

Autism in Quebec:

**All You Need to
Know About Before
and After Receiving
a Diagnosis
(for children and
youth)**



Table of Contents



Introduction	3
General Information about Autism	4
What is Autism Spectrum Disorder?	4
Three Levels of Support Needs	5
Recognizing Signs of Autism Across All Ages	6
What to Do If I Have Concerns About My Child's Development?	8
0-5-year-olds	8
School aged children	10
How to find your local community services centre (CLSC)?	12
How to find a family doctor?	12
How To Get a Formal Diagnosis?	14
Why Does a Diagnosis Matter?	14
Who Can Diagnose in Quebec?	15
Where Can You Receive a Diagnoses in Quebec?	15
After Receiving the Diagnosis, How Can I Get Services?	21
Advocacy & Navigating the System	26
Conclusion	29
Additional Resources	30
References	31

Introduction

If you are a parent or caregiver who suspects your child may be on the autism spectrum – or if you’ve recently received a diagnosis – you are not alone. Navigating Québec’s health, education, and social services systems can feel overwhelming, especially while managing daily life and your child’s needs.

This toolkit is designed to help you:

- Recognize signs of autism at different ages
- Know what to do when concerns arise and how to access screening and diagnostic services
- Understand supports available before and after diagnosis
- Advocate effectively for your child’s rights and needs
- Find reliable resources and contacts at each step

We’ve gathered practical information and step-by-step guidance so you can spend less time searching and more time supporting your child. Whether your child is a toddler, school-aged, or a teenager, there are ways to seek support, begin interventions, and explore financial assistance (see **Navigating Financial Supports for Families in Québec** on AIDE Canada’s website).

You do not need to wait for a diagnosis to begin taking action when you have concerns.



Disclosure

This toolkit provides general information to help families understand pathways to services in Québec. Service availability, eligibility criteria, wait times, and professional roles may vary between regions and CIUSSS. Public services in Québec, including CLSC and CRDI services, are currently experiencing **very long waiting lists** due to high demand. Access to services often involves ongoing triage, with priority given to the most urgent or complex situations.

For this reason, families are encouraged to be proactive as early as possible. Speaking up when concerns arise, clearly describing a child’s needs and their impact on daily family life, and maintaining communication with services can help reduce delays. Practical strategies are outlined in the section on [Effective Advocacy](#).

The information in this toolkit reflects common practices at the time of writing and is intended to complement – not replace – guidance from your local CLSC or professionals involved with your child.





General Information about Autism

What is Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)?

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a developmental difference that affects how the brain perceives the world, as well as how a person learns, communicates, and interacts with the world. In some cases, autism is linked to genetic differences, while in others the exact cause remains unclear. Researchers suggest that several factors may combine to influence brain development, leading to the wide range of strengths and challenges seen in Autistic individuals. Although much progress has been made, scientists are still learning about the different causes of autism and how they affect each person uniquely.¹

Diagnostic Criteria for ASD According to DSM-5

To meet diagnostic criteria for ASD according to DSM-5, a child must have persistent deficits in each of three areas of social communication and interaction (see A.1. through A.3. below) plus at least two of four types of restricted, repetitive behaviors (see B.1. through B.4. below)

