



# Undivided's Roadmap for Parents:

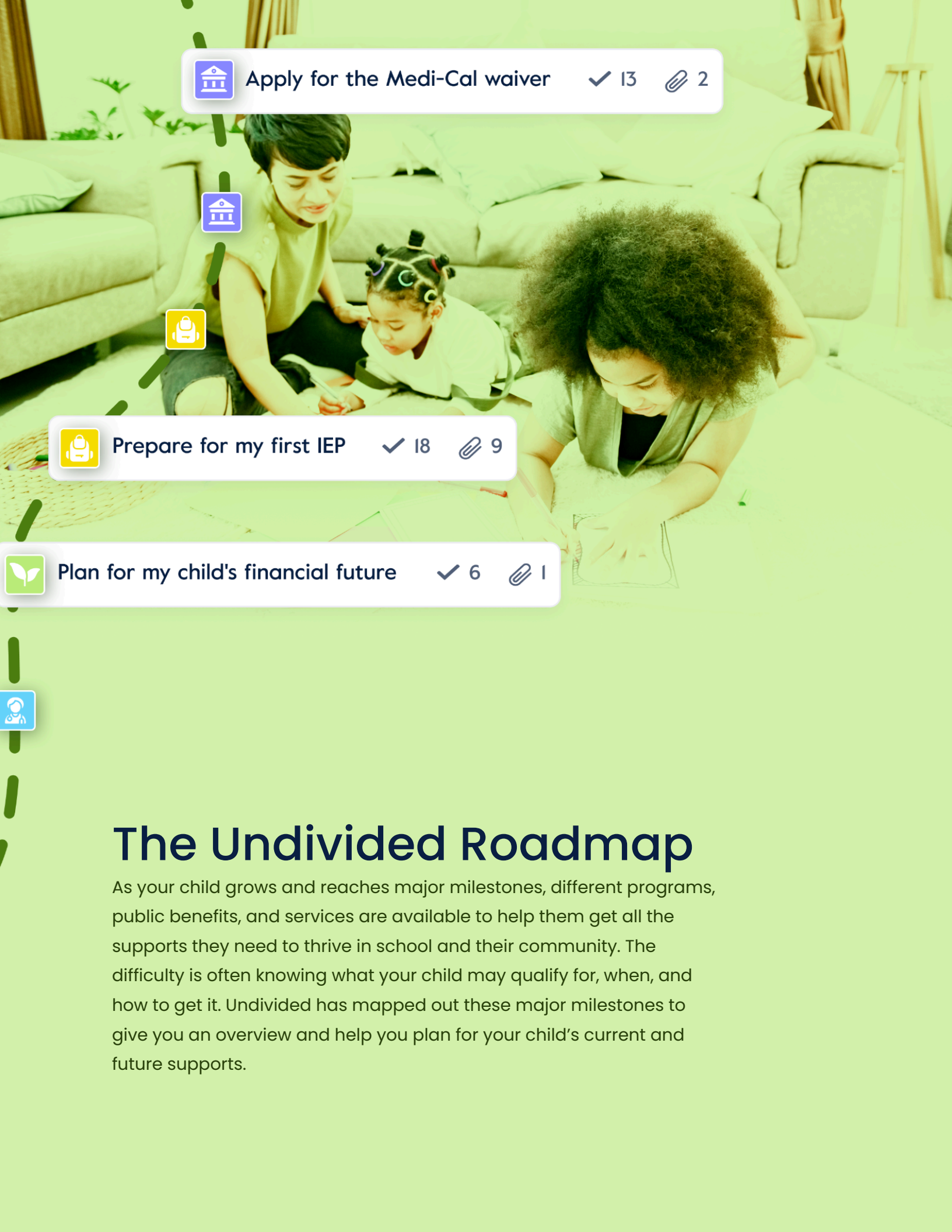
# Autism



# Introduction

Autism, sometimes referred to as autism spectrum disorder (ASD), is a developmental disability that can present in many different ways. This roadmap will help you get organized with tools and resources to make sure your child with autism has the supports and services in place that they need to thrive.

