

Tandem Learning &
Wandering Brightly presents

RESOURCES FOR CAREGIVERS OF AUTISTIC YOUTH

IN BOULDER & BROOMFIELD
COUNTIES

Written by Marni Kammersell,
Neurodiversity and Educational Consultant



Welcome, Parents and Caregivers



This guide was created to help families of Autistic youth in Boulder and Broomfield counties better understand and access available local supports.

Navigating services can feel overwhelming—especially when your child may have varying support needs month-to-month or even day-to-day. This guide gives you straightforward information about local supports so you can make informed choices for your child. While we’ve done our best to simplify complex systems, programs and eligibility rules change often.

Be sure to connect directly with A&I Avenues, the Case Management Agency (CMA) for this region, to receive the most up-to-date guidance and to talk with a case manager.

A&I Avenues summary of programs: <https://www.aiavenues.org/a-i-avenues-funding-programs>

A note on disability

Some parents may not think of their Autistic child as “disabled,” especially if their child doesn’t fit society’s (highly problematic) stereotypes of disability. Yet Autistic people are often disabled by a world filled with inaccessible systems, rigid expectations, and a lack of accommodations. Being disabled doesn’t mean your child is not capable or valuable. It does mean that they may need extra support in certain settings. Embracing this can open doors to resources that help your child and your family thrive.

Disability justice is a movement that values every body and mind, and reminds us we all thrive through mutual support. Two helpful books on disability are *Demystifying Disability* by Emily Ladau and *Disability Visibility* edited by Alice Wong.

Financial Support

Autism Spectrum (ASD) Program

This program serves individuals ages 5–26 who have a medical diagnosis of autism and adaptive and/or IQ scores above 70, but do not qualify for Medicaid waiver services. It offers a single three-year period of support, with funding of several thousand dollars per year depending on the county, though exact amounts may change. Providers must be contracted with and paid directly through the ASD program. Eligible expenses are broad and include therapies, parent or family coaching, educational or skill-building supports, adaptive recreational programs, and more. There is usually a waitlist, which may be several years long. A simple, one-line autism diagnosis from a pediatrician or other qualified evaluator and an adaptive testing score is sufficient for eligibility.

Family Support Services Program (FSSP)

FSSP provides grant funding to families caring at home for individuals of all ages with intellectual or developmental disabilities (including autism when adaptive or IQ scores are below 70). While there is no waitlist, time to receive funding support will depend on the funding cycle and the level of need. Families can apply annually as long as the individual remains eligible and program requirements are met. Grant awards are adjusted based on individual circumstances and have historically been several thousand dollars per year. Funds are paid directly to families, with receipt tracking and annual submission required. Eligible expenses include: assistive technology, medical/dental services, consultant/advocate assistance, recreational, parent/sibling support, respite, and more.

What's the difference?

The ASD and FSSP programs are managed by A&I Avenues, and a case manager can help you determine which is best for you. While they both help provide support for Autistic individuals in Boulder county, they serve different populations and needs—and the key difference often comes down to “adaptive functioning” scores.

- The ASD program is specifically for individuals ages 5–26 who have 1) a medical diagnosis of autism and 2) adaptive and IQ scores above 70, and who do not qualify for Medicaid waiver services.
- The FSSP program is broader. It serves individuals of any age with intellectual or developmental disabilities (not just autism), and is intended for those whose adaptive or IQ scores are below 70, indicating a higher level of need in daily living. Families receiving FSSP may be waiting for or ineligible for Medicaid waiver programs.

What is an Adaptive Score?



So what exactly is an adaptive score for kids, and why does it matter?

An adaptive score measures a child's daily life skills compared to others their age. These include things like communication, social interactions, self-care (like brushing teeth or getting dressed), and practical skills (like using money or following safety rules).