A. Persistent deficits in social communication and social interaction across multiple contexts :



Deficits in social-emotional reciprocity



Deficits in developing, maintaining, and understanding relationships



Deficits in nonverbal communicative behaviours

B. Restricted, repetitive patterns of behavior, interests, or activities :



Stereotyped or repetitive motor movements, use of objects, or speech



Insistence on sameness, inflexible adherence to routines, or ritualized patterns



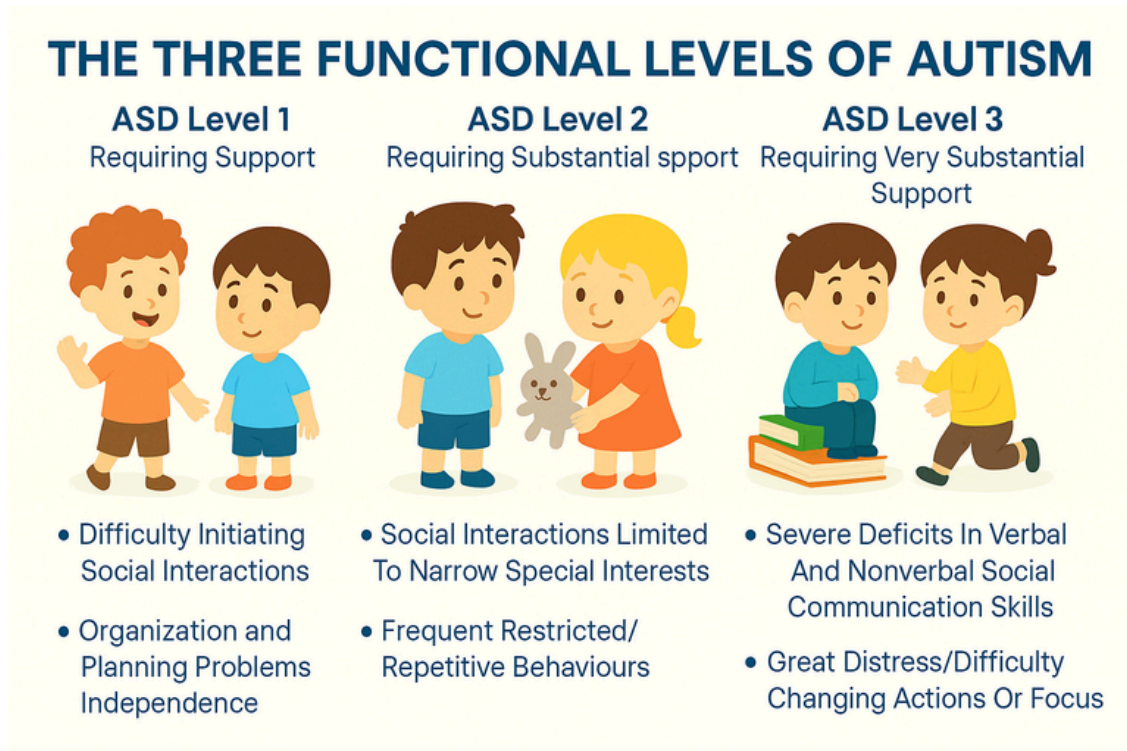
Highly restricted, fixated interest



Hyper- or hypo-reactivity to sensory input



Three Levels of Support Needs in an Official Autism Spectrum Disorder Diagnosis



Level 1 - Some Support

- Can be independent but may need help with social interactions and flexibility.

Level 2 - Substantial Support

- Clear difficulties with communication and adapting to change.
- Needs regular support in daily life.

Level 3 - Very Substantial Support

- Significant challenges in communication and behavior.
- Requires help in most areas of daily life.²



Recognizing Signs of Autism

Early detection of autism spectrum disorder is essential for timely intervention and improved outcomes. ³ You can find some of the most common signs at different developmental stages in the table below :

Note: These signs alone do not confirm autism, and a person doesn't need to have all of them to make it worth discussing with a healthcare professional.

6 to 12 months

- Doesn't babble, or babbles less than expected
- Doesn't gesture (e.g., pointing, waving bye) or gestures less than expected
- Rarely responds to their name
- Limited smiles or joyful expressions directed toward people
- Little or no eye contact
- Limited back-and-forth sharing of sounds, smiles, or facial expressions



15 to 24 months

- Doesn't use single words to communicate
- Avoids eye contact; prefers to be alone
- Poor joint attention (doesn't follow your point or show interest in shared activities)
- Becomes upset by minor changes in routine
- Doesn't share interest (e.g., pointing to show you something)
- No pretend play (e.g., feeding a doll)
- No spontaneous or meaningful two-word phrases

Preschool (3 to 5 years)

- Limited vocabulary or difficulty forming sentences
- Repeats words or phrases (echolalia) without clear meaning
- Difficulty playing with other children; prefers to play alone or alongside others without interacting
- Repetitive play (e.g., lining up toys, spinning objects)
- Trouble understanding simple instructions or questions
- Strong reactions to certain textures, sounds, or lights
- Becomes distressed with changes in routine or environment
- Difficulty showing or understanding emotions



School-age (6 to 12 years)

