

Willy's World is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization dedicated to creating awareness as well as spreading hope, courage, and resources to those with hidden disabilities, like ASD.



PARENT GUIDE:

10 STEPS AFTER AN AUTISM DIAGNOSIS

For families in Pennsylvania

1

Take a Breath

- A diagnosis is not the end — it's the beginning of understanding your child's unique strengths and needs. Give yourself a moment to process.
- One meaningful way to reframe your journey is to read the poem "Welcome to Holland" by Emily Perl Kingsley. It beautifully describes how life may look different than you expected, but can still be filled with love, joy, and unique beauty.

2

Connect with Early Intervention Services

- In Pennsylvania, children from birth to age 5 may receive Early Intervention (EI) services through their local Early Intervention Program.
- Birth to 3: Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) / Age 4-5: Individual Education Plan (IEP). Ask for preschool recommendations.
- These services are free of charge and can include speech therapy, occupational therapy, physical therapy, special instruction, and family support.
- CONNECT Helpline: 1-800-692-7288.

3

Apply for Medical Assistance (MA/Medicaid)

- In PA, children diagnosed with autism automatically qualify for Medical Assistance regardless of family income.
- Medical Assistance can help cover therapies, evaluations, and services your insurance might not fully pay for.
- Apply online at www.compass.state.pa.us

4

Explore Waiver Programs & Supports

- Pennsylvania offers waiver programs that provide additional support for children with developmental disabilities.
- Ask your County's Early Intervention Service Coordinator for more information.

5

Request Intensive Behavioral Health Services

- IBHS is a Pennsylvania program that provides behavioral health support in the home, school, and community.
- It can include:
 - Behavior Consultation (developing a treatment plan)
 - Mobile Therapy (working directly with your child)
 - Behavioral Health Technicians (BHTs) (trained staff who work 1:1 with your child to build skills and reduce challenging behaviors).
- Ask your pediatrician, developmental specialist, or Early Intervention coordinator for a referral.

6

Ask for a Referral to a Developmental Pediatrician

- A developmental pediatrician is a doctor who specializes in children with developmental differences, including autism.
- They can provide a comprehensive evaluation, track your child's progress over time, and help coordinate care between specialists, EI, and your family.
- They may also guide you toward additional support such as feeding therapy, sleep specialists, or genetic testing if needed.

7

Seek Additional Pediatric Therapy Services

- While Early Intervention provides important therapies, families often benefit from adding private or outpatient therapy on top of EI.
 - Speech Therapy (ST): builds communication, language, and social interaction skills.
 - Occupational Therapy (OT): supports fine motor skills, sensory processing, and daily living activities.
 - Physical Therapy (PT): strengthens gross motor skills, coordination, and balance.

8

Build Your Support Team

- Work with your pediatrician and any other specialists they may recommend.
- Reach out to local parent support groups and nonprofits for encouragement and resources.
- Create a folder or binder for your child's medical and therapy records — this will help you stay organized.

9

Take Care of You, Too

- Caring for a child with autism is a journey, and parents need support too. Lean on family, friends, and community resources.

10

You Are Your Child's Best Advocate!

- No one knows your child better than you do. You see their strengths, challenges, and progress every day.
- Being an advocate means:
 - Asking questions at doctor visits, school meetings, and therapy sessions.
 - Speaking up when something doesn't feel right or when more support is needed.
 - Celebrating your child's wins and reminding professionals that your child is more than a diagnosis.
- You will be your child's voice until they can fully speak for themselves. Trust your instincts — they matter.
- Remember: Advocacy is a journey. With your love, persistence, and courage, your child will have the strongest chance to thrive.

For more information on resources, visit www.willysworld.org today!