

## **Checklist: Finding & Working with an Experienced Autism Worker**

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Finding and reading information takes time. Therefore, finding time to do so is in itself a challenge. You are on this site in the hope that it will help guide you on your search for appropriate providers for your child. While you need to consider all the tips, it is not a “must-do-everything-on-the-checklist”. Take those that you find practical and suit your needs.

### **I. TOP TIPS to Finding an Experienced Autism Worker**

#### ***Start with a Binder***

Purchase a good-quality 3” binder and three-hole punch. As time goes on, your binder will begin to expand into file cabinets, but for now a binder is transportable and will have sufficient room to get you started.

#### ***Keeping Records***

On the first page, print out contact information:

- Address and phone #
- Contact name

In further sections, add:

- Date, time and notes about conversation
- Date, time and notes about appointments
- Copies of correspondence

This system should be customized to include whatever is helpful to you. Other things that can be included are: calendar of appointments, price quotes from other providers, questions you want to ask at your next appointment, and so on.

Keep a close eye on all the appointments with your child and write them down on a blank calendar. If they do not match up to the invoice, be sure to initiate a discussion with your provider; ensure that discrepancies are handled as soon as you are aware of them.

#### ***Compile a List of Local Providers***

- To see a complete list of experienced autism workers listed on Spirale, search either by provider type or region (see left menu).
- At this time, you may not find many or any listings of your interest as this site is very new and will take time build with provider listings. If so, ask other parents (including Autism Ontario Chapter support meetings) to recommend a provider.
- You should also ask your Case Manager, Early Intervention Worker or local Autism Ontario Chapter if they have lists of private providers.

#### ***Make some Phone Calls***

- Make as many photocopies of the Phone Interview Question Checklist as you have names of potential providers and then start phoning.
- Keep a record of everyone you speak to (including dates and what you spoke about). This will become an important tool. If you feel you need to write a reflective letter, there is an example below.
- Do not be intimidated by the person you are speaking with. Have them spell their name and give you their title. If they are speaking too fast, do not be afraid to ask them to slow down.

- Be diligent about asking questions and include any other questions you might have. When you have finished, thank them politely and move on to the next.

### *Find Your Top Three*

- Go through your list and sort out the ones that are inappropriate for whatever reason, and then look at your ‘maybe’ list.
- Pick the top three and then book an appointment with each. When you keep these appointments, ensure you have copies of the In-Person Interview Question Checklist.
- Once you have completed the three meetings, go through your lists. You may enlist the help of someone else to provide a different point of view.
- Be sure to call references and use the Interviewing References Checklist.

### *Look for an Experienced Autism Worker whose ethics are similar to yours*

- Ensuring their answers compliment your ethics and match your concerns will help you find a suitable provider.
- The provider should have no problem giving you references.
- Check with other local families about typical fees and hourly rates for various providers.
- They should not be intimidating or condescending and they should patiently answer all your questions and consult you when determining goals for your child.

### *Monitor the Service*

- Once the service has begun, be sure to track all activities, meetings, and discussions.
- Use the tips in the Evaluating and Monitoring Checklist.
- Consider Composing a ‘Reflective Letter’

- It is essential that you be organized right from the start. One of the most important components of organization is the “reflective letter”. This is a letter summarizing your understanding of a particular conversation or meeting. While speaking with your service provider on the phone (or in person), make notes.
- You may want to follow up your top three interviews with a reflective letter. Using this tool can help eliminate potential misunderstandings, particularly with respect to fees and contract issues.
- Try to remember everything you can, but don’t rely just on your memory. Do not be afraid to ask them to repeat themselves. Before ending the conversation, read back your notes to the person you were speaking with. If you are meeting with them in person, bring a friend along to take notes so that you can concentrate on the topic at hand.
- After you have hung up (or left the meeting), write up a short letter containing the information you have written down. Use a pleasant and factual tone. You can open with something like: “It was a pleasure to speak with you today (date). In order to clarify our conversation in my mind, I would like to reiterate. If I have omitted anything or misunderstood, please advise me within ten working days. If I do not hear back from you, I will assume my summary is accurate.”
- Mail the original letter. Make sure to keep a copy in your file in the appropriate section for that agency. If you receive a response, add that as well. If you save the first letter on your computer, it may be used as a template for future letters. This will save you a great deal of time as you will only have to change specific information such as names, dates, etc.
- The reflective letter is the next best thing to “getting it in writing”. This may come in handy down the road and will go a long way toward avoiding misunderstanding with your service provider.

## 2. CHECKLIST: Phone Interview with Autism Worker

Consider the following questions when first contacting a potential autism worker by phone. (Experienced Autism Workers cover a broad range of services and supports, therefore some of the questions are not applicable.)

- I have a recent assessment from \_\_\_\_\_, can you use it?
- What is the cost per hour for your service, including all fees?
- How often are your appointments?
- Who do you consult with if you need feedback or support?
- Please describe your training and experience
- Am I, as a parent, invited to take part in meetings and view sessions?
- Will I receive regular feedback?

## 3. CHECKLIST: In-Person Interview Questions

Consider the following questions when interviewing a potential Autism Worker.

- Getting to Know the Provider
- What training do you have? (Be specific i.e. which courses, how long were they, who conducted them, were they local or out of town?)
- What age range of children or adults are you willing to work with?
- Do you work exclusively with individuals with ASDs?
- How will you build rapport with my child?
- What is your experience with co-existing conditions such as mental health issues or seizure disorder? What would you need to know or learn to continue working with my child if these other health matters present themselves?