- Difficulty making or keeping friends
- Challenges with understanding social cues (tone of voice, facial expressions)
- Very focused interests, sometimes unusual for their age
- Prefers routines; becomes upset when plans change
- Sensory sensitivities (e.g., covering ears to block noise, avoiding certain clothing)
- Trouble with transitions between tasks or settings
- Difficulty with organization and planning schoolwork
- May speak in a formal or unusual way for their age



Teens (13 to 18 years)

- Ongoing difficulties with social interaction and communication
- Finds group conversations challenging; may prefer online communication
- Difficulty interpreting sarcasm, jokes, or figurative language
- Experiences anxiety or stress in social or unfamiliar situations
- May struggle with executive functioning (planning, time management, organization)
- Strong, specific interests that may dominate conversations
- Sensory sensitivities continue or become more noticeable in certain settings
- Challenges with independence skills (e.g., managing money, transportation, daily routines)

At any age

- Loss of previously learned skills (regression)
- Decreased social behaviors or communication
- Concerns raised by parents, caregivers, or educators



[Click here](#) for printable posters for families about recognizing signs of autism across childhood.



What To Do If I Have Concerns About My Child's Development?

Noticing differences in your child's development can feel overwhelming. You don't need to "wait and see" if something feels off – taking action early can help your child access services and support sooner. If you live in Quebec and have concerns about your child's development (communication, motor skills, learning, behaviour, social interaction, etc.), the steps you take depend on your child's age and the type of concerns you have. Here's a clear, structured overview:

0-5-Year-olds

1 See your pediatrician or family doctor

- Express concerns about your child's development clearly (speech delay, unusual behaviours, absence of language, regression, etc.), give examples, and ask for developmental screening or referrals (speech therapy, occupational therapy, psychologists etc.).

Your pediatrician will provide you with a referral for an ASD evaluation.

- If you do not have a family doctor see "[Section – Finding a Family Doctor or Pediatrician in Quebec](#)".





2 Contact your local CLSC (Local Community Services Centre)

- If you are unsure where to start, the easiest way to reach the right team at your local CLSC is by calling 811 – Option 2 (the psychosocial support line) or by visiting your CLSC's Psychosocial Intake Services in person.
- Ask for an Agir tôt screening. The Agir Tôt program offers all children in Québec a free one-hour appointment for their 18-month vaccine. This appointment will give parents the opportunity to discuss their child's health and development with a nurse.⁴
- You may get referred to services such as:



- Many specialized services are only available once a diagnosis is confirmed.
- Speech-Language Pathology (SLP), Occupational Therapy (OT), psychoeducation, and physiotherapy services often have long waitlists.
- Access to a caseworker or social worker is usually easier, but wait times may still apply.

- You can request referral to a psychologist or neuropsychologist for a developmental assessment or cognitive testing.
- If you suspect autism or global developmental delay → Ask for referral

3 Private option (optional)

- Book a private developmental assessment (speech, OT, psychologist, developmental pediatrician).
- Because wait times for public services can be quite long, many families look into private options. These services are usually quicker to access, but they can also be costly.



If your child is school aged:

1 Talk to the school

Meet with teacher and principal.

Request evaluation by the school's special education team.

If needs are significant, ask for an Individualized Education Plan (IEP / Plan d'intervention).



2 Contact your local CLSC, family doctor or pediatrician

- Same process as for younger children:
 - Family doctor or pediatrician → referrals to specialists.
 - CLSC → possible services and screening.
- See **"Section – Finding Your Local CLSC"**. and make an in person visit or call **811 - Option 2**



If your child is school aged:

3 Requesting specialized resources

- Once a diagnosis is confirmed, families can request access to CRDI services (Centre de réadaptation en déficience intellectuelle). In Québec, CRDIs are rehabilitation centers that support children and adults with an intellectual disability or autism spectrum disorder (ASD). Their role is to help individuals and their families develop skills, build on strengths, and increase independence in everyday life.
- Access to CRDI services is coordinated through the CLSC. Parents can contact 811 – Option 2 or go to their local CLSC Psychosocial Intake Services to be oriented to the appropriate services.
- Services can include: follow-ups with speech therapy, occupational therapy, or psychology, support for school or finding a job, help with daily living skills (e.g., getting dressed, organizing routines), meetings and support for parents, recreational activities and group workshops to practice social skills and meet other families.
- The referral must come from an **authorized professional** (family doctor or pediatrician, psychologist, SLP, OT, CLSC nurse or psychoeducator).
- Concerns related to academic learning or behaviour in the school setting are typically addressed by the school and/or the school board (e.g., school-based psychology or support services). CLSC or CRDI specialized services generally do not intervene directly in schools, as this falls outside their mandate. However, a CLSC or CRDI social worker can often support parents in communicating with the school and help coordinate services with the appropriate professionals.

