

## Things to look for in a service provider for your family member with autism

If your child is coming out of a good educational program, many of these features are things you are so used to that you might assume an adult provider with a good reputation has at least some experience with them. That is not necessarily the case, as providers are still pivoting to meet the needs of the large wave of children with autism reaching adulthood, and many providers are new to the degree of challenges posed. This list is offered as a starting point and is not intended to be comprehensive. Rather, it is designed to start a conversation with potential providers, and to prevent unpleasant surprises down the road. (This list does not constitute professional or legal advice. For a full legal disclaimer, go to <http://autismhousingpathways.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/DocsLegalDisclaimer.pdf>.)

Features to look for:

- Residents have choices offered in terms they can understand (such as pictures)
- Written or picture schedules as appropriate
- Ability to implement a behavior contract (e.g., a points board) when necessary
- First this, then that (premack principle)
- Transition warnings ("in 5 minutes it will be time to...")
- Social stories
- Sensory diet
- Staff can implement a communication system (PECs, communication book, iTouch, etc.)
- No yelling
- Staff understand the concept of behavior as communication, ABC principle (antecedent, behavior, consequence)
- Data collection when necessary
- Clear structure to the day provides consistency and predictability to residents
- To the degree possible, staff do household chores with residents, not for them
- Ability to handle special diets and allergies
- System for communicating with families
- Regular opportunities for community involvement
- Staff scheduling provides consistency and predictability to residents
- Provider minimizes staff turnover and burnout by:
  - Avoiding double shifts (e.g., overnight staff on duty the next day)
  - Providing autism-appropriate training to allow for better support when maladaptive behaviors occur