Many neurodivergent individuals show a “spiky profile,” where cognitive or academic testing may fall in the average or high range, while adaptive or functional scores appear lower on standardized measures. Adaptive scores come from standardized assessments like the Vineland or ABAS-3 and are often used to help determine eligibility for services, including school supports, developmental disability services, or Medicaid waivers. These are typically completed through parent or caregiver questionnaires and do not generally involve direct testing of the child.

A low adaptive score (usually below 70) indicates that a child needs more help with everyday tasks than their same-age peers and may qualify for additional supports. That score reflects the child's current needs, not necessarily their long-term outcomes. Regardless, needing support with daily living skills does not make someone less capable, worthy, or human. Adaptive scores should be used to access support, not to judge a person's value.

Understanding Adaptive Scores

When answering questions for an adaptive skills evaluation, it's natural to think about what your child can do on a good day—what you know they are capable of when regulated.

But adaptive assessments are meant to reflect what your child is able to do *consistently*. Especially when things are hard—during times of stress, dysregulation, or burnout—it may be hard for your child to access those skills.

For example, your child might be able to independently brush their teeth or cross the street safely *sometimes*—but if that takes adult support, reminders, or only happens under ideal conditions, your answers should reflect that reality.

Many Autistic children have uneven and fluctuating skill profiles, especially during times of stress. For this reason, parents are generally advised to answer based on what their child can manage on harder days, rather than best-case moments. Being honest about the full picture helps ensure your child receives the support they truly need.

Who can provide an adaptive score?

In theory, any master's level mental health provider can provide adaptive testing, and sometimes your child's current therapist, a school psychologist, or another evaluator may be able to do it. Adaptive testing is often part of a full neuropsychological evaluation, but it can also be given on its own. You only need the parent portion of the questionnaire, not the teacher forms. A good evaluator will help you talk through confusing questions and accurately capture uneven skills, so when you are choosing someone, it helps to ask about their approach to make sure it feels like the right fit. If you need names, A&I Avenues has a list of evaluators.

Not all questions are simple...

Here's an example of a paraphrased item from an adaptive scoring tool:

“Does your child say the names of familiar people, like ‘mom,’ ‘dad,’ or friends?”

Rating scale:

- 0 – Is not able
- 1 – Never or almost never
- 2 – Sometimes
- 3 – Always or almost always

For some Autistic children—especially those with high situational anxiety, inconsistent access to speech, or apraxia of speech—this question can be complicated.

A child might use spoken words sometimes or often, but not always reliably, or only with supports like AAC. An Autistic child in distress or burnout may go through extended periods when they do not use spoken words, while at other times or in different contexts they may speak a lot. These fluctuations can make it challenging to choose a single rating.

Some other examples of tricky questions: “Does your child listen for more than five minutes to someone else who is talking?” or “Cleans up after they spill something.” Again, the answers may be highly situational, depending on factors like regulation, interest, personal relationships, and what else is happening in the moment.

A skilled evaluator will help you with these kinds of considerations:

- Is the skill spontaneous or prompted?
- Is it reliable across settings or people?
- Is the child able to do this during times of stress or dysregulation?

This kind of nuanced discussion helps ensure the adaptive score reflects real-world experience. If these nuances feel tricky, you don't have to figure them out alone—a thoughtful evaluator can guide you, and it may also help to talk with other parents who have been through this process. This process can be hard and emotional, so remember to take care of yourself too.

Healthcare Options



** These programs will be changing in 2026

Health First Colorado (Income-Based Medicaid)

Colorado's standard Medicaid program, Health First Colorado, provides medical coverage for children based on household income. Many families don't realize that their child may qualify for Medicaid even if the child is not disabled and the family does not receive other supports. Children under age 19 in Colorado can qualify for Medicaid if the household income is under approximately 138% of the federal poverty level, and for Child Health Plan Plus (CHP+) at slightly higher income levels (up to about 260%). This coverage can include doctor visits, therapy, prescriptions, dental care, and behavioral health services. You can apply online through Colorado PEAK or get help applying through your local county human services office.