4 Private option

- Book a private developmental assessment (speech, OT, psychologist, developmental pediatrician).
- Because wait times for public services can be quite long, many families look into private options. These services are usually quicker to access, but they can also be costly.





Finding Your Local Community Services Centre (CLSC)

CLSCs are neighbourhood health and social service clinics available to everyone in Quebec. They provide day-to-day medical care, preventive services, and support for a wide range of social and mental health needs. Families can turn to their CLSC not only for physical health services, but also for help with developmental concerns, mental health, and referrals to specialized resources.⁵

Click here to find your local CLSC.

Call 811 - Option 2 or go to your local CLSC Psychosocial Intake Services **in person** for fastest access to the right team.

Finding a Family Doctor or Pediatrician in Quebec

Having a primary healthcare provider makes it easier to get screenings, referrals, and follow-up care. If your child does not yet have a family doctor, you can register through the Quebec Family Doctor Finder (GAMF):

How to register with the Guichet d'accès à un médecin de famille (GAMF)?

1

Visit the Quebec Family Doctor Finder (GAMF) registration site

[Québec Family Doctor Finder | Gouvernement du Québec](#)



Complete the online form

You'll need your child's RAMQ health card number and some medical information.

2

Wait to be contacted when a doctor becomes available. The wait time depends on your region and local availability.⁶



Alternatives While Waiting for a Family Doctor

If your child does not yet have a family doctor, there are other options for getting medical advice or care:

01 Super Clinics

Walk-in consultations for a variety of health needs.

02 Primary Care Access Point (GAP)

Consult with a nurse, who may arrange an appointment with a general practitioner.

03 Info-Santé 811

Call anytime, 24/7, to get advice from a nurse on what steps to take next.

04 Pediatric clinics

Some private clinics accept new patients, though a fee may apply.

05 CLSCs (Local Community Services Centre)

Provide basic health assessments and referrals to pediatric specialists.⁷



Key message for parents: You don't need to wait for a confirmed diagnosis to seek help. If you're worried, speak up, document what you see, and request a developmental screening as soon as possible.



How Do We Get a Formal Diagnosis?

Why Does a Diagnosis Matter?

A formal diagnosis can:

Open access to public services

Certain intervention programs, school supports, and CLSC resources require an official ASD diagnosis.

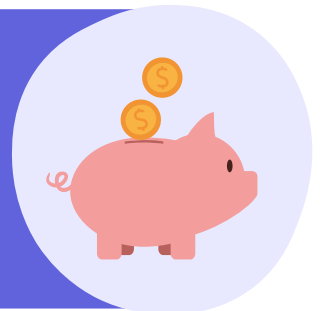


Enable individualized school planning

An official diagnosis is often needed to receive an Individualized Education Plan (IEP), special accommodations, or placement in specialized classrooms.

Unlock financial support

Federal and provincial benefits such as the Child Disability Benefit, Disability Tax Credit, Supplement for a Disabled Child require proof of diagnosis, and financial support for daycares. Check **AIDE Canada – Navigating Financial Supports** for Families in Quebec for detailed information.



Guide intervention strategies

A diagnosis helps professionals tailor therapy approaches to the child's specific needs.

Provide validation and understanding

For families, it can confirm concerns, guide next steps, and connect them to relevant communities and resources.





Who Can Diagnose ASD in Quebec?

In Quebec, only **psychiatrists** and **specialized psychologists** are authorized to complete an evaluation and formally diagnose autism spectrum disorder (ASD). Other professionals such as **occupational therapists, speech-language pathologists, and psychoeducators** can carry out valuable assessments to identify developmental needs and recommend supports, but they cannot provide a formal ASD diagnosis.⁸

Where Can Diagnoses Happen in Quebec?