Introduction	2
The Undivided Roadmap	4
Getting a diagnosis	9
Enrolling in public benefits	12
Regional Center	14
CCS	15
Medi-Cal	15
IHSS	15
Social Security	15
Accessing educational support	17
IEPs for students with autism	18
Finding therapies and building your care team	21
Learning about advocacy and support	25
About Undivided	29



Apply for the Medi-Cal waiver

✓ 13



2



Prepare for my first IEP

✓ 18



9



Plan for my child's financial future

✓ 6



1



## The Undivided Roadmap





As your child grows and reaches major milestones, different programs, public benefits, and services are available to help them get all the supports they need to thrive in school and their community. The difficulty is often knowing what your child may qualify for, when, and how to get it. Undivided has mapped out these major milestones to give you an overview and help you plan for your child's current and future supports.



## Birth – Age 3

From birth to age 3, it's important to secure early intervention services for children who have a suspected developmental disability or delay. Statewide public benefits programs such as Regional Center can be a source of assessment services and therapies regardless of family income. Getting started early with public related benefits can significantly streamline access to key services.




### Recommended Undivided goals:

-  Apply to Regional Center Early Start [View goal](#)
-  Fund early intervention [View goal](#)
-  Apply for the Medi-Cal waiver [View goal](#)
-  Apply for IHSS [View goal](#)

## Age 3-4

At age 3, a child's school district becomes primarily responsible for providing therapeutic services for individuals who qualify for an Individualized Education Program (IEP). The process starts as early as preschool. For eligible children, public benefits programs can supplement insurance funding for medical services, therapies, and equipment.

### Recommended Undivided goals:




-  Request an educational assessment [View goal](#)
-  Prepare for my first IEP [View goal](#)
-  Optimize my public benefits [Get a free Kickstart to optimize your benefits](#)



## Age 5-11

The transition to elementary school is a big step. Parents should work closely with their IEP teams from year to year to develop IEPs that provide the accommodations, services, and other supports necessary for their children to thrive.




### Recommended Undivided goals:

-  Transition to elementary school [View goal](#)
-  Plan for my child's financial future [View goal](#)
-  Optimize educational supports [Get a free Kickstart to optimize your supports](#)

## Age 12-15

Transitioning to middle school and then high school involves supports to help children with disabilities continue developing their academic skills, social skills, and functional life skills. These supports can be provided by the school district, insurance, and public benefits programs. Some programs, have different evaluation criteria in the teen years for how much support a child needs compared to their typically developing peers, so it's possible to get respite or supervision hours increased.

### Recommended Undivided goals:

-  Prepare for my child's triennial IEP [View goal](#)
-  Review Regional Center specialized supervision hours [View goal](#)
-  Optimize public benefits [Get a free Kickstart to optimize your benefits](#)

## Age 16-17

Although planning for the transition to adulthood can begin as early as eighth grade, age 16 is when many government programs officially provide support. Parents should work with their IEP teams and their child to develop an Individual Transition Plan (ITP) that considers future education, work, and living arrangements. This is the time for parents to plan for their child becoming a legal adult at 18.

### Recommended Undivided goals:



Prepare my child for the transition to adulthood

[View goal](#)



Reassess therapy and team needs

[View goal](#)



Optimize care team

[Get a free Kickstart to optimize your team](#)

## Age 18-22

Many students with an IEP have up to age 22 to obtain a high school diploma, during which time they may also participate in adult transition programs from the school district or Regional Center. Many government benefits programs have different eligibility criteria for minors than for individuals 18 and above, so young adults can see if they qualify for public medical insurance, food assistance, Social Security, and more.

### Recommended Undivided goals:



Transition from school district services to Regional Center

[View goal](#)



Apply for Supplemental Security Income (SSI)

[View goal](#)