Children's Medicaid Buy-In Program

If your family's income is too high for regular Medicaid, your child may still qualify for coverage through the Children's Medicaid Buy-In Program. This program is specifically for children with disabilities and is available regardless of parental income. Instead, it allows families to "buy in" to Medicaid by paying a small monthly premium based on a sliding income scale. Children who qualify receive full Medicaid benefits—including therapies (such as speech, occupational, and physical therapy), medical equipment, mental health services, and more. The Buy-In Program can be a crucial support for Autistic children with medical or developmental needs who don't qualify for a waiver but still need services not covered by private insurance. To apply, it is best to connect with a case manager.

Long-Term Care (LTC) Medicaid

LTC Medicaid is a pathway to Medicaid coverage for people with disabilities and ongoing support needs. Unlike income-based Medicaid, eligibility is based on the disabled person's own income and assets, plus a functional "level of care" assessment. Getting approved for LTC Medicaid is also a step in qualifying for extra services and supports through Medicaid waiver programs.

Additional Supports

Community First Choice (CFC) Program

CFC is a new Medicaid benefit in Colorado (launched July 2025) that lets eligible children and adults with long-term care needs access in-home supports without needing a waiver. It can cover things like daily living help, caregiver-provided medical tasks or household chores, and supportive equipment. Families can request an assessment for eligibility for CFC services through A&I Avenues.

Medicaid Waiver Programs

Colorado offers several Medicaid waiver programs that provide extra support for disabled children and adults with Long-Term Care (LTC) needs (see next page for details).

Parents and caregivers can apply for LTC Medicaid on their loved one's behalf, which covers basic health care and in-home supports. They can also apply for a waiver, which adds benefits like respite care and community connector (paid caregivers are chosen by the family), home safety changes, assistive technology, and pay for family members who provide care.

Waiver enrollment can also help with the transition to adulthood. At age 18, some waivers connect young people directly to adult disability services, avoiding long waitlists.

If your loved one has substantial medical, behavioral, or daily living support needs, reach out to A&I Avenues to see if a Medicaid waiver may be available. A case manager can walk you through options, provide free support, and help you apply.

If you need more help navigating the waiver process, community resources are also available. Family Voices Colorado is a nonprofit founded and run by parents, which offers free one-to-one support to families. Maureen Welch's program Navigating Disability Colorado (NDC), helps caregivers apply for and navigate waivers, and some families may also be able to access funding for this program through their case management agency.

What Does “Long-Term Care” Needs Really Mean?

Being Autistic is a lifelong experience. Support needs can change over time, and Autistic people benefit from ongoing awareness and accommodations.

To qualify for many Colorado Medicaid waivers, caregivers must show that their loved one requires frequent supervision or hands-on help to stay safe, healthy, and cared for at home. In practical terms, this can involve daily living support, medical care, or behavioral regulation.

Some possible examples may include:

- Needs adult intervention/support on average every 2 hours throughout the day and every 3 hours at night
- Needs help to eat, dress, use the bathroom, or regulate emotions
- Has complex medical needs requiring skilled nursing care at home (for example, ventilator or feeding tube support)
- Is not safe to be left unsupervised
- Is at risk of out-of-home placement due to intensive developmental or behavioral support needs

Your child may still qualify even if their needs are mostly managed through your ongoing support, with technology, and/or medicine. Eligibility is measured by the level of care they would require without those accommodations.

Meeting this level of need doesn't mean something is “wrong” with your child, and it doesn't necessarily mean things will always be this way. It means they need extra support, and your family may be eligible to get up to \$60k per year of support services and parental care funding through Medicaid waiver programs, regardless of family income.