Public sector

To access an ASD evaluation in Quebec's public sector, you should contact your CLSC or family doctor to request a referral to a CRDI or hospital developmental clinic. The evaluation will be multidisciplinary and free under RAMQ.

There are 4 hospitals officially mandated on the island of Montreal to do evaluations and give an ASD diagnosis:

- [CHU Sainte-Justine Hospital \(Montreal\)](#)
- [Montreal Children's Hospital](#)
- [Douglas Mental Health University Institute](#)
- [Rivière-des-Prairies Hospital](#)

Note: Some hospitals have age limits and territorial restrictions.

Evaluations and diagnoses may also be carried out at other local hospitals or specialized clinics. For guidance, contact your local CLSC.

Wait times in the public system can range from **6 to 24 months**.





Private sector

Because of the wait for diagnoses through the public system, many families turn to private clinics for ASD evaluations. While the private option is usually faster, it can also be costly for the parents.⁸

How to find private clinics in Quebec?

Many families explore private options for an autism evaluation because wait times in the public system can be very long. Here are some ways to find a private clinic:

- **Autisme Québec** and **Autisme Montréal** websites – Both provide resource lists and guidance on diagnostic services.
- Professional orders – The **Ordre des psychologues du Québec** and the **Collège des médecins du Québec** have directories where you can search for licensed psychologists or doctors who provide ASD evaluations.
- Word of mouth – Other parents, schools, or community organizations often share recommendations.
- Online search – Many private multidisciplinary clinics (psychology, speech therapy, occupational therapy) advertise ASD assessment services.



Tip for parents: If you choose a private evaluator, make sure they **specialize in autism** and ask which **diagnostic tools** they use to ensure reliability.



Some Private Clinics that are Covered by RAMQ

Below is a list of private clinics that offer ASD evaluations for children covered by RAMQ. Please note that a referral from a physician is required for all of them:



AUTISM MD

Offers ASD evaluations for all ages, provided by psychiatrists.



CLINIQUE D'ÉVALUATION DE L'AUTISME DE MONTRÉAL (CÉVAM)

Offers ASD evaluations for children from 30 months to 12 years of age, provided by psychiatrists or pedopsychiatrists.



BLOOM CLINIC

Offers evaluations for ages 0–17-year-old.



CLINIQUE CHERRIER (MONTREAL)

Dr. Rogerio Rossi offers ASD assessments for children and adults.



LA CITE MÉDICALE

CLINIQUE DULUTH



Important note for **parents**: In many cases, you will need a medical reference (referral) from your pediatrician or family doctor. What the referral must include:



- **Child's information**
 - Full name
 - Medicare (RAMQ) number
 - Date of birth
- **Reason for referral**
 - The referral must clearly state: "Psychiatric Assessment for ASD"
- **Clinical details**
 - Family, medical, developmental history, screening/assessment results (if available), interventions received (if any)
- **Description of major clinical signs suggestive of ASD**
 - Relevant significant medical or developmental history
- **Physician's details**
 - Full, legible name of the physician
 - Signature
 - License number



Documents to Prepare for the Diagnosis Appointment

Medical history and vaccination record

Daycare or school reports

Developmental history (milestones, concerns, regressions).

If available, past evaluations by speech therapists, occupational therapists, or psychologists

Videos or examples of behaviours of concern





While Waiting for a Formal Evaluation

Even before receiving an official diagnosis, there are many things you can do to support your child and family:

Access local services: Contact your CLSC to ask about early intervention programs such as Agir tôt or other services available in your area.

Consider community or private options (may be quicker, but often involve costs)

Build your knowledge and support network:

- Join parent support groups or attend workshops to learn practical strategies you can use right away.
- Explore free online resources such as Help Is In Your Hands or 2-Minutes to talk about Autism.



After Receiving the Diagnosis, How Can I Get Services?

Now that your child has a diagnosis, what comes next? Receiving a diagnosis can bring many emotions – relief, worry, hope, uncertainty. Give yourself the space to feel and process them. Remember, the diagnosis does not define your child; it is a tool to better understand their needs and strengths.

