

Receiving an autism diagnosis

Information and resources for foster and kinship carers



Government
of South Australia

Department for
Child Protection

Receiving an autism diagnosis can feel like a whirlwind of emotions - relief, confusion, or even a bit of overwhelm. It is a significant milestone that marks the start of a new chapter in understanding how your child's brain works.

This guide will help you navigate these early days with evidence-based information and South Australian-specific resources.

What is Autism?

Autism (or Autism Spectrum Disorder - ASD) is a **neurodevelopmental condition**. This means the brain develops and processes information differently to 'neurotypical' brains.

- **A 'spectrum':** It is called a spectrum because it affects every person differently. Some children may have advanced language skills but struggle with social cues, while others may be non-speaking and have significant sensory needs.
- **Key characteristics:** Autism generally involves differences in **social communication** (interpreting body language, navigating conversations, understanding relationships) and **repetitive patterns** of behaviour (repetitive movement and speech, preference for routines and sameness, intense interests).
- **Sensory processing:** Many autistic children experience the world more intensely (hypersensitivity) or less intensely (hyposensitivity) than others. This may mean they are extra sensitive to certain inputs to their body like sounds, lights, or textures. Alternatively, they may deliberately seek out more of certain sensations to help their body feel organised.
- These key characteristics and sensory processing differences can affect your child's ability to participate in their daily life.

What does this diagnosis mean?

For your child

A diagnosis doesn't change who your child is; it provides a roadmap for how to support them. It explains why they might find certain things, such as a noisy classroom, difficult, and highlights their unique strengths, such as deep focus or attention to detail. Early diagnosis allows for 'neuro-affirming' support that helps children thrive as their authentic selves. It enables you to help your child work towards their goals.

For you

Many carers find that the diagnosis helps them move from a place of frustration to one of advocacy and understanding. You now have information about your child that may help to access specialised funding and tailored educational support. Start thinking about the things that you need to help make caring for your child sustainable, such as activities that bring you joy and safe spaces where you feel supported.

It is completely normal to feel a range of emotions right now. Allow yourself time to process your feelings and connect with people who you can talk to openly. As you look ahead, your family's day-to-day life may require adjustments, such as attending new therapy or medical appointments and allowing time to learn about autism.

Where can I get more information?

Your child's autism diagnostic report will include information about what kind of supports and next steps are recommended for your child.

Information on the internet can be confusing. The below links to **evidence-based, Australian-led** organisations, may be helpful.

- [Raising Children Network](#): Comprehensive parenting information for Australian families, backed by experts. Includes a dedicated [autism section](#) covering everything from early signs to evidence-based therapies.
- [Autism: What Next?](#): Free digital toolkit that helps you navigate a new diagnosis of autism and the next steps for your family.
- [Autism Association of Australia](#): National peak body for autism in Australia providing education, advocacy and resources for autistic people, their carers, families and community.
- [Amaze](#): Offers a wealth of downloadable resources and a national helpline called **Autism Connect (1300 308 699)**.
- [Neurodivergent Insights](#): Information about autism informed by research, clinical and lived experiences of psychologist Dr Megan Neff.
- [Yellow Ladybugs](#): Information specifically about autistic girls.

Support in South Australia

South Australia has several dedicated pathways for local families.

Key organisations

- [Autism SA](#): The primary state body. You can register your child with Autism SA, informing them that they have received an autism diagnosis. They can advise whether they have any free home, community or school supports you may be able to access.
- [Office for Autism \(SA\)](#): A state government initiative that provides a [Directory of Services](#) specifically for South Australians.

Financial and practical support

- [National Disability Insurance Scheme \(NDIS\)](#): Some children with an autism diagnosis in SA access support through the NDIS "Early Childhood Approach" (for children under nine) or the main scheme (for children over nine).
- [Carers SA](#): Provides support for you as the carer, including counselling, peer support groups, and respite information.
- [Carer Payment](#) and [Carer Allowance](#): You may be eligible for one or both of these payments. Eligibility for the Carer Payment depends on your child's support needs and your household's financial circumstances. The Carer Allowance is based primarily on your child's daily care needs.
- [Medicare plans](#): These plans are developed by your GP to enable your child to access a Medicare rebate for a limited number of therapy sessions per year with allied health therapists, such as an occupational therapist, speech pathologist or psychologist.

Community and connection

- [Play Connect+ and Playgroups](#): Autism-specific playgroups located across SA where children can play in a low-sensory environment while parents connect.
- [MyTime](#): Facilitated support groups for parents of children with disabilities (including autism) to share experiences and advice.
- [The GRID Youth Hub](#): Drop-in centre in Elizabeth providing a free, supervised space for young people to connect, access support and engage in recreational and social activities.
- [Onkaparinga Youth Centres](#): welcoming, inclusive spaces where young people aged 8-25 can connect, create and hang out.

Therapeutic support

Talk to your child's DCP case manager about accessing the following supports if needed:

- **Therapies**: Allied health providers may help you work on goals you identify for your child. These might be language, motor skills, self-care or social goals.
- [Kids Hubs](#): Free mental health and wellbeing support for children (0 to 12 years) and their carers.
- [Headspace](#): Free mental health services for 12-25 year olds.

What do I do next?

Below is a checklist of steps you may wish to take in sharing information about your child's diagnosis with others and organising for extra support.

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- ☐ **Take a breath**: Acknowledge that this is a significant moment. It may take time to process this information and understand this diagnosis.
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- ☐ **Seek support**: Talk to those who know you and your child – the people with whom you can openly share any worries about this diagnosis.
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- ☐ **Notify the team**: Inform your child's DCP caseworker and your kinship or foster care support worker. Discuss with them how this diagnosis will be shared with other people in the care team supporting your child.
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- ☐ **Join a 'lived experience' group**: Look for a local groups on social media for 'special needs foster or kinship carers or find a MyTime group nearby. Talking to other carers with a similar experience can be helpful.
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- ☐ **Schedule time for yourself**: Enjoy a hobby or have some quiet rest time that has nothing to do with appointments or researching your child's needs. You need time to recharge to be the advocate your child needs.