Colorado Healthcare and Support Options for Children

Program	Who It's For	Based On	Key Benefits	Notes
Health First Colorado (Medicaid)	Children under 19	Family income ($\leq 138\%$ FPL) (less than \$44,367 for a family of four) *	Full Medicaid coverage (medical, dental, vision, specialty care, and more)	Apply through PEAK; no disability required
CHP+ (Child Health Plan Plus)	Children under 19	Family income (138% – 260% FPL) (between \$44,367 and \$83,590 per year for a family of four) *	Comprehensive low-cost coverage including medical, dental, vision, specialty care, and more; sliding-scale premiums	For families who earn too much for Medicaid
Children's Medicaid Buy-In Program	Children under 19 with a disability	Child's disability + family income (up to 300% FPL, approx. \$92,160 for a family of four) *	Full Medicaid coverage; sliding-scale premiums	No waitlist; no need for SSI or waiver; connect with a case manager to explore eligibility
Medicaid Waiver Programs	Children (and adults) with high support needs	Individual's disability + "institutional level of care"	Full Medicaid coverage + up to \$60K/year in services (respite, caregiver pay, and more)	Based only on the individual's personal income and assets; requires documentation and eligibility evaluation

*Listed numbers are based on the 2025 Federal Poverty Level (FPL), which is updated each year and varies by family size. Contact A&I Avenues to discuss eligibility for any of these programs.

Local Resources

A & I Avenues

<https://www.aiavenues.org> | (303) 439-7011

Provides case management and support services for Autistic children and young adults in Boulder and Broomfield Counties. Offers help with accessing therapies, recreation programs, community inclusion, and funding resources.

Autism Society of Boulder County (ASBC)

<https://www.autismboulder.org> | info@autismboulder.org | (720) 272-8231

Supports Autistic individuals and their families through social programs, peer support groups, educational events, and a robust resource directory. Offers both in-person and virtual gatherings for caregivers, teens, and adults.

Center for People With Disabilities (CPWD)

<https://cpwd.org> Supports people with disabilities in Boulder County through advocacy, resources, and transition services for youth and adults. Part of the national network of Centers for Independent Living, which are led by people with disabilities and grounded in the motto “nothing about us without us.”

Inclusive Acres

<https://www.inclusiveacres.org> | inclusiveacres@gmail.com

A nonprofit community farm near Longmont offering free activities for neurodivergent youth ages 5 to 18 and their caregivers. Programs include animal-focused Open Farm Saturdays, field trips, and self-advocacy workshops that build connection and community across Boulder County.

Local Resources continued....

Inclusion on Purpose

<https://www.inclusiononpurpose.org> Provides programs for young adults who are independent in the community but often underserved by traditional disability services. Offers life skills coaching, social experiences, mentorship, employment supports, and trauma-assumed counseling. Services are usually funded through SLS and DD waivers, with limited private pay and DVR options.

Navigating Disability Colorado (NDC)

navigatingdisabilityco.com | info@navigatingdisabilityco.com
Founded by Maureen Welch, NDC helps families navigate the Colorado Medicaid waiver system through info sessions, courses, coaching, and community support. Boulder County residents may qualify for funding through A&I Avenues. Free info session offered the first Wednesday of each month.

Neurodiversity Community Center

<https://www.neurodiversitycc.org> | hello@neurodiversitycc.org
A Lafayette-based nonprofit that empowers neurodivergent individuals and families through mentorship, advocacy, social groups, and creative programming. Offers inclusive opportunities for connection, identity exploration, and leadership development for youth and young adults.

Successfully Social

<https://www.besuccessfullysocial.com/> provides Denver-based in person and virtual social connection groups for neurodivergent youth, as well as parent support. Neurodivergent-led and rooted in a strengths-based approach, the organization helps kids and teens build authentic connection, confidence, and emotional resilience in a supportive environment.

Local Resources continued....

State & Regional Organizations

These organizations provide statewide advocacy, legal support, disability rights education, and Spanish-language resources.

