



# Supporting Individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder

A guide for families and  
professionals

## About this Publication

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This publication has been compiled to assist individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder who are under 25 years of age. It is a guide for individuals, parents and professionals to provide information on available supports and services in Australia. This guide has been produced as a reference only and is not intended to replace the advice of a health professional.

As the service system varies between the states and territories, the best point of contact when seeking information regarding services and supports in your local area is your state or territory autism association.

This document was developed by the Australian Advisory Board on Autism Spectrum Disorders through funding provided by the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services, and Indigenous Affairs. Copyright 2013.



Australian Government  
Department of Families, Housing,  
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Australian Advisory Board on  
Autism Spectrum Disorders

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## Contact Details for the Corporate Members of the Advisory Board

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### **Autism Spectrum Australia (Aspect)**

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### **Autism Northern Territory**

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### **Autism Tasmania**

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Email: [admin@autismtas.org.au](mailto:admin@autismtas.org.au)  
Phone: Hobart (03) 6278 9985 Launceston (03) 6344 1212

### **Amaze (Autism Victoria)**

Web: [www.amaze.org.au](http://www.amaze.org.au)  
Email: [info@amaze.org.au](mailto:info@amaze.org.au)  
Phone: 1300 308 699

### **Autism Association of Western Australia**

Web: [www.autism.org.au](http://www.autism.org.au)  
Email: [autismwa@autism.org.au](mailto:autismwa@autism.org.au)  
Phone: (08) 9489 8900

## What is Autism Spectrum Disorder?

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Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is the term used to describe a life-long neurodevelopmental disability marked by impairments in social interaction and communication, and repetitive or restricted behaviours, interests and activities.

The presentation of ASD varies considerably depending on factors such as cognitive ability (IQ), personality and age. Some people with ASD have learning, sensory, and communication difficulties. Some people with ASD may have an average or above average IQ, and acquire spoken language at the same age as typically developing children. No two individuals with ASD are the same.

The following characteristics indicate that a person may have ASD:

- Limited eye contact, facial expressions, and gestures
- Frequent or extreme tantrums with aggressive or self-injurious behaviour
- Developmental delay in speech and language
- Abnormal speech content and quality
- Echoes words back without understanding (echolalia)
- Poor use of nonverbal communication and body language
- Repetitive use of words or phrases and unusual speech patterns
- Difficulty expressing needs and wants both verbally and nonverbally
- Difficulty initiating or sustaining conversation
- Has trouble understanding or talking about feelings
- Takes what is said too literally
- Talks incessantly about one topic
- Extreme resistance to change and transitions, insistent on following same rules and routines
- Preoccupation with parts of objects or fascination with repetitive movement e.g. spinning fan
- Repetitive body movements e.g. hand flapping, rocking
- Narrow, restricted interests often involving numbers or symbols e.g. memorising sports statistics
- Limited development of play activities, particularly imaginative play
- Remains aloof, preferring to be alone
- Uneven development of gross and fine motor skills
- Abnormal posture e.g. toe walking
- Reacts unusually to sights, smells, sounds or textures. May be especially sensitive to loud noise.

*If you are concerned that an individual you know has an ASD please refer to the [Assessment and Diagnosis](#) section of this publication.*

*Alternatively, you can consult your state or territory autism association for further information.*



# Understanding and Working with People on the Spectrum

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People with ASD often find understanding and relating to other people challenging and anxiety provoking. Understanding the difficulties of an individual with ASD is important, especially if you are going to be interacting with them regularly.

## ***Behaviour and Social Skills***

Individuals with ASD may have difficulty interacting appropriately with others because they may not understand the rules of social behaviour. They may not understand how to behave appropriately in a social capacity and the social cues that others take for granted may not come naturally to them. Many individuals with ASD will need to learn the rules of social interaction.

Some individuals with ASD may display behaviours of concern. It is important to involve the team around the individual in all aspects of the individual's care to ensure a consistent approach. If the individual is an adult, it is important to provide them with the opportunity to make the decision regarding the involvement of parents or carers. Their level of involvement in this decision will depend on the person's capabilities.

Individuals with ASD need consistency, predictability and structure. Always explain what you are going to do and if possible, present information visually as well as verbally to aid understanding.

Sometimes making a schedule of the day's activities or giving a map of where you are going can be reassuring. Provide support and reassurance and understand that anxiety can cause extreme reactions to what seems like a minor event.

## ***Cognitive Capacity***

Be aware that individuals with ASD have varying degrees of cognitive capacity. Some may have an intellectual disability (or intellectual impairment) while some may have average or above average cognitive ability. People with ASD may have difficulty learning new tasks or understanding instructions. Always provide continuous positive reinforcement and clear, simple instructions to reduce stress, confusion and frustration.

It is important to understand the learning style and capabilities of the individual that you are working with. For example, some people with ASD may learn better when material is presented visually, whereas others may process auditory information more successfully.

## ***Communicating Effectively with Individuals with ASD***

Many individuals with ASD will have trouble understanding and communicating effectively. It is important to consider the language you are using. Some may have language disorders that make communication challenging.

### **Some examples of this can include:**

*Use and understanding of nonverbal behaviours as communication*

- Poorly integrated verbal and nonverbal communication
- Abnormalities in eye contact and body-language
- Unusual vocal quality; i.e. abnormal use/understanding of prosody (i.e. voice pitch, intonation, volume rhythm or stress).
- Difficulty in identifying a topic of interest to others
- Difficulty in understanding purpose and intentionality of communication as a social medium

*Delay in, or total lack of, speech development*

- Expressive, receptive language delays and/or disorder
- Receptive language often more delayed than expressive
- Disordered sentence structure
- Difficulty with complex sentences
- Often repeats last part of sentence or question
- Tends to be literal
- Difficulty with understanding and use of language concepts (i.e. time, direction, emotion)
- Becomes overwhelmed with too much verbal direction.

*Stereotyped or idiosyncratic language use*

- Use of rote or learnt phrases – echolalia
- Unusual vocal quality
- Abnormal voice pitch, intonation, volume rhythm or stress.
- Misuse of pronouns

May have extensive vocabulary, but not appropriate to social context

### **To communicate effectively:**

- Use clear and simple language.
- Leave pauses and waiting time in between sentences and phrases to allow individuals with language difficulties to process the information.
- Communicate one idea at a time by breaking up ideas into sentences with pauses in between.
- List events in sequential order to allow for information to be processed more easily.
- State your message clearly and avoid language that may imply meaning. This will prevent individuals from making inferences about what is being said.
- Avoid ambiguous language such as metaphors, similes and idioms as these can be taken literally.
- Avoid giving instructions by asking a question (e.g. “please set the table” instead of “can you set the table?”).
- Speak in a normal tone of voice using normal intonation and volume, slightly slower speed and plenty of pauses.
- Give specific choices and limit open ended questions.

### ***Sensory Stimuli***

Many individuals with ASD experience sensory processing issues of some sort. Although their eyes, ears, and other sensory receptors function normally, the way that sensory information is processed in their brains, can cause them to experience and respond to sensory input in unusual ways.

Sensory processing refers to the brain’s interpretation of information from the common five senses: sight, hearing, taste, smell and touch. Information from two



other systems is also interpreted in the brain: the proprioceptive system (sensors in the muscles and joints that give us information on position of parts of our body), and the vestibular system, which helps with balance (sensors in the middle ear that tell us if we are upside-down or right-side-up, if we are moving fast or slowly).

Sensory issues can impact on an individual with ASD in a number of ways. For example, sensitivity to touch can contribute to parent-child struggles over teeth cleaning and haircuts. Sensitivity to the taste, smell and texture of foods can contribute to picky eating habits. At times, heightened stress associated with overwhelming sensations in the environment may escalate to challenging behavior.

The unusual sensory response of people with ASD may include:

- **Over-responsiveness:** People with ASD can find some forms of sensory input uncomfortable or distressing. For example some people with ASD may react negatively to loud noises, bright lights, someone touching them unexpectedly, or strong smells.
- **Under-responsiveness:** Sometimes people with ASD don't respond to input as much as others seem to. For example, they may not notice someone speaking to them, or may not seem to notice painful events or extreme temperatures.
- **Sensory-seeking.** Some people with ASD appear to crave particular sensations, such as touching or mouthing objects, body-rocking, humming to themselves, or watching patterns of light. The person may use these sensations to "block out" other sensations that they find distressing. They may also engage in sensory seeking behaviours to help calm themselves when they are feeling anxious. They may also seek some sensations because they enjoy them.

