



Finding a Caregiver for Your Autistic Child or Loved One

If you are the primary caregiver for a loved one with autism, it can be a challenge to find someone trustworthy and knowledgeable to care for them in your absence. Below are some tips for getting started to find assistance:

Support Groups: Often, the best caregivers are located by word of mouth among people who understand autism needs. Joining a local support group for families with autism is a great place to start.

Friends and Community Acquaintances: There may be other families affected by autism in your community, who have located a caregiver that has experience and that they trust. Reach out to them in person, through community groups or online.

Service Agencies: Caregiver agencies often have a special needs database. Their staff has been vetted with background checks and references so you can rest assured your loved one will receive trusted care.

Colleges & Universities: Local colleges may have programs for special education, applied behavior analysis (ABA) and more. Inquire about students who may be working toward their degree in relevant these programs as possible candidates.

Once you have identified candidates, it is a good idea to meet them ahead of time for an interview. Here are some tips to prepare:

1. Create a list of questions and concerns regarding the care of your child, like:

What is their background in childcare?

What is their experience with autism or disabilities?

What is their flexibility in schedule (ensure they are available for the times you are seeking assistance)?

How can they help with your child or loved one's specific needs? For example, if your child is not toilet-trained, are they able to assist?

Provide hypothetical scenarios that you encounter with your child or loved one, and ask them how they would handle it. Ask other questions that pertain to your family's specific cultural considerations. Do not hesitate to ask specific questions that are important to you.

Is the candidate physically capable of assisting with your child? For example, if your child tends to run away, can the caregiver keep them safe?

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- 2. Locating and interviewing candidates to care for your child are the initial hurdles. Trust your judgment — you know what is best for your family. If you have concerns, follow this instinct. Ask for background checks and references to provide formalized reassurance.**
- 3. Once you have completed the initial steps, set up a time for the candidate to meet your child or loved one. Observe their interactions and look for the following:**

A first-time meeting can be overwhelming for all involved. Keep your focus on how the caregiver connects with your child or loved one.

How well does the caregiver engage with your child or loved one? For example, do they try to speak at the child's level of understanding?

Does the caregiver continuously monitor and stay tuned in to what your child or loved one is doing? Watch how your child or loved one receives the caregiver. Knowing their individual level of acceptance of new people can provide insight.

Does the caregiver ask a lot of questions? Often, for a caregiver in this capacity, there are many things to know. A good caregiver will likely come up with questions. This may occur during the initial stages of meeting your family or once they are immersed in your family's home and lifestyles.

Ensure a caregiver candidate meets your needs. It may also help if they have “added bonus” attributes. Trust your instincts and do not hesitate to ask questions. Advocate for your child or loved one when it comes to the relationship with their caregiver.

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