- **Colorado Developmental Disabilities Council** – <https://coddc.org>
- **Disability Law Colorado** – <https://disabilitylawco.org>
- **Colorado Cross-Disability Coalition (CCDC)** – <https://ccdconline.org>
- **The Arc of Colorado** – <https://thearc.org/chapter/the-arc-of-colorado/>
- **El Grupo VIDA** – <https://elgrupovida.org/en/home/>

Local Resources for LGBTQIA+ Support

Many Autistic children and teens also identify as LGBTQIA+. Research and lived experience both highlight a strong connection between neurodivergence and gender diversity. Supporting Autistic youth means honoring the full complexity of their identities—and making sure they have access to safe, affirming spaces that reflect who they are. The resources below recognize the importance of intersectionality and provide support at the overlap of neurodivergence, gender, and sexuality.

Local Resources for LGBTQIA+ Support Continued...

Rocky Mountain Equality (RMEQ)

<https://www.rmequality.org> | info@rmequality.org | (303) 499-5777

A Colorado-wide LGBTQ+ advocacy nonprofit with its main center in Boulder and a satellite location in Fort Collins. RMEQ offers a range of services—including youth programs (ages 18–24), trans support, behavioral health, QTPOC groups, and family/parent support groups. They provide safe spaces for social connection, mental health resources, education, volunteer opportunities, and leadership development across Boulder, Broomfield, and beyond.

Parenting The Rainbow

<https://www.parentingtherainbow.org> |

hello@parentingtherainbow.org A Boulder-area community run by parents of trans, non-binary, and gender-expansive children. They offer monthly virtual and in-person support groups, a moderated Discord community, advocacy guidance, and seasonal activities and events. In partnership with RMEQ, they offer educational events and a safe space tailored to the unique journeys of parenting rainbow kids.

Camp Indigo

<https://www.thecampindigo.org> |

thecampindigo@gmail.com A summer day camp specifically for trans and nonbinary youth ages 5–17, including sessions in Boulder. Rooted in joy and community, it offers crafts, music, outdoor activities, and identity-affirming connection in a structured yet celebratory environment. Scholarships and sliding-scale pricing make it accessible to families across the state.

Public School Resources

Public school can be a very different experience for each Autistic student and for each family. Some students find connection, meaningful support, and growth in their local schools, while others experience barriers like sensory overload, exclusion, or behavior-based systems that don't reflect their needs. These differences are hyper-local, meaning that even within the same district or school, experiences can vary dramatically from one classroom or staff team to another. The resources are recommendations from Boulder Valley School District (BVSD) Autism Advisory Committee current and past co-leads.

BVSD Parent Page for Special Education

<https://www.bvsd.org/departments/special-education/parent-news>

Stay informed about parent events, advisory updates, and neurodiversity initiatives within BVSD.

BVSD Autism Advisory Team Updates

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSfE_ZRix5G4Qpd0OFXb7YsPw_lxHzrN5QowX-SvhafKgQrL.yg/viewform

A newsletter from the parents who serve as Co-Leads on the BVSD Autism Advisory Team. It includes updates on the team's work, results of community surveys, along with resources for families and Autistic students.

BVSD Neurodiversity Philosophy (Policy Statement)

<https://www.bvsd.org/about/board-of-education/policies/policy/~board/a-policies/post/an-neurodiversity-philosophy>

Boulder Valley School District has adopted a public-facing philosophy statement affirming the value of neurodiversity. This document can be a helpful tool for starting conversations with your child's school team about how inclusive practices and strengths-based approaches are reflected in their IEP or classroom environment.

Curated School-related Resources

Alliance Against Seclusion & Restraint

<https://endseclusion.org> A national advocacy group working to end the use of restraint, seclusion, and punitive discipline in schools. Offers webinars, research summaries, and alternatives to compliance-based discipline.

Neurodiversity at School

<https://oolong.co.uk/nd-at-school/> Created by Autistic educator and writer Fergus Murray, this resource offers an accessible introduction to neurodiversity-informed education. Drawing from lived experience and research, Murray challenges conventional schooling practices and explores concepts like double empathy, monotropism, and the importance of inclusive, student-centered learning environments.