It is important to be aware of sensory difficulties when working with a person with ASD. This may present as sensitivity to sounds, smells, or tastes. Loud noises in particular can be distressing for individuals with ASD. Too many visual or auditory stimuli at once can also cause stress. Sensitivity to fluorescent or flashing lights can be problematic. Some individuals with ASD may withdraw (e.g. put fingers in their ears, close their eyes) while others 'stim'. Stimming occurs when individuals make motions such as flapping hands, rocking or flicking fingers in order to stimulate sensations that they enjoy, -to block out other sensations that they find overwhelming or to deal with stress. This kind of behaviour can help calm the individual, so try not to stop it unless absolutely essential.

Simplify the environment wherever possible and be watchful for sensory issues. For example, try to avoid too much extraneous sensory input such as background noise, visual clutter or crowding. It may be helpful to offer a quiet space or quiet time where individuals can go and relax and escape from the general environment if they need to.

For more information consult your state or territory autism association.

## Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

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### ***What is the prognosis for an individual with an ASD?***

ASD is a lifelong condition. Most individuals with ASD will require varying degrees of support throughout their lives. With structured support programs sensitive to the unique needs of each individual, many gains can be made and individuals with ASD can live a meaningful and fulfilling life.

### ***Does ASD co-exist with other conditions?***

ASD can occur by itself or in association with other disorders such as intellectual disability, anxiety, learning disability, epilepsy, Fragile-X syndrome, mood disorders, sleep disorders, attention deficit disorders and others.

### ***How common is ASD?***

The findings of research on the number of people with autism spectrum disorder in the population vary considerably. Currently most Australian autism service providers are using an estimated prevalence rate of one in every 100 children for planning purposes. More males than females are diagnosed with ASD. The ratio is around 4:1.

### ***What causes ASD?***

The cause of ASD is unknown. There is evidence that genes play an important role in the cause of ASD; however it is likely that there are multiple genes involved. There is no medical or genetic screening for ASD; diagnosis is based on the presence of particular behavioural patterns.

### ***What is the range of intellectual functioning of individuals with an ASD?***

Some individuals have an intellectual disability in addition to their ASD. There are also many individuals with ASD who are of average or above average intelligence. Individuals with ASD often display an uneven pattern of abilities, having strengths in certain areas and weaknesses in others.

### ***How do individuals with ASD commonly communicate?***

Individuals with ASD vary in their communication skills. Some may never develop language. Others might acquire simple language, whilst others will develop fluent and effective language. Some have sophisticated vocabulary and/or the ability to speak with great technical complexity on certain topics, but may have difficulty understanding or expressing complex or abstract concepts. Sometimes their conversations may be very one-sided, as struggle with the back-and-forth nature of conversations. Some individuals with ASD have comprehension problems, often more so than suggested by their expressive language. Even the most able individuals with ASD report auditory comprehension difficulties at times at some level. Many rely heavily on visual skills to compensate for auditory comprehension problems. Some individuals with ASD may not develop speech but will be able to communicate through alternative communication methods such as signing, picture exchange systems or printed word.

### ***Can children with ASD go to a mainstream school?***

Yes, all children with ASD are entitled to go to a mainstream school. Some children with ASD may qualify for some extra funding, which the school can use to support the child's learning. Some mainstream schools have special education units or ASD-specific units where children get specialised teaching and support and also have opportunities to do activities with children in mainstream classrooms. Some children are included in the mainstream classroom all of the time. They may receive extra supports in the classroom (e.g., teacher aide or learning support). Some children with ASD may attend an autism-specific school if there is one in their region. Children with ASD who also have an intellectual disability may qualify to go to Special Schools or Special Developmental Schools (see [Schooling Options](#)).

### ***How can I help someone with ASD?***

Anyone can help someone with ASD. It all begins with patience, knowledge and understanding around ASD. An important fact to remember is that every individual on the spectrum is unique and therefore will have both strengths and difficulties. Simplifying communication and instructions may benefit the individual. Other ways to help someone with ASD include taking time to listen and communicate with the person, minimise any stressful scenarios, and reading ASD-related books to help gain a better picture of the disorder. You can also contact your state or territory autism association for resources or training in your area.

## **Assessment and Diagnosis**

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An assessment can provide information for the individual, parents, and carers about a person's behaviour and can help to guide particular strategies and intervention approaches for their individual needs. Early intervention is recommended by researchers and health professionals.

### ***Where to start?***

If you are worried that your child (or another family member) has Autism Spectrum Disorder the first step is often to visit your General Practitioner (GP) and discuss your concerns with them. GPs do not assess for ASD, however, they will be able to refer you to the relevant specialists.

### ***Assessment for children***

ASD assessment is usually carried out from 18 months or older. There is no single test for diagnosing ASD, so a range of tests and measures are used to gather information. The assessment process can be quite lengthy and often includes involvement by a number of health professionals. Diagnosis requires a comprehensive assessment that may include: gathering a detailed developmental and family history; observation of the child's behaviour and interaction with others; a medical assessment; cognitive assessment; language assessment; and the use of standardised tests and questionnaires.

### ***Who will be involved?***

A number of professionals may be involved in the assessment process including paediatricians, psychiatrists, psychologists, speech pathologists, occupational therapists, audiologists and neurologists. A diagnosis of ASD in children is often conducted by a multi-disciplinary team of health professionals over a number of sessions. In some regions the diagnosis is primarily made by the child's paediatrician. These health professionals will be experienced in the assessment of ASD and they will gather comprehensive information on cognition (knowledge and understanding), communication (language and non-verbal), and social, behavioural and adaptive skills.

There are a number of public and private practitioners and teams that specialise in the assessment and diagnosis of ASD. To obtain information about practitioners in your area please contact your state or territory autism association.

### ***Diagnosis***

Once the assessment is completed the team will discuss their findings and decide whether the child meets criteria for ASD. Health professionals involved in the diagnosis will generally refer to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM). This manual is currently in its fifth edition. For further information please see [www.DSM5.org](http://www.DSM5.org).

### ***Assessment for Adolescents***

For some individuals, the signs for ASD have not been as prominent in early childhood and they may not receive a diagnosis until later in life. Sometimes social and behaviour differences become more noticeable as individuals grow older (for example, it may become more apparent when they reach high school and have difficulty functioning within the school environment). A diagnosis as an adolescent can still be beneficial in guiding treatment and intervention approaches. If seeking assessment for an adolescent, consulting a psychologist or psychiatrist who has experience in the assessment and diagnosis of ASD would be helpful.

### ***Assessment for Adults***

If an individual reaches adulthood without receiving a diagnosis, an assessment can still provide important information about the adult's functioning and can help provide support and assistance. For adults seeking an assessment, the best option is to talk to a psychologist or psychiatrist that has experience in the assessment and diagnosis of ASD.

*The assessment and diagnostic process for ASD varies between states and territories in Australia.*

*For more specific information relevant to your state please contact your state or territory autism association.*

### ***Further Information and Resources***

Raising Children Network ASD website: [www.raisingchildren.net.au/autism](http://www.raisingchildren.net.au/autism).

## Federal (National) Funding Packages

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### **Medicare**

There are a number of Medicare rebates available for therapy. These rebates do not cover the entire fee and usually you will be required to pay the full amount then make a claim to Medicare for the rebate. For families with young children who are accessing the Helping Children with Autism funding through the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA), it is important to remember that the Medicare items can be used in conjunction with the FaHCSIA funding.

#### *Chronic Disease Management Plan (previously Enhanced Primary Care Plan)*

This plan is available to individuals with ASD because it is classified as a life-long condition. It will provide the individual with five sessions with an Allied Health Professional every calendar year and is written by your GP.

[www.health.gov.au/internet/main/Publishing.nsf/Content/2D0515377A0F7ED6CA25767200080F17/\\$File/cdm%20Patient%20Information%20Brochure.pdf](http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/Publishing.nsf/Content/2D0515377A0F7ED6CA25767200080F17/$File/cdm%20Patient%20Information%20Brochure.pdf)

#### *Better Access to Mental Health Plan*

This plan is available to any individual who feels that their overall wellbeing and mental health is at risk. This item provides six sessions of individual therapy (an additional four sessions are available if needed), and 10 group sessions of therapy per calendar year with a psychologist, social worker or occupational therapist. This plan is written by your GP, psychiatrist or paediatrician.

