

AUTISM PROVIDERS

If you or a loved one has a diagnosis of autism, chances are that you will meet many different support people as you look for services and supports. There are many different kinds of providers who work with people with autism: these can include healthcare providers, mental health providers, and county or state workers. This guide will help you understand what different types of providers do and what kinds of things they can help you with.

DOCTORS



PEDIATRICIAN OR GENERAL PRACTITIONER

One of the first people you will probably talk to about autism is your doctor. If you are a parent, this will be your pediatrician. If you are an adult, this will be your general practitioner (your main doctor). Most pediatricians will give your child a short screen (test) for autism at ages 18 and 24 months. If they notice something that indicates autism, they will probably give you a referral to have a full diagnostic evaluation. Your doctor can help you connect with specialists.

DEVELOPMENTAL PEDIATRICIAN

If your pediatrician thinks your child may have autism, they can refer you to a developmental pediatrician. This person specializes in developmental conditions like autism or Down Syndrome. They may give your child a full evaluation for autism and give you recommendations for which services are available. They can help you plan where to go after your diagnosis.

PSYCHIATRIST

A psychiatrist is someone who provides mental health services who also has a medical license to prescribe medications. You may work with a psychiatrist to get a diagnosis, or to get a prescription for medication related to mental health. There is no medication that treats autism itself, but many people with autism can find medications helpful for co-occurring problems like ADHD, depression, anxiety, or OCD.

NEUROLOGIST

Neurologists can help provide more specific information about a person's nervous system and brain. They can diagnose autism, and they can be particularly helpful for diagnosing and treating seizure disorders (which are more common in people with autism), managing sleep problems, or if you are interested in more in-depth testing that might show genetic or neurological sources of autistic traits.

PHYSICAL THERAPIST

Many autistic folks don't have strong motor skills, strength, posture, coordination, or balance. Many others are hypermobile or have co-occurring disorders that impact joints and mobility. A physical therapist can help develop these skills and will provide exercises to strengthen and/or stretch areas that need more support.

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SUPPORT PROVIDERS



CASE MANAGER

If you or your loved one needs a variety of supports, a case manager is an incredibly helpful resource. Case manager is a broad term that can refer to multiple people in different roles. Depending on where you receive services, your case manager may be a different person who can provide different services. They may also have different education and credentials, including social worker or special education teacher.

In general, case managers help identify the right resources and connect their clients to providers. They can also help coordinate care across different providers and services, provide referrals, support families with school issues (for example at an Individualized Education Plan Meeting), and help you apply for and manage health insurance and county benefits.

SOCIAL WORKER

Similar to case managers, social workers also have a broad role in supporting individuals with autism and their families. Some licensed social workers act as mental health therapists (see next page), while others work more broadly to support the person and their family with things like understanding ASD, helping with communication and social skills, connecting with educators, providing school support, advocacy, and care coordination.

DIRECT SUPPORT PROFESSIONALS/PERSONAL CARE ASSISTANTS

A DSP or PCA can provide direct support to an autistic person, both in their home and in the community. It can include support with bathing, grooming, dressing, eating, cleaning, executive function, etc. DSPs generally support a person in their own home/work/school environment.

VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION/JOB COACH

Vocational rehabilitation is a government service that helps people with disabilities find and keep jobs. When a person with autism enters the workforce or begins thinking about employment, they may work with vocational rehabilitation to learn job skills, practice interviewing, get help with applications, and get support finding a job that is a good fit. They may also work with a job coach who helps them directly at a job. A job coach can provide training, make suggestions for accommodations, improve communication between management and employee, and support a client at the job.

SPEECH/LANGUAGE PATHOLOGIST

Autism affects a person's communication skills, so you may want to get speech and language therapy. This person can help provide access to Augmentative and Alternative Communication (ways of communicating that aren't spoken words), help strengthen the muscles needed to speak, improve spoken and unspoken communication, and help clients speak more clearly.

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THERAPISTS

PSYCHOLOGIST/MENTAL HEALTH THERAPIST

A psychologist is someone who provides mental health services, primarily through talk therapy of some kind. Psychologists and psychiatrists often work together closely. A psychologist can diagnose autism, and you may also work with a psychologist to help manage mental health concerns like depression, anxiety, etc. Some psychologists may support people with life skills like socialization, work, or relationships. They may use a variety of different approaches, and it can help to understand different types of therapy to know which approach will be helpful for you.



OCCUPATIONAL THERAPIST

Occupational therapy can be incredibly helpful for people with autism, but many families don't know what happens in occupational therapy. The goal of any occupational therapy is to help a person gain skills to more independently engage with the world around them: that may be living skills, skills for school, or skills for work. Occupational therapists often help clients understand and meet their sensory needs, learn activities of daily living (eating/bathing/dressing, etc.), and gain motor skills.

BEHAVIORAL THERAPIST

Behavioral therapy works to change a person's behaviors, especially if those behaviors are dangerous or are keeping them from participating in important activities like school, socialization, or work. There are many different types of behavioral therapy that might be provided by therapists with different backgrounds, but all of them will identify particular challenging behaviors and work to help a client replace them with more helpful behaviors. You will probably encounter behavioral therapists providing Applied Behavioral Analysis (ABA) or working at Autism Day Treatment Centers. While some providers may recommend 40 hours of ABA therapy a week, studies have found that more hours of therapy does not improve outcomes: instead, what is most important is that parents are involved.

SPECIALIZED THERAPISTS

There are other types of therapies that may help support a person with autism in emotion regulation, building communication skills, connecting with others, and building motor skills. Some common examples are art therapy, music therapy, and equine therapy.

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autism society of minnesota

Counseling and Consulting Services



The Autism Society of Minnesota's highly trained therapists have committed their careers to helping individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder understand their diagnosis. They provide strategies to support each person's unique autism experience, addressing both the challenges and gifts it can bring. AuSM therapists help individuals with autism from youth through adulthood as they grow at their own pace in a safe, compassionate, and respectful environment. Our therapists practice a variety of types of therapy, including EMDR, ACT, CBT, and hold licensures including LMFT, PhD, MA, MS, MSW, and more. You can learn more about our therapists at www.ausm.org.

Counseling Services:

- Individual therapy
- Marriage, couples, and family therapy
- Psychoeducation
- Second opinions on autism evaluations
- Trauma therapy
- Evaluations for autism for ages 16+ (limited availability)
- Onsite consultations for high-intensity challenges when staff or family need additional support



Contact us at autismcounseling@ausm.org to set up an appointment or visit www.ausm.org for more information.