Neurowild Resources

<https://www.teacherspayteachers.com/store/emily-hammond-neurowild> Includes beautiful, accessible visuals and tools for schools and families, including the *Neurowild Shift* series. Created by an Autistic educator and therapist, these materials support rethinking behavior, regulation, and sensory needs.

The Dark Side of Rewards: Why Incentives Do More Harm Than Good in the Classroom

<https://endseclusion.org/2023/05/06/the-dark-side-of-rewards-why-incentives-do-more-harm-than-good-in-the-classroom/> An important read on how reward systems can unintentionally harm Autistic learners, especially those who mask or suppress distress to meet expectations.

Autism Understood (by Spectrum Gaming UK)

<https://www.autismunderstood.co.uk> Created by Autistic teens for peers and educators, this site explains autism in everyday, relatable language and offers videos and tools directly from youth voices.

Curated School-related Resources Continued



Why Toolkit

<https://supportablesolutions.com/thewhytoolkit/> A neuroaffirming alternative to traditional behavior assessments like FBAs (Functional Behavior Assessments) and behavior plans. Designed to understand the “why” behind behavior with compassion, curiosity, and an aim for increasing co-regulation.



Neuroaffirming Assessment Tools



ASUP (Assessment of Skills and Unsolved Problems)

<https://livesinthebalance.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/ASUP2024-FINAL.pdf>

These emerging frameworks aim to replace deficit-based evaluations with affirming, whole-person approaches. Ask neurodiversity-informed professionals if they use these tools in assessment or IEP planning.



DASEL (Dynamic Assessment of Social Emotional Learning)

<https://www.speechdude.com/dasel-full-assessment-kit-jan-2025>

A strengths-based tool for understanding and supporting Autistic communication, connection, and regulation.



Homeschooling Resources



In Colorado, families can withdraw their child from school and begin homeschooling at any time. To comply with the state's homeschool law, parents must submit a Notice of Intent (NOI) to a local school district at least 14 days before they begin counting instructional days. During this 14-day period, the child does not need to return to school—they are no longer subject to compulsory attendance once withdrawn.

The law requires a minimum of 172 days of instruction per year, averaging at least 4 hours of learning per day. However, families have full discretion over what qualifies as instructional time. This can include a wide range of learning experiences beyond conventional academics, such as therapies (e.g., speech or occupational therapy), reading, nature walks, educational podcasts, hands-on projects, conversations, physical and digital games, and field trips. This flexibility allows families to create a learning environment that fits their child's developmental needs and interests.

One-day enrichment programs such as APEX in Longmont, Summit in Westminster, and Homeschool Connections in Westminster allow homeschooled children to attend classes one day a week while continuing to learn at home or in the community the rest of the time. These programs offer academic subjects, arts, social activities, and hands-on experiences, often in small, supportive settings. Each program is different, so families are encouraged to visit and explore what fits best. Enrichment programs do not provide IEP services or one-on-one supports for students with disabilities, though some may be open to parents staying on site to provide support.

In addition to formal programs, homeschooling parents organize park days, meetups, co-ops, and instructor-led classes. These opportunities shift often, so getting connected with the local homeschooling community is the best way to find current offerings.

Homeschool Resources Continued...

Boulder Area Homeschool Families (Facebook Group)

One of the easier places to connect with other local homeschoolers, ask questions, and get support. Members organize meetups, share co-ops, classes, and outdoor activities. Asking local homeschoolers is a great way to get information about programs that might work well for your family.

Colorado Department of Education - Homeschool Resources

www.cde.state.co.us/choice/homeschool_resources CDE's homeschool resources page includes links to home school programs and enrichment options, support groups, and both local and national resources.