[www.health.gov.au/internet/main/Publishing.nsf/Content/40C645359E58A388CA257A6F0014FCDE/\\$File/patients2.pdf](http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/Publishing.nsf/Content/40C645359E58A388CA257A6F0014FCDE/$File/patients2.pdf)

#### *The Helping Children with Autism Access to Diagnosis and Treatment Plan (Item 135)*

This plan is written by a Paediatrician or Psychiatrist and provides four appointments for private diagnosis and 20 sessions with an Allied Health Professional. Children with ASD are eligible for this plan and these rebates can only be used once in the child's life time, they must be written by their 13<sup>th</sup> birthday, and used by their 15<sup>th</sup> birthday.

[www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/5CF66A50D3A03E14CA2578B2001EFDB6/\\$File/Fact%20Sheet%20for%20Parents.pdf](http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/5CF66A50D3A03E14CA2578B2001EFDB6/$File/Fact%20Sheet%20for%20Parents.pdf)

#### *Summary of Medicare Benefits available to Individuals with ASD*

[www.amaze.org.au/medicare](http://www.amaze.org.au/medicare)

### **Centrelink**

#### *Carer Allowance*

You may be eligible for financial assistance from Centrelink. This includes the Carer Allowance (Child or Adult), which your doctor will help you access. There is also an annual lump sum payment for people who receive the Carer Allowance called the Child Disability Assistance Payment. These payments are not means tested.

### *Carer Payment*

If you cannot support yourself through paid employment due to the demands of your caring role, you may be eligible for the Carer Payment (Child or Adult). This payment is income and assets tested, and takes into account family income. For more information, visit [www.centrelink.gov.au](http://www.centrelink.gov.au) or phone 132 717.

### *Health Care Card*

If you are receiving the Carer Allowance, your child will have a Health Care Card. If you are on other benefits you may also hold a Health Care Card in your name. The Health Care Card allows you access to cheaper medicines and other concessions such as discounted public transport for some cardholders, bulk billing by selected doctors, and higher refunds through the Medicare safety net.

### ***DisabilityCare Australia: The National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS)***

DisabilityCare Australia, the national disability insurance scheme, is currently being introduced in certain areas of Australia at the time of compiling this publication. It will recognise that disability is for a lifetime and will aim to support people with permanent disabilities with ongoing care and support. The details of how the NDIS will operate in Australia are still being developed by the Australian government and it is still unclear as to what this may mean for individuals with [an](#) ASD. Visit [www.ndis.gov.au](http://www.ndis.gov.au) or [www.disabilitycareaustralia.gov.au](http://www.disabilitycareaustralia.gov.au) for further information.

### ***Helping Children with Autism (HCWA) Package***

The Helping Children with Autism (HCWA) package is an Australian Government initiative providing support for children 0-6 years with ASD, their families and carers. The package was introduced by the Federal Government in October 2008 and has a number of components. Each eligible child receives \$12,000 to spend on approved early intervention services before they turn seven years of age. Each state or territory has an Autism Advisor service to facilitate the package and to assist families to access the funding. Contact your state or territory autism association for more details.

The Autism Advisor team at Amaze (Autism Victoria) have put together a video presentation as an introduction to the Helping Children with Autism package, which can be accessed here: [www.amaze.org.au/hcwa-resources](http://www.amaze.org.au/hcwa-resources)

## **State- and Territory-Specific Funding Packages**

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### ***Early Intervention Services***

Each state and territory has a range of funding options available that are designed to support individuals with ASD. Most commonly, each state and territory offers an early intervention service that targets service provision and additional support for children under school age. See the [Early Intervention](#) section of this booklet for more information.



### ***Individual Support Packages Program***

An Individual Support Package is Disability Services funding that has been allocated to a person for assistance with meeting their disability support needs. The funds may be used to buy a range of supports chosen by the person to help achieve their goals. This may include individually delivered supports and/or group based supports such as a day service. Support packages vary between states and territories, it is best to contact your state or territory disability service to get further information on the support packages available to your state.

Visit the Raising Children Network Autism website and follow their Services Pathfinder for contact details of relevant state or territory contacts.  
[www.raisingchildren.net.au/autism](http://www.raisingchildren.net.au/autism).

Alternatively, contact your state or territory autism association or disability department to find out more information about funding in your area.

## **Intervention and Therapy for Individuals with ASD**

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Individuals with ASD often present with a range of difficulties or needs across a number of areas. It can be a challenge to prioritise needs and decide which types of therapy to access. There are many different therapies available for individuals with ASD. Some of the most common are speech therapy, occupational therapy and psychology.

Therapy can take place in many contexts; clinic, schools, community setting, at home. Whilst engaging in therapy the individual and family may be given 'homework' to complete outside of the therapy sessions, or some ideas to try during every-day activities.

### ***Choosing a therapy***

It is important to choose a therapy that is relevant for the individual. This can be difficult when an individual and family are starting on their therapy journey. A good place to start is to seek the advice of the professional that diagnosed the individual.

It is important for the individual and family to understand the types of therapy available and the skills that different therapists work on. When selecting an intervention and therapist it is helpful to consider the following points:

- Does the therapy target the areas that are a priority for the individual and family?
- Does the therapist suit the needs and personality of the individual and family?
- How much time is the family expected to dedicate to the therapy each week (some therapies will have minimum hourly requirements)?
- What is the evidence for the therapy (see the Evidence Based Approach section below)?

An excellent resource to refer to when starting on the therapy journey has been developed by Amaze (Autism Victoria) through funding provided by the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs. This



will assist families of young children with ASD to understand the therapy process, determine the needs of the individual, and maximise the benefits of therapy:  
[www.therapy.amaze.org.au](http://www.therapy.amaze.org.au)

### ***Evidence Based Approach***

When selecting interventions for an individual with ASD it is important to consider the evidence base for that particular intervention. Evidence based practice (also called 'best practice' or 'good practice') means using treatment approaches that have been tested through research and shown to have positive outcomes for individuals with ASD.

There are hundreds of proposed 'treatments' for ASD, but unfortunately, many of these do not have direct research evidence to support their effectiveness. Some have even been found to be harmful for use with children with ASD.

Individuals and families need to be mindful of claims that particular therapies or interventions will 'cure' or 'fix' their child's autism. We know that ASD is a lifelong condition for which there is no cure. While therapies and interventions will not 'cure' autism, a number of treatments have been shown to lead to great improvements for children with ASD.

Levels of evidence for treatment effectiveness are sometimes defined in the following way:

**Established treatments** – these have been thoroughly researched and have sufficient evidence for us to confidently state that they are effective.

**Emerging treatments** – these have some evidence of effectiveness, but more research is needed for us to be confident that they are truly effective.

**Unestablished treatments** – these are treatments for which there is no sound evidence of effectiveness.

For further information please see: The Raising Children Network's *Parent Guide to Therapies*:

[www.raisingchildren.net.au/parents\\_guide\\_to\\_therapies/parents\\_guide\\_to\\_therapies.html](http://www.raisingchildren.net.au/parents_guide_to_therapies/parents_guide_to_therapies.html)

This provides an overview of some of the therapies you may come across. The guide gives an overview of the therapy, looks at what research says about the therapy, and outlines the approximate time and costs involved. This is a useful tool to help you decide what therapy might work best for your child and family. If you have further questions, you can contact your state or territory autism association.

#### *Further reading:*

Prior, M., Roberts, J. M.A., Rodger, S., Williams, K. & Sutherland, R. (2011). *A review of the research to identify the most effective models of practice in early intervention of children with autism spectrum disorders*. Australian Government Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, Australia.

[http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/sites/default/files/files/disability-and-carers/executive\\_summary\\_review\\_report.pdf](http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/sites/default/files/files/disability-and-carers/executive_summary_review_report.pdf)

Research Autism

[http://researchautism.net/autism\\_treatments\\_therapies\\_interventions.ikml](http://researchautism.net/autism_treatments_therapies_interventions.ikml)

### ***Goal Development***

An important part of the therapy process is the development of a therapy plan. This plan should clearly outline goals that the individual is working on in therapy as well as a time when these goals will be reviewed to ensure that progress is being achieved. The development of these goals will happen via collaboration with the individual, family and therapist and will determine the direction of therapy depending on the priorities of the individual.

The use of **SMART** goals will help ensure goals are clear and relevant to the individual:

#### **S – Specific**

A goal that is specific clearly details what is expected of the individual. This can include information about who is involved and where the goal should be achieved (e.g. home, school or social setting). This extra information is particularly useful when the individual is working on applying an existing skill in a range of contexts or with different people (generalisation). A specific goal should be easily understood by any person involved with the individual and not be ambiguous or vague.

#### **M – Measureable**

It is necessary for a goal to be measureable so that it can be evaluated at a set date at the end of the service plan. This information is useful to determine the individual's level of progress, and will also aid in the development of new goals for the next service plan.