Apply for the Medi-Cal waiver

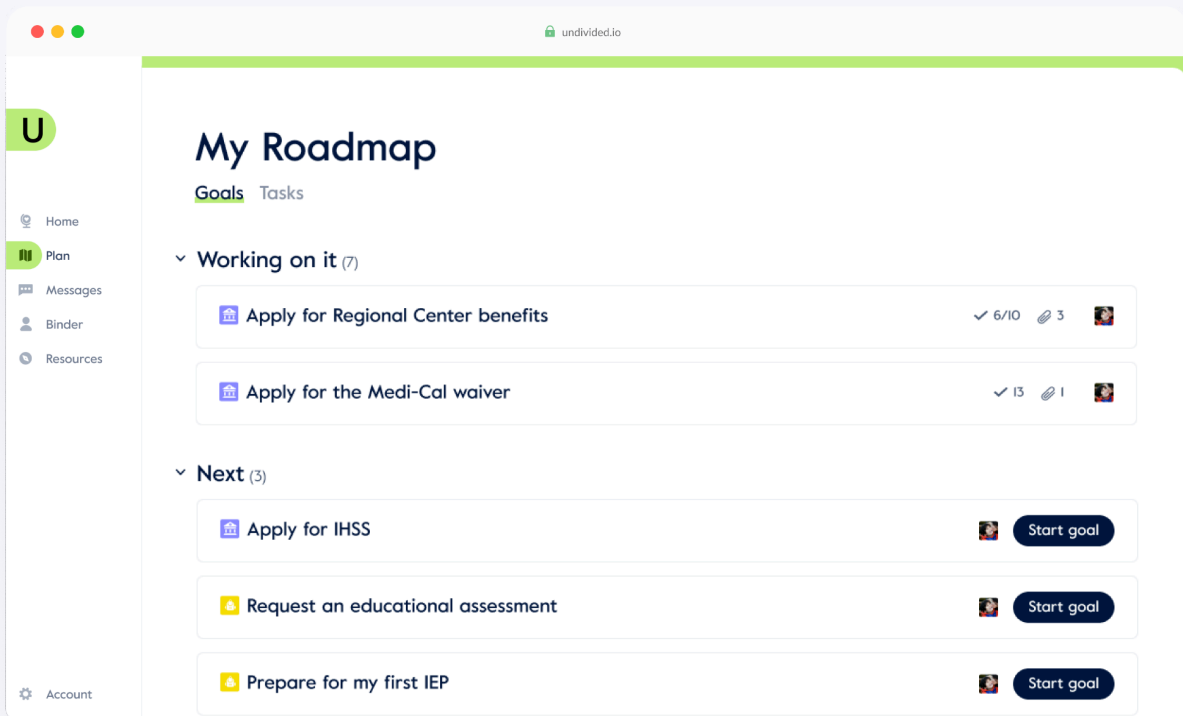
[View goal](#)



Optimize my child's financial future

[Get a free Kickstart](#)

Get your custom Undivided Roadmap today!



Get a digital version of this roadmap with step-by-step guides to accomplishing all these goals in the Undivided app. Sign up at [www.undivided.io/app/join](http://www.undivided.io/app/join).







Obtain a Diagnosis

✓ 5

📎 3



Determine if my child qualifies for Early Intervention

✓ 9

📎 7



Request an educational assessment

✓ 6

📎 1

## Getting a diagnosis

If your child has already been medically diagnosed with autism, it can still be helpful for you to review this information. Note that a diagnosis from a doctor is different from a determination of eligibility for special education services at school. A medical diagnosis may be necessary to secure services and therapies for your child that will be covered by insurance.

According to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5)'s [diagnostic criteria](#), a child with autism will have deficits in social communication and interaction as well as restricted, repetitive behaviors. While these criteria help provide a diagnosis, it does not mean that autism will look the same for each child. In fact, every child diagnosed with autism is different. One child with deficits in social awareness may struggle to reach out to their peers to initiate new connections, while another child may be very interested in meeting new people but struggle with impulse control or have social anxiety. Common [signs and symptoms of autism](#) include:

- Difficulty with social communication and interaction
  - Appearing not to listen or engage with others
  - Infrequently showing or sharing interest
  - Being slow to respond to one's name
  - Having difficulty with reciprocal communication (including talking at length on a subject regardless of others' interest)
  - Responding with emotions, gestures, behaviors, or movements that are socially unexpected
  - Having difficulty understanding or predicting another person's point of view
  - Having difficulty making friends
- Restrictive or repetitive behaviors
  - Engaging in repetitive behaviors (such as stimming) or words or phrases (echolalia)
  - Fixating on subjects of interest, or having long-standing interests in specific objects, details, or facts
  - Having difficulty adjusting to changes in routine
  - Being sensitive to sensory information such as light, sound, clothing, textures, or temperature

Autism has also been described as a condition of "[context blindness](#)," which can be helpful for parents to consider as they support their children.

