SEEKING SUPPORT SERVICES
A GUIDE FOR PARENTS

Autism is a difference, not a deficit. It's up to you whether you want extra support for yourself and your child, and it's up to you what you want that support to look like. There are a range of options available, which can feel overwhelming at first - this document is intended to help you make choices about supporting your child's development. It's important to consider whether support services embrace your child's neurodiversity, and accept and celebrate their unique self.

Neurodiversity means understanding that brain differences are a normal part of human variation, rather than deficient. Many autistic people identify as neurodivergent, but the umbrella term also includes other differences including ADHD, Tourettes, Foetal Alcohol and other conditions. Many neurodivergent people are proud of their diagnosis, and celebrate their unique neuro-type.

When parents receive a diagnosis of autism or another condition for their child, they often experience grief and concern. Those feelings are valid, and it's ok to feel that way. It's also important to remember, though, that your child's neurodivergence is an intrinsic and fundamental part of them, and supporting them means embracing their neurodivergence while also seeking to support their development.

Support services are not compulsory. There can be intense pressure following a diagnosis to get your child involved in support services. You are not failing your child if you decide not to enrol in any services, or if you are on a waitlist for services, or if you decide to see how you go on your own for a while. You know your child and their needs best. The professionals around you may be the experts on the services they provide, but you are the expert on your child.

If you do choose to seek out support services, below is a list of questions you may want to ask a potential service provider:

? What are your goals as a provider?

- Before talking to a provider, work out some goals for your child, and some goals for yourself - do you want your child to be able to communicate their needs, or be able to deal with distress without hurting themselves? Do you want to be able to connect better with your child, or to learn how to adjust your home environment to accommodate them? Check that the provider's goals match up with yours, and that they aren't adding unnecessary goals of their own.

? What procedures or strategies do you have in place for recognising autistic ways of communicating distress? How do you respond to these?

- Autistic children often communicate distress in different ways to non-autistic people. This can result in autistic children's distress signals being missed, the thing distressing them continuing or getting worse, and the child having a meltdown. A good provider should know how to tell when an autistic child is overwhelmed or uncomfortable, and should work with you to get a sense of your child's individual ways of communicating their feelings.

? Can you walk me through the accommodations you provide for my child's particular needs?

- You may have noticed that your child can function better in dim lighting or quieter environments, or that they need to take breaks often when learning new things - a good service provider should be able to adapt to your child's needs and provide accommodations for them.

? What happens if my child says no to something in a session, or communicates that they don't want to engage?

- All children sometimes need to do things they don't want to do. A good service provider should want your child to have fun while they're learning, though, and should have strategies for helping your child in a way they will enjoy.

? What sort of alternative communication methods can you use?

- If your child communicates via sign, picture boards, or other nonspeaking methods, make sure your service provider is competent working with these alternative communication methods.

? How involved can I be as a parent?

- The answer to this question should always be "as much as possible!"

Some definite red flags to avoid: Very time-intensive therapy; any seclusion, physical restraint or punishment; any service that talks about "curing" autism

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