Ask the diagnosing professional for a written report, recommendations, and a clear plan for follow-up. Keep all reports and medical notes in one safe place – such as a dedicated binder – as you will need them for services, school supports, and funding applications. Consider scanning all documents and keeping them in a secured, online folder to allow for easy copies or sharing with professionals.



1. Contact Your CLSC

In Quebec, your **CLSC** is the entry point for public autism services. A diagnosis of ASD makes your child eligible for specialized rehabilitation services through the **Centre de Réadaptation en Déficience Intellectuelle et Trouble du Spectre de l'Autisme (CRDI)**.

To access these services, contact your CLSC's **Psychosocial Intake Service** or **call 811 - Option 2** and ask to have your child placed on the waiting list. While waiting for CRDI services, it is also beneficial for your child and family to receive support from the **Déficience intellectuelle – Trouble du spectre de l'autisme - Deficience Physique Enfance (DI-TSA-DPE)** program at the CLSC.

These services can help with communication, behaviour, daily living skills, and family support. You can request enrollment in this program through the same CLSC access point.⁹

CRDI/DI-TSA-DPE Services by Age Group

0–5 years:

Access to the readaptation services (e.g., occupational therapy, parental coaching, speech language pathology) and/or intensive behavior intervention – up to 20 hours/week.

All ages:

Families are eligible for psychosocial support at any age, including assistance from a social worker or caseworker to help navigate services, school communication, and financial supports.

5 years and older:

Ongoing follow-up with an educator who provides strategies to support learning and behaviour at home. Frequency varies (weekly, monthly, or as needed). The responsibility for the child's daily services generally shifts to the Ministère de l'Éducation and the school board/service centre (e.g., technician or shadow support, Individualized Education Plan (IEP) etc.).



2. Inform the daycare or school

Once your child has an official diagnosis, you will need to share it with the daycare (CPE, private, or home-based) or school (public or private).

Providing documentation of the diagnosis allows the institution to apply for the funding and resources your child is entitled to.

Your child's daycare or school team is an important partner in their development, so it's a good idea to set up a meeting soon after the diagnosis to discuss the situation and plan the best supports moving forward.¹⁰



3. Contact Office des personnes handicapées du Québec (OPHQ)

The **OPHQ** provides free support services for people with disabilities and their families to help them navigate the service-access process. Parents can request that an **agent** be assigned to guide their child and family through the steps.¹⁰

Office des personnes
handicapées

Québec



aide@ophq.gouv.qc.ca



1-800-567-1465

4. Contact a social worker

A social worker can support you navigating the services, help filling out the necessary forms (financial assistance, respite, subsidies), provide emotional support and counselling for caregivers.

If you do not have a social worker, contact your CLSC and ask to be assigned.

5. Learn about financial supports

Explore programs such as the **Child Disability Benefit, Disability Tax Credit**, and the **Supplement for a Disabled Child**, which can help reduce financial stress. You can check **Navigating Financial Supports for Families in Quebec** at AIDE Canada's website.



Note: Wait times for CRDI services are often 12+ months. Many families choose to use private services while waiting.



Other Public & Community Services

- **CLSC-based interventions**

Some CLSCs offer basic developmental support or can connect families with community resources.⁵

- **Réseau d'intervention précoce**

In certain regions, this program provides early intervention for preschool-aged children.

- **Community organizations**

Many local groups run social skills programs, parent support, or adapted recreational activities for Autistic children.

Private Services

Consider private therapy options to address immediate needs.

When choosing a provider:

- Verify their qualifications and experience with autism.
- Ask about approach, cost, insurance coverage, and whether they provide written progress reports.

You can also consult [AIDE Canada's clinic supports directory](#) to explore different clinical support options and find the ones that best meet your child's and family's needs.



Important to consider

Private services can be an important complement to public services, especially while waiting for support. However, they can also represent a significant financial cost.

Families are encouraged to explore available financial supports, subsidies, and tax credits that may help offset these expenses. For guidance, refer to **Navigating Financial Supports for Families in Québec – A Toolkit for Families with Children 0–18 years old**, available on AIDE Canada's website.



Practical Tips for Parents

Keep a binder or digital folder with all reports, forms, and correspondence (see Advocacy section for organization tips).



Always ask for written confirmation when you are added to a waiting list.



Update your CLSC or Access Desk if your child's needs change – it can sometimes affect priority.