#### **A – Attainable**

Although a goal is designed to challenge the individual's abilities, it should be realistic and attainable in the time period set by the service plan. The team around the individual should work together when considering whether a goal is attainable.

#### **R – Relevant**

For individuals with ASD who often have difficulties in a number of areas, it can be difficult to prioritise needs when developing a service plan goal. Ensure the goal is relevant for the individual by considering his/her immediate needs or biggest challenges in everyday life. Bear in mind the individual's current circumstances, as well as any changes or significant events coming in the near future (For example, starting or transitioning out of school, or an upcoming family holiday).

#### **T – Timely/Time-sensitive**

A goal should be bound to a time-frame because it creates commitment to meeting a deadline. It is essential that the individual's service plan has an agreed time frame with a specified date for when evaluation of goals will take place.

### ***Private therapy***

There are many private therapy options for individuals with ASD. The funding initiatives that can assist with access to these such as Medicare and FaHCSIA

funding can be found under the Funding section of this publication. You may also be able to claim part of the fee through your private health insurance if your level of cover includes particular therapies.

The fees for private therapists will vary. Please contact your state or territory autism association for more information on services available in your area.

### ***Early Intervention***

The state and territory governments provide early childhood intervention services and early childhood education and care services, although the nature of these services and how they are implemented may vary between states and territories. Often, the government department responsible for the early intervention funding will provide a service or agency with funding, which the service will administer on behalf of the child. Generally, these services cease when a child starts school although there may be some transition in Term One of school.

An early intervention service may provide special education, therapy, counselling, service planning and coordination, assistance and support to access services such as kindergarten and child care. Families may be allocated a key worker. A key worker model is where an early childhood intervention professional becomes a family's primary contact point and the worker practices from a strengths-based, family-centred perspective that enables the family to be in control of their lives. They may visit the family home, or provide services in a clinic, community setting, child care, or kindergarten/preschool.

The overall aim of these services is to provide parents and families with the knowledge, skills and support to meet the needs of their child and to optimise the child's development and ability to participate in family and community life. As the state funded services may be different depending on where you live, the best source of information is from the services themselves. You should be able to get a list of these from your state or territory autism association.

## **Playgroups**

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### ***Playconnect Playgroups***

[www.playconnect.com.au](http://www.playconnect.com.au)

Telephone: 1800 171 882

Playconnect playgroups are autism-specific playgroups for children between 0 and 6 years of age with ASD or ASD-like symptoms. Playconnect aims to promote learning through play and are based in locations around Australia. Sessions are run by a playgroup facilitator who can connect families with information on early intervention and support services in their local area. Playgroups generally run for two hours per week and parents and carers can meet other families with children with ASD in their area.

Playconnect is funded through the Helping Children with Autism Package so there is no cost for families to attend. A gold cold donation is sometimes required if you would like tea and coffee.

For families who don't have access to a local playgroup, Playconnect along with Amaze (Autism Victoria) developed a USB tool for families. For more information on the Nurturing Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder resource, please visit the webpage below. Alternatively contact Amaze or Playconnect directly.  
<http://www.amaze.org.au/2012/03/new-nurturing-children-with-autism-resource/>

### ***Supported Playgroups***

Supported Playgroups aim to provide a chance for parents and children who would not normally access a playgroup to develop social and family support networks. Families are provided with a supportive environment where they can increase their skills and confidence, and participate in play experiences and activities. Supported Playgroups run once a week for two hours and are facilitated by a coordinator. They are based in locations around Australia.

Supported Playgroup targets families from one or more of the following groups within the community:

- Culturally and linguistically diverse families
- Indigenous families
- Families with mental health or disability issues (either the parent or child)
- Teenage and young parent families
- Families who are socially isolated or disadvantaged

Call 1800 171 882 to find your nearest Playgroup or contact your state playgroup association directly.

## **Childcare and Kindergarten**

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### ***Childcare Inclusion***

#### *Inclusion and Professional Support Program*

The Inclusion and Professional Support Program provides professional development and inclusion support to Australian Government-approved childcare service providers.

**Inclusion Support** helps child care services to include children with additional needs in child care, especially:

- children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, including children from a refugee or humanitarian intervention background
- children with ongoing high support needs, including children with a disability
- Indigenous children.

Inclusion Support is facilitated by Inclusion Support Agencies and the Inclusion Support Subsidy and helps child care services to provide high quality care that is

free from discrimination, segregation and prejudice. The National Inclusion Support Subsidy Provider administers the Inclusion Support Subsidy.

**Professional Support** provides professional development and support to providers to enable them to build the skills of their staff to improve the quality of care provided. <http://deewr.gov.au/inclusion-and-professional-support-program>

### ***Kindergarten Support***

Each state will have various support programs to assist children with additional needs in the kindergarten setting. The name of the programs vary between states, however, some states have access to a worker who will work alongside teachers and families to give advice on planning and resources that will support the needs of the child. For further information, please contact your state or territory autism association.

### ***Autism Specific Early Learning and Care Centres***

In addition to the Helping Children with Autism (HCWA) package, the Government has established six Autism Specific Early Learning and Care Centres (ASELCCs) across the country. The ASELCCs provide early learning programs and specific support for children aged 0-6 years with Autism Spectrum Disorder in a long day care setting.

They also provide parents with support in the care of their children and give them the opportunity to participate more fully in the community. Through their affiliations with universities or hospitals, the centres have a research and workforce training component which will help achieve a better understanding of ASD and increase workforce capacity.

An Autism Specific Early Learning and Care Centre has been established in Sydney, Brisbane, Adelaide, North West Tasmania, Melbourne and Perth.

For more information, contact your state or territory autism association, or follow this link: <http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/our-responsibilities/disability-and-carers/program-services/for-people-with-disability/helping-children-with-autism/autism-specific-early-learning-and-care-centres>

## **School**

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### ***Choosing a school***

Choosing the right school for your child can be challenging and will largely depend on your child's needs. There are many things to take into consideration, and collecting information about the options available to you is the first step. It is recommended that you start this process as early as possible. Information can be gathered from web resources, books, parents, teachers, schools and service providers. It is important to remember that, while consulting others can be helpful, you are the person who knows your child the best and the decision is yours to make.

When choosing a school it is important to ask as many questions as you need and have a good line of communication between home and school. Try to find out if the school has opportunities for individualised support for your child, and if they have previous experience supporting children with ASD. Your state or territory association may have resources to assist with this.

### ***Schooling Options***

There are a range of options for children with ASD in Australia. Given that each child with ASD has diverse needs, parents need to assess each of these options and choose what is right for their child. Each state or territory has their own information about schooling options for children with ASD. There are government schools, private schools, independent public schools and specialist schools in each state or territory. The application process and eligibility criteria will be different across Australia.

The following are some examples of schooling options for children with ASD in Australia. These options may or may not be available in your state or territory. For further information relevant to your area, contact your state or territory autism association or state or territory disability service or department of education.

#### *Mainstream School (Government, Independent, Catholic)*

Many children with ASD attend a mainstream school. Some may be fully integrated and attend regular classes full time, while others may only attend part time and will participate in support classes within the mainstream school. Every child has the right to attend their local school regardless of their level of need. Some children with ASD may be eligible for funding to assist with teaching and learning adjustments. Often this funding is used to employ an education assistant or teacher aide for the child.

#### *Support Classes within a Mainstream School*

Many students with ASD attend support classes within a mainstream school. These classes may be autism-specific or they may also include students with other disabilities. Often these classes are smaller and run by a teacher with special education experience. There are often education assistants to provide additional support. Some students may attend both support and mainstream classes each week.

#### *Special Schools*

Special schools cater to students with an intellectual disability, and they may have a range of additional difficulties like Down Syndrome, ASD, physical disabilities and high medical needs. Usually the classes are smaller than in mainstream and have a higher teacher to student ratio. Students often have access to allied health professionals as part of their program.

#### *Autism Specific Schools*

[www.aspect.com.au](http://www.aspect.com.au) [www.autismqld.com.au](http://www.autismqld.com.au)

There is great variability in Australia about such programs. Autism Specific Schools run in some areas for children with a diagnosis of ASD. Class sizes are

generally small and there is often between 1-6 students per staff member. Students usually have access to professionals such as speech pathologists and occupational therapists as part of their weekly program.

