



AUTISM SOCIETY
ALBERTA

Autism Services for Children Ages 0-6

What To Look For

At-A-Glance



2025

Autism Services for Children Ages 0-6

What To Look For

At-A-Glance

With the support of Autism Society Alberta, an Early Childhood Community of Practice was formed in 2022 to create a place for solution-focused discussion and networking. This group worked together in 2024 to create a guide to outline what to look for in quality services for young children diagnosed with autism. For the full document go [here](#).



Neurodiversity Affirming Practice

Supporting the different ways that people's brains work.

Good Practice Indicators

- Child should feel safe and want to participate
- Understand that children may communicate in different ways
- Create sensory-friendly spaces
- Focus on the child's strengths
- Teach the child to advocate for themselves
- Include the child in the community
- Encourage a positive self-image



Cultural & Contextual Considerations/Intersectionality

Service providers should consider culture and circumstances while focusing on each family's strengths.

Good Practice Indicators

- Recognize the influence of culture on how people understand autism
- Understand family culture and circumstances
- Recognize the impact of the diagnosis on the family
- Focus on family and cultural strengths
- Use cultural preferences
- Be trustworthy
- Share decision-making
- Family is an equal partner
- Communicate in a culturally sensitive way
- Give inclusive and respectful care



Timely and Early Access

Making sure young children have access to services early, when autism is suspected, can be positive for the child's future.

Good Practice Indicators

- Remove barriers to services
- Provide support for child across settings
- Promote early identification of autism in the community



Stepped Model of Care/Individualized Services

Services should be needs-based. A stepped model of care means that services change as the child's needs change.

Good Practice Indicators

- Personalized support for each child
- Services should be reviewed often to make sure the child's needs are met



Clinical Expertise/Interdisciplinary Practice

Professionals with experience and qualifications should deliver services. Paraprofessionals (like educational assistants) should be trained and supervised by the professionals who deliver services.

Good Practice Indicators

- Services are provided by qualified professionals licensed under the Alberta Health Professions Act (HPA)
- All clinicians work together and focus on family goals
- Service plans are updated as the child develops and family goals change



Child and Family-Centred Approach

Parents and caregivers know their child and family best and should be included in all decisions made.

Good Practice Indicators

- Communicate with respect
- Collaborate with parents as partners
- Parents are supported to help children practice skills in their own settings
- Consider the needs of the whole family



Evidence-Informed/Promising Practices

Supports and services should use the best research along with the experience of the service provider.

Good Practice Indicators

- Team stays up to date on autism research and best practice
- Families have clear ways to provide suggestions and express concerns
- Monitoring and supervision is in place to build consistency
- Services are reviewed to make sure they are meeting needs



Fidelity/Training

Good services are delivered by those with training in autism and training around strategies specific to the child.

Good Practice Indicators

- Ongoing training is provided to staff
- Parents can ask questions to make sure that the service is being delivered as planned
- Services are reviewed to make sure that they are being delivered as planned



Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC)

AAC is anything that a child can use to communicate besides talking; like gestures, signs, objects, pictures, and speech-generating devices.

Good Practice Indicators

- Service providers have AAC knowledge and collaborate with the team
- Multimodal communication (many ways to communicate) is encouraged
- Functional communication (ways to get needs met) in natural environments is encouraged



Functional Goals

Choose appropriate, achievable and functional goals. This should be a team effort.

Good Practice Indicators

- Goals based on family priorities should be part of individualized goals
- Every child has their own goals
- Goals are regularly reviewed and updated



Transition Planning

Smooth transitions by transition planning early and offering support. Focus on the long-term success and well-being of the child.

Good Practice Indicators

- Begin transition planning in childhood
- Individualized planning and family engagement
- Include opportunities for community connections



Physical and Mental Health Considerations

Service providers should work to understand the whole child. This includes physical issues like genetic conditions, seizures/epilepsy, nutritional deficiencies, gastrointestinal problems and sleep disorders. It also includes mental health like ADHD, anxiety, depression and trauma.

Good Practice Indicators

- Work with medical professionals and others involved with the child/family
- Consider the role of physical and mental health when making service plans



Autism Through Indigenous Lens

Understand Indigenous ways of knowing and focus on the whole child including their family, community, culture and the systems they live in.

Good Practice Indicators

- Build family values and traditions into services
- Engage the community
- Prioritize remote reserves
- Services reflect Indigenous ways of knowing
- Use a holistic approach
- Support the community to build their capacity