Advocacy & Navigating the System

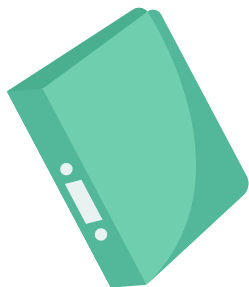
Navigating Quebec's health, education, and social service systems can be complex. Knowing how to advocate for your child and stay organized will help you access services more efficiently and ensure your child gets the support they need.





Advocacy & Navigating the System

1. Keep Detailed Records

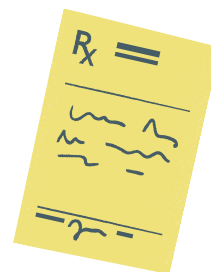


- Create a binder or digital folder for all documents, organized by category:
 - Medical reports & diagnoses
 - Therapy and school reports
 - Correspondence with professionals
 - Financial assistance forms & receipts

Tip: Use a contact log to track who you spoke with, what was discussed, and next steps.

2. Get Written Confirmation

- Always ask for written confirmation when:
 - You are placed on a waiting list
 - A service request is submitted
 - An application is approved or denied
- Written documentation helps prevent misunderstandings and confirms timelines.



3. Follow-up regularly



- Wait times can be long – checking in monthly helps keep your case active. Ask if you can be added to a **cancellation list** in case an appointment opens up at the last minute. The squeaky wheel gets the grease!
- When following up:
 - Reference your child's **file number** if available.
 - Share any **new information or changes** in your child's needs that may affect prioritization.

4. Understand Your Rights

- In Quebec, you have the right to:
 - Access early intervention services through your CLSC/CRDI after a confirmed diagnosis.
 - Be involved in your child's care plan and informed about services offered.
 - Receive clear explanations about decisions made regarding your child's eligibility for services or programs.
- For school-aged children, parents have the right to participate in the creation of their child's **Individualized Education Plan (IEP)** and to request meetings to review it.





Tips for Effective Advocacy

1 Be polite, clear, and persistent.



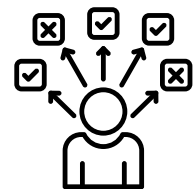
2 Prepare questions in advance for appointments or meetings.



3 Bring a trusted person to important meetings to help take notes and provide support.



4 If a request is denied, ask for the reason in writing and inquire about alternative options or next steps.



Use Psychosocial Support as Part of Advocacy

Advocacy is not something families need to do alone.

- Social workers or psychosocial professionals can:
 - Help families navigate the system and coordinate services
 - Support communication with schools and other partners
 - Assist with access to financial supports, camps, and adapted activities
 - Help reassess priorities if a child's situation changes
- Families have the right to request a change of professional if collaboration is not working.

Conclusion

Raising a child with autism brings unique joys and challenges, and you are not alone in this journey. Québec offers a range of programs, services, and supports, but accessing them often requires time, persistence, and advocacy, especially in a system where many services have long waiting lists and limited availability.

Remember to:

- Keep clear records of documents, forms, and communications
- Follow up regularly on service requests and waiting lists
- Be proactive in sharing changes in your child's needs and how they affect daily family life
- Make use of psychosocial support, such as social workers or caseworkers, to help navigate services, communicate with schools, and access available supports
- Connect with community organizations and other families for shared knowledge and support
- Start early when planning transitions, whether entering school or preparing for adulthood

Every family's path is different, and progress may not always be immediate. However, taking action early, staying organized, and seeking support can make a meaningful difference over time.

You are your child's strongest advocate — and this toolkit is designed to support you, inform you, and walk alongside you at every step of the way.

Additional Resources

- <https://aidecanada.ca/resources/learn/asd-id-core-knowledge/how-to-tell-a-child-about-their-diagnosis>
- <https://aidecanada.ca/resources/learn/asd-id-core-knowledge/helpful-resources-from-aide-canada-library-for-parents-of-autistic-children>
- <https://aidecanada.ca/resources/learn/asd-id-core-knowledge/popular-autism-clinical-supports>
- <https://aidecanada.ca/resources/learn/asd-id-core-knowledge/caring-for-the-caregivers-of-individuals-with-intellectual-and-or-developmental-disabilities#section-9.2>
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