### *Home Schooling and Distance Education*

Home schooling is often the last resort for parents if they feel that attendance at any kind of school has not been successful. Children with ASD often face significant academic pressures, or may experience social difficulties within a school environment. In these cases, parents may consider home schooling as an option. Parents will be required to undertake an evaluation process to do this and will need to develop a plan to address the key areas of the curriculum. For further information about home schooling in Australia, visit [www.hea.edu.au](http://www.hea.edu.au).

Distance education operates outside of major city areas. Contact your state or territory department of education for more information.

Some of the State and Territory Autism Associations (see contact details at the beginning of this document) also provide ASD-specific support and advice to teachers of students in mainstream schools and special schools via outreach programs.

## **School Funding**

Each state and territory education system offers different types of support for students with special needs. Speaking to your child's teacher or administration staff at the school such as the principal or deputy principal is often the first step to finding out if your child may be eligible for extra support. Support offered will also depend on whether your child attends a government or non-government school. Different types of support may be available for your child and this is dependent on a number of factors including area, type or severity of the disability, age and educational system.

There are often specialist consultancy services that can visit the school and assist teachers and other staff members with educational plans and strategies. Children with ASD are not automatically eligible for additional funding so your school will usually be asked to submit an application indicating your child's needs within the school environment. Funding is often given directly to the school to support students with special needs. Sometimes this funding may be used to employ an educational assistant or teacher aide who will be able to provide extra support to implement teaching and learning adjustments for your child.

Contact your autism association, state or territory disability service, or department of education for more specific information about what is available to support your child at school.

## **Transitions**

Transition for an individual with ASD can be stressful and anxiety provoking. Individuals are expected to use their social skills and communication skills to



effectively transition to a new environment, and this can often be difficult for individuals with ASD. Transition planning provides individuals with opportunities to be successful and helps prevent behavioural issues that are a result of unexpected change, anxiety and/or phobia.

Preparation is the key when transitioning to a new environment. Strategies that may assist individuals with ASD and their families during transition include:

- Visiting the new environment and meeting some of the new people before the transition.
- Identifying the individual's strengths and weaknesses and informing relevant parties who will be involved in the transition.
- The use of visual timetables, diaries, maps or wall charts to assist with structure and routine.
- Identifying a quiet space or safe area where the individual can retreat to if necessary.
- Using simple, direct and firm language when discussing transition stages.
- Providing choices but ensuring that these are limited so that the individual does not feel overwhelmed.
- Relaxation exercises such as deep breathing to reduce stress and anxiety.
- Focusing on the positive elements of the transition rather than the negative.

For further information and strategies about effective transitioning for individuals with ASD, you can view this under the School heading on this webpage:

[www.amaze.org.au/resources](http://www.amaze.org.au/resources). Other information can also be found on many websites dedicated to autism spectrum disorders. See the [Useful Websites](#) section at the end of this guide for ideas.

## ***Training for School Staff and Parents***

### *Positive Partnerships*

[www.positivepartnerships.org.au](http://www.positivepartnerships.org.au)

Positive Partnerships are a national series of workshops specifically for parents and teachers of school-aged students with ASD. The aim of the workshops is to provide families and teachers with practical strategies to improve the educational outcomes for school-aged students with ASD. In addition to face-to-face workshops, there are also a number of online modules that can be completed. It provides a wealth of autism-specific information for families of school aged students as well as professionals in the field. Positive Partnerships is funded by the Australian Government as part of its Helping Children with Autism Package.

### *Further information*

Your school often receives information about training opportunities for both parents and staff members throughout the school year. You can also contact your state or territory autism association or department of education.

Some of the State and Territory Autism Associations (see contact details at the beginning of this document) also provide training and workshops.

## Family Support

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### ***Respite (Parent/Carer Rest)***

There are a number of respite options available to families of children with a disability. Respite provides families and carers with the well-deserved break they need. Respite services are provided throughout each state in Australia by a range of different organisations.

#### Commonwealth Respite and Carelink Centre

The Commonwealth Respite and Carelink Centre is the main point of contact for families searching for respite options within their local area. These centres are run by a wide variety of community organisations in metropolitan, rural and remote areas in Australia.

Examples of respite include in-home care and access to support workers that offer assistance when primary caregivers are taking a break away from their caring role, to provide support/time with other family members or for self-care opportunities. The general public, service providers, general practitioners and other health professionals can access information about respite including costs and eligibility criteria.

For more information visit [www.commcarelink.health.gov.au](http://www.commcarelink.health.gov.au) or call 1800 052 222.

#### Interchange (Victoria Only)

Interchange programs provide a wide range of services to support families with a child or young person with a disability. Two of the key services provided are the Host and the Recreation programs. Please visit your local Agency to see what programs they offer.

The Interchange Host program matches a child or young person with a host volunteer who has care of the child on a regular basis; usually once a month and arrangements can be flexible. Host volunteers can be families, couples or single people with or without children and of any age over 18. To provide a consistently high quality of service to families, the suitability of prospective host volunteers is assessed by Interchange staff. Host volunteers can quickly learn what is involved, even if they have had no previous experience with young people who have a disability. [www.interchange.org.au](http://www.interchange.org.au).

### ***Parent Support and Counselling***

As a parent or carer for an individual with ASD it is important that you also care for yourself.

An excellent reference guide for families has been developed by the Association for Children with a Disability – ‘Helping you and your family’. It will provide you with information and strategies to assist with looking after yourself as a carer.

A free copy can be downloaded or ordered from the association’s website.

[www.acd.org.au](http://www.acd.org.au)

Some of the State and Territory Autism Associations such as Autism Queensland, ASPECT and Autism WA (see contact details at the beginning of this document) also provide family support services and parent support groups.

#### *National Carer Counselling Program*

The National Carer Counselling Program provides short-term counselling and emotional and psychological support services for parents/carers. The counselling helps reduce stress, improve coping skills, and facilitate, where appropriate, the continuation of the caring role. The counselling program is delivered through the state and territory carer associations. Free call 1800 242 636.

#### *Lifeline*

Lifeline provides telephone counselling services 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Call 13 11 14.

### **Parent Education**

#### *Early Days*

The Early Days program is a series of free face-to-face or online workshops for families of children aged six years or younger who have recently been diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder or are going through the assessment process. Early Days aims to assist parents and carers of children with ASD by providing workshops on a range of topics such as introductory workshops for families of newly-diagnosed children, and skills-based workshops to provide families and carers with practical strategies on topics such as encouraging early interactions, behaviour management strategies, helping your child cope with change, and encouraging play and social learning.

For information on face-to-face workshops please contact your state or territory autism association.

The Early Days online workshops were developed to complement the Early Days face-to-face workshops. Online workshops topics include: building your resilience to stress, supporting siblings, sleep, fathers and self-management.

For more information on the Early Days online workshops please visit the Raising Children Network Autism Website:

[www.raisingchildren.net.au/articles/early\\_days\\_autism\\_workshops.html](http://www.raisingchildren.net.au/articles/early_days_autism_workshops.html).

#### *Positive Partnerships*

Positive Partnerships are a national series of workshops specifically for parents and teachers of school-aged students with ASD. The aim of the workshops is to provide families and teachers with practical strategies to improve the educational outcomes for school aged students with ASD. In addition to face-to-face workshops, there are also a number of online modules that can be completed. For more information about Positive Partnerships visit

[www.positivepartnerships.org.au/](http://www.positivepartnerships.org.au/)

#### *Raising Children Network Autism Website*

[www.raisingchildren.net.au/autism](http://www.raisingchildren.net.au/autism)

The Raising Children Network website is a Government initiative and contains resources and information for families on all parenting issues. As part of the Helping Children with Autism package, an entire section of the website is devoted to parents of children with Autism Spectrum Disorders.

The website contains a wide range of information about raising children with ASD, with fact sheets on issues that many parents face. There is also a parent forum where you can log in and post questions and answer questions from other parents who are also raising a child with ASD. There is also a useful guide to therapies which gives information on the various therapies you might hear about in Autism, and what we know so far about the evidence for their effectiveness.

## **Support Groups**

### *MyTime Support Groups*

MyTime groups provide support for parents, grandparents and carers of children with a disability or chronic illness (not specific to ASD). The groups provide parents and carers with an opportunity to socialise and meet other families, to share ideas and thoughts on their journey so far. Children are welcome to attend.

For more information about MyTime support groups or to find your nearest group, visit [www.mytime.net.au](http://www.mytime.net.au) or call 1800 889 997.

There are a vast number of local and web based support groups available for parents and carers. For a list of support groups in your area contact your state or territory autism association.

