



First Steps

After an Educational Classification of Autism

Being told that your child has an educational classification of autism can either be expected or come as a surprise. In either situation, you may feel unsure, scared, or lost. Understanding what to do next can ease worries, and help you feel more confident with the path forward. In this document, you will find information and resources to help guide you through the first couple of weeks following an educational classification of autism.



First Steps

After an Educational Classification of Autism

1.

Seek Support

You are not alone. Your child's teacher, pediatrician, other parents or caregivers, and organizations within the community may help you understand the resources and support available for you and your child. For example, [DC Autism Parents](#) (DCAP) is a parent volunteer-led non-profit organization that offers resources, a video series, and monthly newsletters. The DC Parent Training & Information (PTI) Center, [Advocates for Justice & Education](#), can support you with free information and resources related to your child's education and healthcare needs.

2.

Know the Difference Between an Educational Classification versus a Medical Diagnosis of Autism

While only having an Educational Classification of Autism is valid and essential for accessing school-based support, obtaining a medical diagnosis can provide additional resources and services that can further benefit your child's development and well-being.



What is an Educational Classification of Autism?

An educational classification of autism identifies autism as a disability under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and determines eligibility for special education services. An educational classification of autism can be helpful to make sure a child has access to needed supports in school. An Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) or Individualized Education Program (IEP) may be developed.



What happens when you pursue an autism evaluation in the medical setting?

Children can receive a comprehensive autism evaluation in the medical setting by a medical provider (pediatrician, psychologist, or another medical specialist). These evaluations are usually covered by your child's health insurance. Providers use your description of your child's development, developmental history, observations, and assessments to determine if your child meets the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders-5th Edition (DSM-5) diagnostic criteria for autism. If your child meets these criteria, the provider will give your child a medical diagnosis of autism. If your child has only received an educational classification of autism, they can benefit from having a medical diagnosis of autism as well.



Why is it important to pursue a Medical Diagnosis?

A medical diagnosis of autism can be helpful to make sure a child has additional access to services through their health insurance plan. A medical provider may recommend other therapies and services that are not part of your child's IFSP or IEP. Pursuing a medical diagnosis in addition to an educational classification of autism can allow families to have better access to services in school and in the community and may be able to support their child's development more comprehensively.

3.

Inquire About a Medical Diagnosis of Autism

You can call your insurance provider or ask your child's doctor to help you find a health care provider who can diagnose autism. Below is also a list of clinics that evaluate autism:



DC Metro Area

- [MedStar Georgetown University Hospital: Autism and Communications Disorders Clinic](#) Phone: 202-444-2722
- [MedStar Georgetown University Hospital: Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Program](#) (up to age 8)
Phone: 202-944-5400
- [Children's National Referral Guide](#)



Baltimore Area

- [Kennedy Krieger Center for Autism Services, Science, and Innovation](#) Phone: 443-923-7630, option 2
- [Autism Spectrum Center at Mount Washington Pediatric Hospital](#) Phone: 410-367-2222
- [The Behavioral and Developmental Pediatrics Division at University of Maryland Children's Hospital](#) Phone: 410-328-5887



PARENT TIPS ON HOW TO ACCESS AUTISM EVALUATIONS

While waiting for a medical autism evaluation, we encourage you to compile information about your child's development, including any medical records or results from any developmental or educational evaluations. It can also be helpful to contact your health insurance company to find out what services they will or will not cover, and how much they would cover if your child ends up receiving a medical diagnosis of autism. Here are a few more tips:

- Waitlists are long for medical evaluations (3 months-2 years), but stay encouraged
- Call multiple clinics and submit paperwork, make several appointments but check their cancellation policy
- Medical evaluation and early intervention/educational evaluations (Strong Start/Early Stages) can happen at the same time, and it is often a good idea to pursue both at the same time
- Ask questions if you do not understand
- Work with your medical provider to arrange further diagnostic evaluations if needed



Resources

ORGANIZATIONS:

- **[Advocates for Justice & Education](#)** serves as both the Parent Training and Information Center (PTI) and the Family-to-Family Health Information Center (F2F) for the District of Columbia:
 - **Parent Training and Information Center (PTI):** Each state has at least one PTI Center funded under IDEA. The goal of the PTI is to support families of children birth-22 with disabilities by providing free information to maximize their child's education.
 - **Family-to-Family Health Information Center:** The F2F is staffed by highly skilled, knowledgeable family members who have first-hand experience and understanding of the challenges faced by families of Children and Youth with Special Health Care Needs and Disabilities.
- **[DC Autism Parents \(DCAP\)](#):** DCAP supports families in navigating the autism journey through [a video series and monthly newsletter](#). DCAP is a 501(c)3, parent volunteer-led non-profit organization created by parents of autistic children and youth for parents of autistic children and youth.
- **[DC Special Education Hub](#):** The DC Special Education Hub helps families understand special education in the District of Columbia. Their knowledgeable team connects families with tools, information, and 1:1 support so families can make informed decisions to guide their child's learning.
- **[The Ethiopian Eritrean Special Needs Community \(EESNC\)](#):** EESNC is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit dedicated to empowering individuals with special needs and their families. EESNC adopts a family-centered approach, offering culturally sensitive and linguistically appropriate information, training, tailored guidance, and referrals. Serving as a dynamic community hub and information-sharing platform, EESNC ensures easy access to vital resources and expertise.

PARENT TRAININGS:

- **[ADEPT \(Autism Distance Education Parent Training\)](#):** Developed by UC Davis MIND Institute/Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities, ADEPT Interactive Learning is a 10-lesson interactive, self-paced, online learning module providing parents with tools and training to teach their child with autism and other related disorders functional skills using applied behavior analysis (ABA) techniques.
- **[Caregiver Skills Training](#):** A free online training program from Autism Speaks and the World Health Organization that teaches caregivers day-to-day skills to help boost the wellbeing and development of children ages 2-9 with autism and other developmental delays.
- **[Help is in Your Hands](#):** An online interactive resource, developed by UC Davis clinical psychologists, Sally Rogers and Aubyn Stahmer, for families with young kids with symptoms of or diagnosed with an autism spectrum disorder. It is a free website with 16 web-based video modules to help parents add simple intervention practices to their everyday routines at home.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

- **[Rest to Create Change Toolkit](#):** A resource created by DC Autism Parents to support parents and caregivers to adopt rest within their daily lives.
- **[Sesame Street and Autism](#):** The Sesame Workshop's autism resources page offers educational and engaging materials tailored for families of children with autism, featuring videos, activities, and the introduction of Julia, a Muppet with autism, to promote understanding and inclusiveness. The site provides practical tools and tips to help navigate daily challenges. They support the nurturing of connections within the autism community with empathy.
- **[Association for Science in Autism Treatment - Learn More About Specific Treatments](#):** A comprehensive resource for parents of children with autism, offering information on a wide range of autism treatments. It aims to empower families with knowledge to make informed decisions regarding therapeutic options, emphasizing the importance of scientifically validated methods for improving the lives of individuals with autism.