- Are you trained in what to do in a medical emergency?

### *Understanding the Service They Provide*

- Do you require an assessment before providing service?
- Do you have a waitlist for services? If so, how long? Do you provide interim support for wait-listed families?
- Are you agreeable to working as a team with an occupational therapist, a speech and language pathologist and other professionals?
- Do you work with the family on the Individual Education Plan (IEP), the Identification, Placement and Review Committee (IPRC), behavioural plans, etc.?
- How many hours of service per month do you recommend to start?
- Who is responsible for training materials, paper, storage, therapy items, etc.?
- If you are providing the service in the home, do you require an adult to be present while you are working with a child?
- If you provide a home program, do you set it up? If I have recommendations by a professional already in place, can you implement those recommendations?
- What techniques or approaches would you use in order to understand and respond to the way my child communicates?
- Do you help with life skills such as toileting, eating problems, dressing, bathing, etc.?
- Do you provide integration into a community program?
- What techniques do you use to manage challenging behaviours such as self-injury, aggression, etc.?
- Is your service provided in the home, community, in your office or a combination? Are there extra fees

associated with home based or community based service? (Travel time, gas, etc.)

### **Communication and Parent Education**

- Are parents involved with the planning?
- Do you train or support parents? Do you teach parents how to implement recommendations and how to generalize skills learned?
- Are parents welcome to observe sessions? Can they record the session? If not, why?
- How long does it take for you to return phone calls?
- What happens if you are sick? How long will it take for an appointment to be rescheduled?
- What is your policy in the event my child gets sick? How much cancellation notice do you require? Are we required to pay for that appointment?
- How do you evaluate a child's progress and how often? How are the parents informed? Can you provide written updates?
- What are the markers to indicate my child has been successful? How will we know when it is time to end service?

### **Financial**

- What is the cost per hour for your service including all fees?
- Is there an income dependent sliding scale for those not able to afford full cost?
- How often am I invoiced? Do you provide a detailed monthly statement? What method of payments do you accept?

## **4. CHECKLIST: Interviewing References**

Consider the following questions when interviewing your potential experienced autism worker's references...

- Do you have a written contract with your service provider? If so, was it easy to understand?
- Did the final amount you were charged coincide with costs quoted to you when you first signed with the provider?
- Do you find the provider (therapists, mediators or front-line staff, etc.) polite and respectful of you and of your child?
- Is the provider imaginative when teaching new skills?
- Does the provider include community skills, self-help skills, social skills, anxiety self-modulation, and communication skills in their regular programming?
- What is their philosophy on teaching skills?
- If they work in your home; do they leave the programming area the way they found it? Do they show up on time? Leave early?
- If the service is office based, are they ready to start your child's appointments on time?
- Explain to me what happens when your child is called in sick. Do they charge you for a session?
- Are you allowed to view the sessions?
- Does the provider listen to your opinions, answer your questions and return your phone calls promptly?

## **5. CHECKLIST: EVALUATING AND MONITORING THE SERVICE**

Now that you've hired an autism worker, how do you know they are doing a good job?

Individuals with autism spectrum disorders and their families have the right to know whether persons and their employees who claim to be qualified to provide services actually can perform the necessary competencies.

- All consumers also have the right to hold those individuals accountable for providing quality services.
- Take a look at these questions and determine the answers that will satisfy you. Be sure to use this tool on a regular basis.

## **Performance: Are they doing the work?**

- What happens if the worker calls in sick? How long do you have to wait for another appointment?
- Has the worker established a good rapport with your child? With you?
- Is the worker consistently on time?
- Does the worker take part in meetings with case managers, providers, schools, etc.?

## **Attitude**

- Is the worker respectful of your privacy?
- If the appointments occur in the home does the worker leave the programming space the way they found it?
- Are you allowed to observe appointments?
- Is the worker forthcoming and open when you ask questions? For example, would s/he take the time to explain the service, implementation of recommendations and how progress is evaluated?

## **Parent Education**

- Has the provider taught you how to generalize the skills they teach your child?
- Are you allowed to sit in on appointments and make suggestions?

## **Goals**

- Are they fulfilling their contracted hours?
- Are program goals met in a timely fashion?
- If progress is not being made with a program, are changes made to teach the skill in another way?

- Would you feel comfortable in recommending this service to another parent?
- Do you feel there is a good match between your child's needs and the competencies of this provider?
- Is the provider also helping with: integration into the community, self-help skills, social skills, self-calming and other skills that have to be taught in a natural environment?
- Have they provided a plan for when your agreement ends?
- Does your child seem to be having fun while in appointments?
- Is the worker's service meeting the expectations laid out in the initial interview?

## **Financial**

- What is the process if your child is sick – do they charge you for the shift if not enough advanced warning is given?
- Are they fulfilling their end of the contract to a satisfactory level?
- Do you agree with the hours they are billing you?

**DISCLAIMER:** This document reflects the views of the author. It is Autism Ontario's intent to inform and educate. Every situation is unique and while we hope this information is useful, it should be used in the context of broader considerations for each person. Please contact Autism Ontario at [info@autismontario.com](mailto:info@autismontario.com) or 416-246-9592 for permission to reproduce this material for any purpose other than personal use. © 2012 Autism Ontario 416.246.9592 [www.autismontario.com](http://www.autismontario.com)