## **Advocacy**

Advocating for a person with ASD involves negotiating with people, organisations and service providers to get what the person needs. Depending on the capabilities of the individual, they may have limited capacity to defend his or her rights and may not understand complex issues. Parents or carers, therefore, may take on the responsibility to defend and protect the rights of the individual with ASD.

Advocacy can be done individually. That is, you may be advocating for the person's needs. It may involve you making a request to the school for a particular resource, or a service provider for additional support. Advocacy can also be conducted systemically with the aim to improve systems, policies, or to benefit multiple people. If you need support getting started, an advocacy service may be useful.

### *Further Information*

Autism Aspergers Advocacy Australia is a national organisation directly representing people with ASD and their families. The organisation regularly develops and promotes national policy, and reports on outcomes.

[www.a4.org.au/a4](http://www.a4.org.au/a4)

For further advocacy information and support contact your state or territory autism association.

## ***Case Coordination***

Case Coordination provides integrated and intensive support to help connect people to appropriate services in their community and provides more help for people with complex needs.

Case Coordination helps connect you to services you need, when you need them. They may spend extra time with you to look at your circumstances, identify your goals and challenges, and establish a plan of action that may involve linking you to a range of internal and external services.

Case Coordination can refer you to support services in your community, such as health, welfare and employment services that are delivered by both government and non-government organisations.

Anyone experiencing challenges in their life, and who live in the areas serviced by one of the [Case Coordination sites](#), can access Case Coordination. The service is voluntary and you can opt out at any time:

[www.humanservices.gov.au/customer/services/centrelink/case-coordination](http://www.humanservices.gov.au/customer/services/centrelink/case-coordination).

### Alternative Options for Case Coordination

The case coordination options available for families and individuals vary between states and territories. Please contact your state or territory autism association for further information on your local providers.

## **Planning for the Future**

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When making future arrangements for a family member with ASD, the extent of your planning will depend on the abilities of the person with the disability, your goals for the future and the resources available. The individual may be able to organise his or her own money independently or with assistance from a parent or carer and may not require special arrangements.

### ***Guardianship and Financial Management***

Once an individual turns 18 it is presumed that they have the capacity to make decisions for themselves, regardless of whether they have a disability. If the person is under the age of 18, parents are able to appoint a guardian in their will.

If the individual is unable to manage his or her own affairs, it is possible to have a guardian or financial manager appointed to make decisions on the person's behalf. A financial manager is able to make financial decisions (e.g. paying debts, signing contracts, arranging insurance) and a guardian is able to make decisions on other life issues (e.g. health care, education and training, service provision). For further information regarding guardianship and financial management consult your state or territory legislation.

- **Australian Capital Territory** – *Guardianship and Management of Property Act 1992 (ACT)*
- **New South Wales** – *NSW Trustee and Guardianship Act 2009 and Guardianship Act 1987 (NSW)*

- **Northern Territory** – *Adult Guardianship Act (NT)* and *Aged and Infirm Persons Property Act (NT)*
- **Queensland** – *Guardianship and Administration Act 2000 (Qld)*
- **South Australia** – *Guardianship and Administration Act 1993 (SA)*
- **Tasmania** – *Guardianship and Administration Act 1995 (Tas)*
- **Victoria** – *Guardianship and Administration Act 1986 (Vic)*
- **Western Australia** – *Guardianship and Administration Act 1990 (WA)*

### ***Power of Attorney***

Power of attorney is a legal agreement that enables a person to appoint an attorney to take care of financial assets on your behalf if for some reason you are not able to. An attorney is a person who you trust to manage your financial assets in your absence. You are able to appoint an attorney who is able to make decisions about financial matters that will affect your child with a disability if you are no longer able to do this.

A person with a disability is able to appoint an attorney to make decisions on their behalf if they are capable of doing so. In situations where the individual has impaired decision making capacity they are not able to appoint an attorney as they will not have the legal capacity to sign a document.

### ***Wills***

A will is a legal document that will allow you to outline how you wish your assets to be divided after you die. A will is important for parents with a child with a disability as it provides you with the security to plan for the future support and care of your child. Without a will your assets will be distributed according to state law and will not give consideration to the special needs of your child with a disability.

A lawyer can help you to draw up a will and provide information on what needs to be included. Your will should be regularly reviewed and updated. Finding a lawyer with previous experience in writing wills for families with children who have disabilities is important. Your state based Trustee and Trustee Corporations and also options to discuss your will requirements.

### ***Trusts***

A trust is a legal obligation by which a trustee is given the responsibility to look after the assets held in the trust for the benefit of another person or a number of people called the beneficiaries. There are many different types of trusts and can be helpful when looking after the interests of a person with a disability.

A *Special Disability Trust* can be established by parents and immediate family members to plan for the future care and accommodation needs of a person with a severe disability. To be eligible, the disabled person must meet certain criteria. For more information contact the Department of Human Services' Special Disability Trust Team on 1800 734 750 or visit [www.fahcsia.gov.au/our-responsibilities/disability-and-carers/program-services/special-disability-trusts](http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/our-responsibilities/disability-and-carers/program-services/special-disability-trusts)

### *Further information*

FaHCSIA's Planning for the Future booklet

[www.fahcsia.gov.au/our-responsibilities/disability-and-carers/publications-articles/general/planning-for-the-future-people-with-disability-booklet](http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/our-responsibilities/disability-and-carers/publications-articles/general/planning-for-the-future-people-with-disability-booklet)

## Housing Options

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Each state or territory provides a range of housing options and support services to help people with disabilities access appropriate and affordable housing. These may include:

- Support to live in their own home, or the family home
- Supported affordable rental housing
- Specially adapted, modified homes
- Shared or group accommodation

### ***Supported Residential Services (SRS)***

Supported Residential facilities operate in South Australia, Queensland, Victoria and New South Wales. They often operate as private businesses and offer supported accommodation to older people and people with a disability.

For further information about what is available in your area contact your state or territory Housing or Disability Department.

#### **Australian Capital Territory**

[http://www.dhcs.act.gov.au/disability\\_act/housing\\_and\\_tenancy\\_options](http://www.dhcs.act.gov.au/disability_act/housing_and_tenancy_options)

#### **New South Wales**

<http://www.adhc.nsw.gov.au/individuals/support>

#### **Northern Territory**

[http://www.health.nt.gov.au/Aged\\_and\\_Disability/Disability/index.aspx](http://www.health.nt.gov.au/Aged_and_Disability/Disability/index.aspx)

#### **Queensland**

<http://www.communities.qld.gov.au/housing/housing-services/social-housing/applying-for-housing-assistance/housing-assistance-for-people-with-a-disability>

#### **South Australia**

<http://www.sa.gov.au/subject/Community+Support/Disability/Adults+with+disability/Housing+and+home+assistance/Housing+options+for+people+with+a+disability>

#### **Tasmania**

[http://www.dhhs.tas.gov.au/service\\_information/services\\_files/housing\\_tasmania](http://www.dhhs.tas.gov.au/service_information/services_files/housing_tasmania)

#### **Victoria**

<http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/for-individuals/disability/accommodation>

#### **Western Australia**

<http://www.disability.wa.gov.au/individuals-families-and-carers/for-individuals-families-and-carers/housing-/>

## Puberty

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Puberty is a confusing time for children and teenagers. Individuals with ASD often take longer to adjust to changes than typically developing children. For an individual with ASD, the physical changes during puberty can be quite out of place with where the person is at in other stages of development, such as communication and social skills. Prepare early and explain to your child what is happening and



what they may expect. There is no way of knowing what age your child will start puberty. As a general rule puberty begins for girls around 10 to 11 years of age and for boys around 11 to 13 years of age. It may be earlier or later depending on a number of factors.

Further reading on puberty and ASD can be found on the Raising Children Network Autism website.

[http://raisingchildren.net.au/articles/autism\\_spectrum\\_disorder\\_puberty\\_teenage\\_rs.html/context/886](http://raisingchildren.net.au/articles/autism_spectrum_disorder_puberty_teenage_rs.html/context/886)

## **Work**

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There are many options available to assist individuals with finding and maintaining work. There is no one size fits all approach to individuals with ASD. Some people will independently find and maintain employment where as others may require assistance depending on their capabilities. For some, supported employment options may be more appropriate. It is helpful to consult with organisations that specialise in disability employment if you are unsure of the best option.

