



Mental and Behavioral Health Guidelines

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Family Considerations

*Important things to think about as you look
for a provider:*

1. What is the primary area of concern?: Behavioral, Emotional, Educational, Relational or Combination.
2. Who should be included?: Child, Caregivers, Siblings, or Whole Family.
3. How are services being paid? Also, how many sessions are covered?: Private Insurance (Excellus, Aetna), Public Insurance (Medicaid), or Fee for Service (set rate or sliding scale with providers in private practice).

Patient Considerations

*General points to consider about the
identified patient:*

1. Developmental Level: how is their functioning relative to their age?
2. Communication: single words, brief phrases, full sentences, PECS, AC device.
3. Abstract Thinking: pretend play skills, perspective taking ability.
4. Learning Style: auditory, visual, hands-on, or combination.



Service Delivery Format

1. Individual: focus on single patient.
2. Group: focus on a group with similar presenting concerns (e.g., social skills).
3. Family: working with single patients and their family across multiple sessions.
4. Blended: adapting approaches across different levels of the patient and family.

Types of Services

1. Therapy: To learn new skills and approaches to concerns.
2. Assessment: To determine the nature of the presenting concerns (diagnosis).
3. Consultation: To target specific concerns in a specific setting.

Types of Providers

Professionals who have training providing mental health:

- [Psychiatrists](#) (M.D. or D.O.): Medical degree with specialized training in mental and behavioral health who can prescribe medication and monitor biological functioning. [Download the Medication Decision Aid Tool Kit.](#)
- [Psychiatric Nurse Practitioners: Advanced practice nurse with certification](#) and training that includes the ability to diagnoses mental health concerns, provide therapy, and prescribe medication. This profession interfaces across disciplines.
- [Clinical Psychologists](#) (Ph.D. or Psy.D.): Doctoral degree with background in theory and research related to the practice of mental and behavioral health.
- [Licensed Behavior Analysts](#) (LBA): Master's or Doctoral degree trained to provide behavior analytic services to individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder.
- [Licensed Clinical Social Workers](#) (LCSW or LCSW-R): Licensed Clinical Social Workers have a Master's Degree in Social Work from an accredited university and has passed the state's licensure exam. The "R" designation is only awarded after a licensed Clinical Social Worker has had a minimum of 6 years of postgraduate supervision and has met strict credentialing guidelines.
- [Licensed Mental Health Counselors](#) (LMHC): Master's degree trained to provide counseling, psychotherapy, and prevention.
- [Licensed Marriage & Family Counselors](#) (LMFC): Master's degree trained to provide individual psychotherapy and family systems to assess and treat mental, emotional, and behavioral disorders, and address an array of relationship issues within the context of marital/couple, family and various relational systems.
- [School Psychologists](#): Master's degree trained to apply expertise in mental health, learning, and behavior, to help children and youth succeed academically, socially, behaviorally, and emotionally.
- [School Counselors](#): Master's degree trained to help students in the areas of academic achievement, personal/social development and career development.

Things to Consider when Choosing a Provider:

- What is the person's training broadly and specifically?
- Do their skills match what you're looking for and what your child needs? Ask to see a resume or a CV (curriculum vitae) if you want to know more about the provider's training and experience – you have every right to be an informed consumer of behavioral mental health services.
- Is their personality a good fit/style with you and your child's temperament?
- What is their position on coordinating care across other specialties? This is especially important to discern as many people with autism benefit from a coordinated care plan that bridges medical and mental health professionals.



Therapeutic Approaches

Skilled providers draw on different, developmentally-informed therapeutic approaches, but are usually informed by an overarching theoretical framework that guides treatment decision making and therapy techniques.

1. **Behavioral:** Generally informed by the principles of [Applied Behavior Analysis](#).
2. **Cognitive:** [Cognitive Behavioral Therapy](#) has been adapted for people with ASD.
3. **Social-Emotional:** One example is a [Social Skills](#) focus.

Things to Consider:

- What are my child's strengths? What are their areas of need and support?
- What therapeutic approach sits best with me as a caregiver? After all, this is a service you're paying for and should endorse?
- What is the evidence base/research around the approach being used?
- How does the provider measure and track treatment progress?
- How is therapy adapted to meet my child's unique presenting concerns?

How to Find the “Right” Therapist

They can be in hospitals, outpatient mental health clinics, community health centers, counseling centers, or private practice.

1. Ask your pediatrician or family medical provider. They should have recommendations based on their experience working with patients.
2. Contact local parent and family organizations. They have the benefit of recent experience searching for and hopefully finding therapists for their children. Some local examples include [AutismUp](#), [M.A.T.T.](#), and [Camp Puzzle Peace](#).
3. Ask your child's school team for recommendations for local mental/behavioral health providers. They almost certainly have a perspective on this topic.
4. Access [Psychology Today](#) – search by Zip Code initially, and then refine by both Insurance type and Issues on the left-hand side bar to narrow down search. Caregivers are **strongly encouraged** to review and scrutinize therapist's credentials as it is important for a provider to have training and experience working with children with autism spectrum disorder and their families.
5. Visit the [Behavior Analyst Certification Board](#) to find a Board Certified Behavior Analyst in your area. Be sure to confirm that they are also [licensed](#).

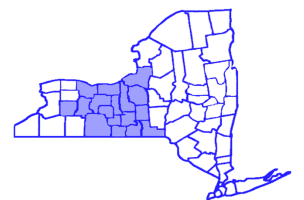
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Please note that the Strong Center for Developmental Disabilities, Kirch Developmental Services Center, or UPMC does not endorse a particular program or resource, but we provide information here for caregivers to investigate further based on their child's strengths and areas of need.