The Kiva Center Homeschool Program

www.thekivacenter.com/ Based on an 80-acre wilderness property near Lefthand Canyon, Kiva offers programs for ages 5–18 one to two days per week (9 a.m.–3 p.m.) with nature connection, self-directed projects, and service learning. Tuition is \$3,350–\$4,500 per year with discounts and aid available; limited free spots are offered through Colorado Homeschool Enrichment (CHE).

Junkyard Social Club – Homeschool Program

<https://junkyardsocialclub.org> Located in Boulder, Junkyard offers paid homeschool sessions for ages 6+ on Wednesdays and Fridays, plus weekly Thursday meetups for play and connection. Programs include hands-on science and global studies.

Homeschool Resources Continued...

Sunflower Farm – School Age Program

<https://sunflowerfarminfo.com> | 11150 Prospect Rd, Longmont, CO
| 303-774-8001

Sunflower Farm offers a licensed, farm-based enrichment program for homeschoolers ages 5–8, held outdoors on a 55-acre working farm. Children attend one or two full days per week (Tuesdays and/or Thursdays) and engage in self-directed learning through farm chores, nature play, animal care, planting, building, art, and science. With a focus on following the child's interests and rhythms, the program fosters confidence, curiosity, and sensory connection to the natural world. A heated indoor space is available when needed. Private pay tuition, scholarships and sibling discounts offered.

Laughing Coyote Project – Homeschool Program

<https://laughingcoyoteproject.org/homeschool/> Located on

40+ acres in Longmont, Laughing Coyote Project offers immersive, hands-on homeschool programs rooted in primitive and traditional skills. Designed for ages 6–18, students attend 1–3 days per week in fall and spring, learning fire-making, archery, foraging, pottery, tracking, shelters, and more in a supportive, nature-rich community. The teen program blends leadership, deep nature connection, and self-directed projects in a tight-knit peer group. A unique, land-based experience that fosters independence, skill-building, and belonging.

Book Recommendation - A Different Way to Learn: Neurodiversity and Self-Directed Education

A practical guide by Naomi Fisher for parents of neurodivergent children considering self-directed or homeschool paths. Clinical psychologist Naomi Fisher explains why conventional schooling often fails neurodivergent youth, with a particular focus on Autistic and PDA children. She explores how self-directed educational methods such as homeschooling and unschooling can reduce anxiety, honor individual learning styles, and build confidence.

Online Neuro-affirming Resources From Autistic Adults

Kieran Rose - The Autistic Advocate

www.theautisticadvocate.com An Autistic educator, speaker, and trainer from the UK whose work focuses on Autistic identity, masking, and support for Autistic people across the lifespan. Kieran delivers trainings and webinars internationally, helping families, schools, and professionals adopt neurodiversity-affirming practices.

Yellow Ladybugs

www.yellowladybugs.com.au An Australian Autistic-led nonprofit that supports Autistic girls and gender-diverse young people through peer connection, advocacy, and education. Offers free guides, mental health resources, and events designed by and for Autistic individuals.

Kristy Forbes – inTune Pathways

www.kristyforbes.com An Autistic educator and parent specializing in PDA (Pathological Demand Avoidance) and trauma-informed family support. Offers online courses, webinars, and guidance to help parents understand nervous system-based avoidance and support Autistic children with compassion.

Sonny Jane Wise - Lived Experience Educator

www.livedexperienceeducator.com An Australian advocate, author, and speaker with multiple neurodivergent identities, including Autistic, ADHD, and BPD. Sonny's work expands beyond autism to reframe neurodivergence broadly through talks, workshops, and accessible resources.

Dr. Megan Anna Neff - Neurodivergent Insights

neurodivergentinsights.com An American Autistic and ADHD clinical psychologist who develops accessible, affirming mental-health resources for neurodivergent people. Her platform provides blogs, workbooks, and trainings that translate research into practical supports as well as a membership community.

