driven by principles of Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA)
- Maintain a flexible approach and a willingness to adjust based on environment or situation
- Select strategies that are clearly tied to the goals created

Monitoring and Data Collection

Effective strategies will utilize data collection and analysis to continually re-evaluate program progress and effectiveness of strategies. Beware of treatment packages that are not regularly re-evaluated.

Parent Involvement

Parent/caregiver input is an essential element for success. Providers should solicit and accept input on a regular basis. Parent/caregiver training should be a component and should occur frequently. Finally, the behavioral provider should appear to genuinely care for your child's/adult's well-being.

Please see reverse for resources.



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RESOURCES

Who We Are and Who We Serve

The **Vanderbilt Kennedy Center (VKC)** works with and for people with disabilities and their family members, service providers and advocates, researchers and policy makers. It is among only a few centers nationwide to be a University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities, a *Eunice Kennedy Shriver* Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities Research Center, and a Leadership Education in Neurodevelopmental and Related Disabilities Training Program. The following are some of the ways the Center's programs and staff can assist families, educators, and other service providers.

Vanderbilt Autism Resource Line

Free information and referral service for parents, teachers, and community professionals. Information is available about autism-specialized diagnostic evaluation services, school consultation, parent workshops, and professional training at Vanderbilt for children, adolescents, and adults with ASD. Contact autismresources@vumc.org, or (615) 322-7565, or toll-free (877) 273-8862.

Treatment and Research Institute for Autism Spectrum Disorders (TRIAD)

TRIAD is a Vanderbilt Kennedy Center program dedicated to improving assessment and treatment services for children with autism spectrum disorders and their families while advancing knowledge and training. See triad.vumc.org or call (615) 322-7565.

Tennessee Disability Pathfinder

Tennessee Disability Pathfinder provides free information, referral sources, and help with navigating services via phone, email, and website. Assistance is available to individuals of all ages, all types of disabilities, and all languages spoken. Its website database has over 3,000 agencies searchable by Tennessee county and service. Pathfinder is a project of the VKC, TN Council on Developmental Disabilities, TN Department of Health, and the TN Department of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities. Contact www.familypathfinder.org, (615) 322-8529, toll-free (800) 640-4636.

Other Resources

• Behavior Analyst Certification Board

The Behavior Analyst Certification Board is a nonprofit corporation established to meet professional credentialing needs identified by behavior analysts, governments, and consumers of behavior analysis services. Their website has a helpful "consumer information" section, including a registry of current Board Certified Behavior Analysts. www.BACB.com

• Autism Society of America Tennessee Chapters

Three regional chapters in Tennessee function to enrich the lives and experiences of individuals on the autism spectrum, their families, and their surrounding community through support, advocacy, and education. Autism Society of East TN, www.asaetc.org
Autism Tennessee, www.autismtn.org
Autism Resources of the Mid-South, autismresourcesmidsouth.org

• National Autism Center

The National Standards Project answers one of the most pressing public health questions of our time — how do we effectively treat individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders? A free downloadable report of strategies is available to assist parents, educators, and service providers in making informed decisions about which treatments are backed by research. See autismpdc.fpg.unc.edu/sites/autismpdc.fpg.unc.edu/files/2014-EBP-Report.pdf.

Contact the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center

Nashville (615) 322-8240

Toll-Free (866) 936-VUKC [8852]

Web: vkc.vumc.org

Email: kc@vumc.org

