

GETTING STARTED WITH ASD

Starting on a diagnosis journey for Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and not sure where to start? I've created this guide to help navigate the way. These are the steps my family took when seeking help for our daughter.

**We live in Florida. Process and organizations may vary by state or country.*

Prior to Diagnosis

Assistance up until diagnosis age:

- Journal behaviors you notice at home and school, engage your child's teacher for input
- Inform your Pediatrician each time you go; *you have to advocate for your child*
- Contact your state's Early Steps Coalition or State's Department of Health for local programs *(This helped us get developmental services such as Speech and Occupational Therapy prior to the diagnosis and is for infants-toddlers.)*

Seeking the Autism Spectrum Diagnosis:

- Speak with your Pediatrician and continue to advocate at every appointment. *We brought up behaviors around 8 months old*
- Ask for a referral to a Behavioral or Developmental Pediatrician (locally they would not diagnose until age 3). *We asked for the referral earlier than 3 so we could have the appointment scheduled around her 3rd birthday*
- Google local behavioral/development pediatricians. Your primary doctor may give a list, however you may need to expand your search based on waitlists.
- Call all of the behavioral/developmental pediatricians on Google to make 2-3 appointments with those you feel most comfortable
 - Confirm they diagnose ASD and at what age
 - Confirm they accept your insurance
 - Verify the waitlist timeline
 - Make appointment at multiple facilities (you can cancel the additional appointments once you get in, I'd keep at least one scheduled for a 2nd opinion)
 - Ask to be put on the cancellation list
- For the appointment, bring:

- History of the child's medical birth experience
- List of questions
- Your journal of behaviors and the frequency of behaviors
- Lots of snacks as you may be there for a couple of hours (typically they have toys onsite)

After Diagnosis

Now that you have a diagnosis, you can start seeking ABA therapy for your child (Applied Behavior Analysis)! Not everyone goes the ABA route, but it changed our life!

- Research and start calling ABA therapy centers near you, some will be in facility and some may be in home/school/facility combined.
- Get on multiple waitlists
- Accept the help. Once you get established with a BCBA (Board Certified Behavior Analyst), they become like family. Their goal is to not only help the child but to also make your daily lives easier than it has been. I believe the older the child gets, the harder to receive ABA services.
- Attend parent trainings with your BCBA, this is crucial in providing the child consistency from therapy to home (and sometimes it's required by insurance).
- Implement what you learn, our children are learning from us!
- Continue follow ups with your Behavioral/Developmental Pediatrician

Notes

- Autism Spectrum Disorder is a spectrum of various behaviors that previously had their own separate diagnosis, but now encompasses many diagnosis', like Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD).
- Do not stop until you get answers.
- Follow-up with doctors and therapists, be persistent, don't wait for them to call you.