

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 the large wave of children with autism is just starting to reach 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.net/?attachment_id=168.)

Features to look for:

- residents have choices offered in terms they can understand (such as pictures)
- picture schedules
- behavior contracts (e.g. points board)
- first this, then that (premack principle)
- transition warnings ("in 5 minutes it will be time to...")
- social stories
- sensory diet
- communication system (PECs, communication book, iTouch, etc.)
- no yelling
- staff that at a minimum understand the concept of behavior as communication, ABC principle (antecedent, behavior, consequence)
- data collection
- clear structure to the day that minimizes open-ended "down time"
- residents participate in chores to facilitate learning and help structure their day
- 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 management of maladaptive behaviors