### ***Disability Employment Services***

Disability Employment Services providers offer a range of services to support your individual needs, including:

- help to prepare for work, including training in specific job skills
- job-search support, such as résumé development, training in interview skills, and help in looking for suitable jobs
- support when initially placed into a job, including on-the-job training and co-worker and employer support
- ongoing support in a job if required
- the purchase of vocational training and other employment-related assistance
- access to help with workplace modifications; support services; and Auslan interpreting in the workplace

<http://www.humanservices.gov.au/customer/services/centrelink/disability-employment-services>

### ***National Disability Coordination Program***

The Australian Government's National Disability Coordination Officer (NDCO) Program targets the barriers that people with disability face in successfully accessing and completing post-school education and training and subsequent employment.

A national network of NDCOs works within 31 specific regions across Australia to improve the coordination and delivery of support services to help make it easier to enrol or participate in post-school education, training and employment.

The goals of the NDCO program are to:

- **Improve transitions** to help people with disability move from school or the community into post-school education and training and subsequent employment.
- **Increase participation** by people with disability in higher education, vocational education and training and employment.
- **Establish better links** between schools, universities, TAFEs, training providers and disability service providers so that they can work together to provide the best possible assistance for people with disability.

NDCOs perform a range of functions to help people with disability gain access to and successfully complete post-school education and training, and employment. NDCOs can provide practical assistance and advice to individuals with disability and their families, education and training providers, as well as employment and community support agencies. Phone: 133 873

### ***Federal Government Funding***

This department provides support if you have a disability, illness or injury to find and keep a job. There is financial support available to help you work, study or do other approved activities. They also provide free information and job search services to help you while you are looking for work.

<http://www.humanservices.gov.au/customer/subjects/disabled-ill-or-injured-and-looking-for-work>

There are many local services that will provide support and training to individuals with ASD. Please contact your state or territory organisation for more information.

## **Transport**

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### ***Public Transport - Travel Cards***

Individuals with disabilities are often eligible for a concession card or travel pass that allows the individual to travel for a reduced rate or for free on public transport. If the individual with a disability requires a companion to travel with them, some states or territories offer a travel pass for them also. See your state or territory transport website for further details about eligibility criteria.

#### **Australian Capital Territory**

[http://www.transport.act.gov.au/catch\\_a\\_bus/myway/concessions](http://www.transport.act.gov.au/catch_a_bus/myway/concessions)

#### **New South Wales**

<http://www.transport.nsw.gov.au/content/travel-concessions-people-disabilities-and-their-companions>

#### **Northern Territory**

<http://www.transport.nt.gov.au/public/ticket-fares-concessions-and-free-travel>

#### **Queensland**

<http://www.tmr.qld.gov.au/Travel-and-transport/Public-transport/Public-transport-concessions.aspx>

#### **South Australia**

<http://www.sa.gov.au/subject/Transport,+travel+and+motoring/Public+transport+and+travel/Getting+around+with+a+disability+or+mobility+aid/Public+transport+help+for+people+with+disabilities>

#### **Tasmania**

<http://www.service.tas.gov.au/browse/Transport/People+with+disabilities/>

#### **Victoria**

<http://ptv.vic.gov.au/tickets/free-travel-passes/access-travel-pass/>

#### **Western Australia**

<http://www.transperth.wa.gov.au/TicketsandFares/ConcessionPasses.aspx#Disability>

### ***Mobility Allowance***

Help is available for people with a disability, illness or injury who cannot use public transport without substantial assistance.

<http://www.humanservices.gov.au/customer/services/centrelink/mobility-allowance>

### ***Driving***

For an individual with ASD, obtaining a driver's licence will be dependent on their abilities. There are no specific guidelines surrounding licence requirements for individuals with ASD because each individual presents so differently.

Problems that may affect driving include:

- Difficulty understanding driving rules
- Difficulty multi-tasking
- Perception difficulties
- Poor coordination or physical weakness
- History of epilepsy
- Physical impairments to legs, arms, hands or spine that would affect your ability to drive a vehicle

It may be helpful to have an assessment with an occupational therapist to determine the individual's driving capabilities. Some occupational therapists will have undergone additional training in the assessment of driving skills.

Find out from your state or territory transport authority the requirements to be met when applying for a driver's licence. You may be required to disclose the diagnosis of ASD as part of these requirements.

#### **Australian Capital Territory**

<http://www.rego.act.gov.au/licensing/licencemain.htm>

#### **New South Wales**

<http://www.rta.nsw.gov.au/licensing/index.html>

#### **Northern Territory**

<http://www.transport.nt.gov.au/mvr/licensing>

#### **Queensland**

<http://www.tmr.qld.gov.au/Licensing/Getting-a-licence.aspx>

#### **South Australia**

<http://www.sa.gov.au/subject/Transport%2C+travel+and+motoring/Motoring/New+and+young+drivers/Driving+in+South+Australia>

**Tasmania**

[http://www.transport.tas.gov.au/licence\\_information](http://www.transport.tas.gov.au/licence_information)

**Victoria**

<http://www.vicroads.vic.gov.au/Home/Licences/>

**Western Australia**

<http://www.transport.wa.gov.au/licensing/20389.asp>

### ***Australian Disability Parking Scheme***

The Australian Disability Parking Scheme provides eligible people with a nationally recognised Disability Parking Permit. People with disabilities who meet the criteria will be able to park nearer to their destination with the permit. See your state or territory website for further information.

**Australian Capital Territory**

<http://www.rego.act.gov.au/parking/parkingadpp.htm>

**New South Wales**

<http://www.rta.nsw.gov.au/usingroads/mobilityparking/index.html>

**Northern Territory**

Forms available from the council <http://www.lgant.asn.au/>

**Queensland**

<http://www.tmr.qld.gov.au/Travel-and-transport/Disability-access-and-mobility/Disability-Parking-Permit-Scheme.aspx>

**South Australia**

<http://www.sa.gov.au/subject/Transport,+travel+and+motoring/Public+transport+and+travel/Getting+around+with+a+disability+or+mobility+aid/Disability+parking+permit>

**Tasmania**

[http://www.transport.tas.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0014/52340/PTS0121F\\_TAS\\_Information\\_and\\_Form.pdf](http://www.transport.tas.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0014/52340/PTS0121F_TAS_Information_and_Form.pdf)

**Victoria**

<http://www.vicroads.vic.gov.au/Home/TrafficAndRoadConditions/ParkingAndClearways/DisabilityParkingScheme.htm>

**Western Australia**

<http://www.concessions.wa.gov.au/Concessions/Pages/ACROD-Parking-Permits---Australian-Disability-Parking-Scheme.aspx>

## **Recreation**

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### ***General information***

Community participation for individuals with ASD is beneficial in the growth of social skills, communication skills, health and independence. Your state or territory autism association or disability department will be able to provide you with information about what is available in your area. Some recreation opportunities may be for all individuals in the community, while some may be autism or disability specific. Choosing recreation for your child will depend on their interests, your financial situation, transport, individual needs, and availability of groups in your area.

### ***Mainstream Programs***

To find out about recreation activities in your area that are available to all children an internet search will usually provide a few ideas. You may also be able to find out about recreation by asking other families in your area or talking to people at your child's school or child care. Your local council may also be able to assist you with finding recreation opportunities nearby.

## **Support Programs**

### *Sports Connect*

Sports Connect is a national framework that develops pathways for people with a disability to get involved in sport. For more information visit the Australian Sports Commission website [www.ausport.gov.au/participating/disability](http://www.ausport.gov.au/participating/disability).

### *Nican*

<http://www.nican.com.au/>

Nican provides information on recreation, tourism, sport and the arts for people with disabilities in Australia. It is funded by the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs and aims to provide inclusive services for people with disabilities. The website has a search option where you can find services in your area that support recreation activities for individuals with special needs.

### *Disability Sport & Recreation*

<http://www.dsr.org.au/>

### *State/Territory Sport & Recreation Department*

#### **Australian Capital Territory**

[www.act.gov.au/browse/topics/sport-and-recreation](http://www.act.gov.au/browse/topics/sport-and-recreation)

#### **New South Wales**

[www.dsr.nsw.gov.au](http://www.dsr.nsw.gov.au)

#### **Northern Territory**

[www.sportandrecreation.nt.gov.au](http://www.sportandrecreation.nt.gov.au)

#### **Queensland**

[www.nprsr.qld.gov.au](http://www.nprsr.qld.gov.au)

#### **South Australia**

[www.recsport.sa.gov.au](http://www.recsport.sa.gov.au)

#### **Tasmania**

[www.development.tas.gov.au/sportrec](http://www.development.tas.gov.au/sportrec)

#### **Victoria**

[www.dpcd.vic.gov.au/sport](http://www.dpcd.vic.gov.au/sport)

#### **Western Australia**

[www.dsr.wa.gov.au](http://www.dsr.wa.gov.au)

### *Interchange (Victoria Only)*

Interchange organises a wide variety of volunteer assisted recreational and social programs for children and young people with a disability and their families. The range of programs include; school holiday programs, youth/young adult groups, children's and/or family camps, sibling activities, parent support groups and family activities. The programs provide opportunities for friendships and recreational experiences, as well as giving families a break or much needed support. The exact nature and range of such programs vary according to each local

Interchange agency. Volunteering is a great way to have fun and have rewarding experiences. It also provides an opportunity to meet likeminded people while supporting children and young people with a disability and their families.