Books

Parenting & Neurodivergence

- *The Explosive Child: A New Approach for Understanding and Parenting Easily Frustrated, Chronically Inflexible Children* – Dr. Ross W. Greene
- *Brain-Body Parenting: How to Stop Managing Behavior and Start Raising Joyful, Resilient Kids* – Mona Delahooke
- *I Will Die On This Hill: Autistic Adults, Autism Parents, and the Children Who Deserve a Better World* – Meghan Ashburn & Jules Edwards
- *Raising Kids with Big, Baffling Behaviors: Brain-Body-Sensory Strategies That Really Work* – Robyn Gobbel
- *Self Care for Autistic People: 100+ Ways to Recharge, De-Stress & Unmask!* – Dr. Megan Anna Neff
- *The Neurodivergent-Friendly DBT Workbook* – Sonny Jane Wise
- *We're All Neurodiverse* – Sonny Jane Wise
- *Your Child Is Not Broken* – Heidi Mavir

Gender Identity

- *Supporting Autistic Transgender Youth and Adults: A Guide for Professionals and Families* – Finn V. Gratton
- *Supporting Autistic Girls & Gender Diverse Youth* – Yellow Ladybugs
- *The Awesome Autistic Guide for Trans Teens* by Yenn Purkis and Sam Rose
- *Queerly Autistic* by Erin Ekins

Understanding Therapies



Families are often introduced to a range of therapies after an autism diagnosis. Therapies can be supportive when they are focused on meeting an individual child's needs, and helping to reduce stress rather than "fix" differences. Here are three common ones to explore:

Child & Family Therapy

Child therapy uses play to help children express feelings, manage stress, and explore experiences in a safe setting. Family therapy or Parent Counseling can also support everyone in strengthening communication, repairing connections, and learning new tools for working through challenges together. A neuro-affirming approach focuses on understanding and advocating for the child's needs, and views relationships as central to growth and healing.

Occupational Therapy (OT)

Occupational therapy helps children build daily life skills such as moving their bodies, eating, sleeping, toileting, identifying needs, regulating emotions, and staying comfortable in different sensory environments. The focus should be on building skills with the child's consent and in ways that feel accessible, not pushing them to tolerate distress.

Speech Therapy

Speech-language therapy supports communication in many forms: spoken words, AAC (Augmentative and Alternative Communication), gestures, and more. A neuro-affirming approach respects all forms of communication and does not treat speech as the only "successful" outcome. It can also help children with apraxia, articulation, or social communication differences.

What about changing behavior?

A neuro-affirming approach to supporting Autistic children focuses on felt safety, connection, and regulation as the foundation for growth and change. When seeking therapy, look for providers who respect boundaries, honor communication, and address the root causes of distress rather than trying to suppress behaviors. Providers should always respect a child's right to say no and focus on consent, self-awareness, and self-advocacy – not coercion.

The Organizations Behind This Guide



Wandering Brightly

NEURODIVERSITY & EDUCATIONAL CONSULTANT

<https://www.wanderingbrightly.com> Marni is a neurodivergent educator who supports caregivers in understanding Autistic and other neurodivergent experiences and in seeing their child's needs through a different lens. With over 15 years in alternative education, she guides families in creating personalized, strength-based approaches that adapt to each child's evolving needs.



Louisville Family Center

NEURO-AFFIRMING THERAPY

<https://www.louisvillefamilycenter.com>

Louisville Family Center offers heart-centered therapy for people of all ages & identities. LFC specializes in providing a relationship focused, trauma-informed approach to therapy, and in working with families with neurodivergent individuals. Louisville Family Center runs the Community Education program, Tandem Learning for people in schools & the wider community.



Tandem Learning

NEURO-AFFIRMING SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL EDUCATION

<https://tandemlearning.getlearnworlds.com/>

Utilizing information from the fields of neurobiology, mental health and education, Tandem Learning offers interactive self-paced and facilitated experiences for anyone wanting to learn how to better relate and communicate with themselves and others. They are trauma-informed, neuro-affirming & equity driven. They also have school support services.

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