<http://www.interchange.org.au/>

### Swimming

Learning to swim is an important part of childhood, with swimming lessons currently offered in many Australian schools. For some children with ASD, learning to swim can present many challenges. Some children with ASD may be able to participate in regular community or school swimming lessons, while others may require a modified program.

Most states and territories offer modified programs for children with autism and other disabilities. Victoria, for example, run the KickStart Swimming Program that provides swimming lessons for children with autism, communication difficulties, sensory processing difficulties and developmental delay, aged 3 years and up. For regular swimming programs contact your school, council or local swimming pool. For modified swimming lessons for children with autism and other disabilities contact your disability department or autism association to find out what is available in your area. You may also wish to visit the Swimming Australia website [www.swimming.org.au](http://www.swimming.org.au).

## Individualised Support/Service Plans

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An individualised service plan (ISP) is a document that outlines the needs, goals, and priorities of the individual with ASD or family unit if the individual is a child or still under the care of a parent or guardian. It will generally be facilitated by a key support worker or case manager depending on the access that an individual has to services.

An ISP provides an individual and family with the opportunity to direct their care and service provision.

The plan should consist of:

- Priorities of the individual or family
- Goals that the individual or family would like to achieve
- Strategies that will be used to achieve the goals set
- A plan for reviewing the plan and monitoring progress
- An outline of the roles of the individual and team members

### ***Who is responsible for the plan?***

This will be determined by the age and cognitive capacity of the individual. The preference, particularly with teenagers and young adults, is to have the person drive the plan and determine their needs and goals. Where this is not possible, a parent or primary caregiver will be responsible for this process.

It is important to remember that the person responsible for the plan is the one responsible for determining goals and strategies that are incorporated by the different team members. For example, a therapist's role is to advise as to what they think are the areas of need for an individual, however, it is the individual themselves or the family that have the choice in the prioritisation of goals.

If an individual is too young or does not have the ability to lead this process, it is important that the parent or carer take a lead role in coordinating the team and ensuring that the goals and strategies of all parties suit the needs of the individual.

### ***Collaborative Process***

Many individuals with ASD will have complex and wide ranging needs. There will often be a number of health professionals, support staff, teachers, and other people involved in a person's care. The most important part of this team is the individual themselves and any primary family/advocacy supports. It is important that the individual has input into the development of the plan and takes the primary role in determining their goals and priorities in the process.

It is important to ensure that the 'team' around the individual is working in a collaborative fashion. This can be achieved in a number of ways, depending on the needs of the individual:

- Team meetings can be a helpful way of bringing everyone together in the same room to discuss the plan for the individual. This provides all parties with the opportunity to discuss goals and any concerns so that all team members are providing a consistent and holistic approach.
- If a team meeting is not logistically possible, it is important that the therapy plans, education plans, and support plans are shared within the team. This can be achieved via telephone or email.

### ***Goals***

It is important to ensure that the goals developed for the individual are specifically tailored to address their needs. Goals should be based on the priorities of the individual as well as information gathered from relevant team members and assessments that have taken place. It is important that goals are specific and measurable (see SMART goals explanation under the [Goal Development](#) section of this publication).

### ***Presentation of support/service plan***

A support plan will primarily comprise of written goals and strategies. The length and format will vary depending on the individual's needs and the worker who is facilitating the development.

It is also important to be mindful of the format of a support plan when presenting it to the individual. This should consider the learning style of the person with ASD. For example, some people may process visual information more effectively; in this case, the support plan could be presented along with a clear visual representation of the goals. Or for an individual that does not process visual information



effectively and has better comprehension when information is presented in an auditory format, presenting the service plan in the form of a CD or DVD may be more appropriate.

## Useful Websites

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### **Australian Advisory Board on Autism Spectrum Disorders**

[www.autismadvisoryboard.org.au](http://www.autismadvisoryboard.org.au)

The Australian Advisory Board on Autism Spectrum Disorders is the national peak body representing people who have an autism spectrum disorder, their families, carers and helpers. The focus of the Advisory Board is working with governments to develop appropriate policies for people who have an autism spectrum condition, their families and carers, disseminating information about ASD and working with the Australian ASD community to build skills.

### **Association for Children with a Disability**

<http://www.acd.org.au/>

Provides information, support and advocacy for families who have a child or young adult with any type of disability or developmental delay across Victoria.

The Association is run by parents and looks at issues from a family perspective.

Their services include free telephone information and advocacy support for families. For families outside of Victoria, the association has a number of resources that may be of benefit. Check for your state based association or contact your state or territory autism association.

### **Commonwealth Respite and Carelink Centres**

[www.commcarelink.health.gov.au](http://www.commcarelink.health.gov.au)

Commonwealth Respite and Carelink Centres are information centres for older people, people with disabilities and those who provide care and services. Centres provide free and confidential information on community aged care, disability and other support services available locally, interstate or anywhere within Australia.

### **Early Days - Free Parenting Workshops**

[www.raisingchildren.net.au/articles/early\\_days\\_autism\\_workshops.html](http://www.raisingchildren.net.au/articles/early_days_autism_workshops.html)

A national series of workshops for parents of children with ASD. Speak to your Autism Advisor to register your interest in attending an Early Days workshop, or call the autism association in your state or territory. There is an introductory workshop to help newly-diagnosed families navigate the system, as well as skills-based workshops focusing on specific strategies for parenting children with ASD. All workshops are free.

### **Interchange (Victoria Only)**

[www.interchange.org.au/](http://www.interchange.org.au/)

Interchange programs are community based not for profit organisations. They provide family support and social opportunities for children and young people with a disability.

### **PlayConnect Playgroups**

[www.playconnect.com.au](http://www.playconnect.com.au)

These are autism specific playgroups for children with ASD or ASD-like symptoms. They also very welcome young siblings. Visit the website to join a playgroup in your area, or phone 1800 790 335.

### **Positive Partnerships Autism Training**

[www.autismtraining.com.au/](http://www.autismtraining.com.au/)

A national series of workshops for parents and teachers of school-aged children with ASD. Visit the website or phone 1300 881 971 for more information.

### **My Time Support Groups**

[www.mytime.net.au](http://www.mytime.net.au)

Groups for mothers, fathers and carers of children with a disability (not specific to ASD), developmental delay or chronic medical condition. For more information, visit their website or call 1800 889 997.

### **National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Liaison Officers**

[www.autismqld.com.au](http://www.autismqld.com.au)

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Liaison Officer program is a national two year pilot project by Autism Queensland and members of the Early Days Consortium of Autism Specialist Providers that aims to raise awareness of ASD in indigenous communities. It is funded by The Department of Social Services as part of the HCWA program.

Heading up the program are Liaison Officers Barry Fewquandie and Deirdre Finter, who although based in Queensland have a national role and work throughout Australia. Read the brochure.

### **Raising Children Network**

[www.raisingchildren.net.au/autism](http://www.raisingchildren.net.au/autism)

This website provides families with general information about autism spectrum disorders as well as specific information about the *Helping Children with Autism* package. It includes a guide to common therapies and interventions, what the research says about the therapies, and the approximate time and costs involved. There is also a *My Neighbourhood* section which allows you to search for services in your area. If you tick *Therapeutic Services*, then *Autism Services*, it will show approved service providers on a map of your area.

### **Siblings Australia**

[www.siblingsaustralia.org.au](http://www.siblingsaustralia.org.au)

Siblings Australia is a unique national organisation committed to improving the support available for siblings of children and adults with chronic conditions including disability, chronic illness and mental health issues. This website will allow you to access information about sibling support - services, resources, research and policy. You will be able to explore a number of relevant areas - whether you are a sibling, parent, worker or researcher.

**Therapy Connect Resource**

[www.therapy.amaze.org.au](http://www.therapy.amaze.org.au)

An excellent resource to refer to when starting on the therapy journey has been developed by Amaze (Autism Victoria) through funding received from the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA). This will assist families to understand the therapy process, determine the needs of the individual, and maximise the benefits of therapy.