Common strengths of individuals with autism include:

- Ability to learn and remember detailed information

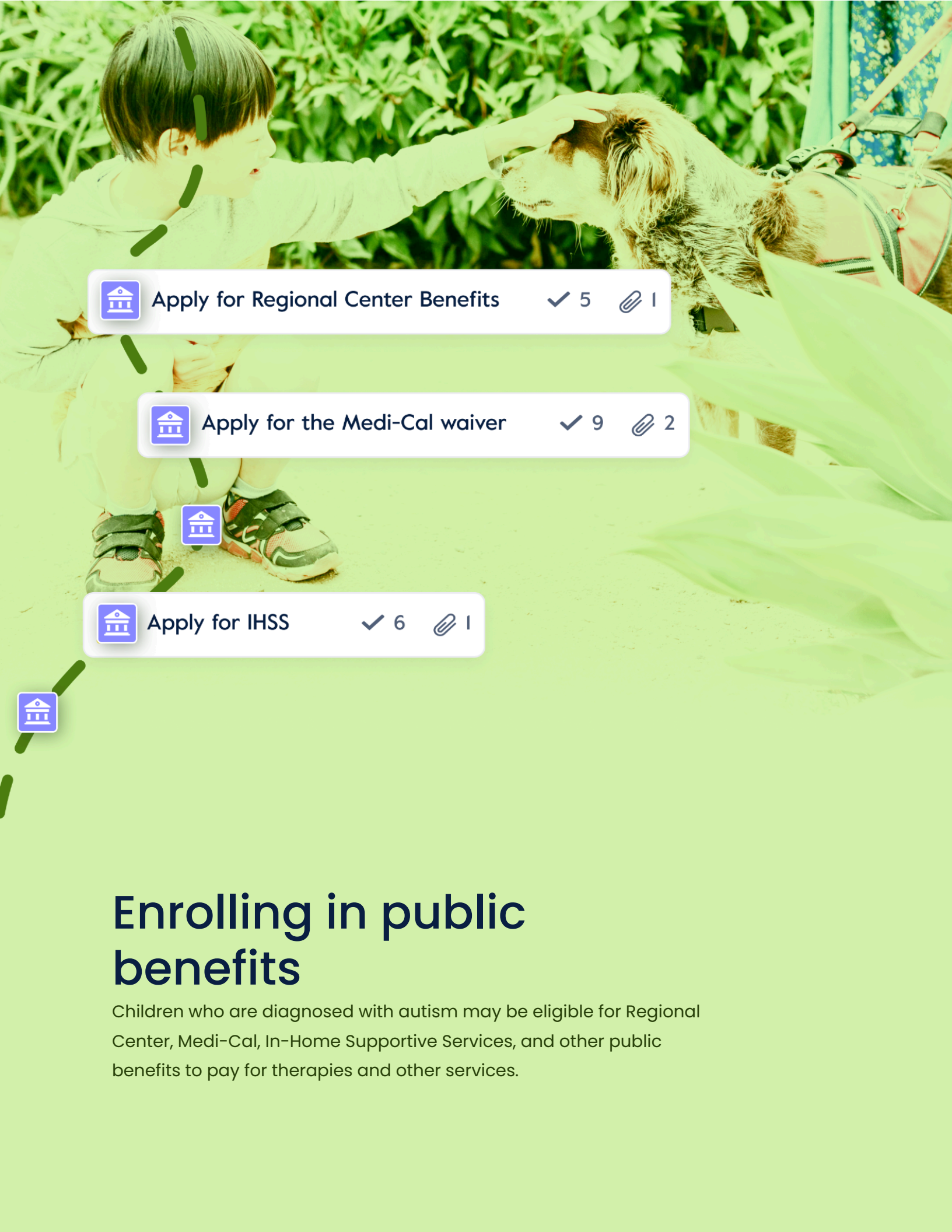
- Strong visual and auditory learning skills
- Strong skills in math, science, music, or art

You can ask your child to be assessed by a specialist such as a developmental pediatrician, child psychologist, pediatric neuropsychologist, or pediatric neurologist. You can find a specialist through your child's pediatrician, a school psychologist, or your insurance plan. An [autism support group](#) can also be a great source for local referrals. Some children with autism are eligible for assessment from [Regional Center](#). Your pediatrician can refer you, or you can refer yourself by [finding your local Regional Center](#).

To learn more about diagnostic criteria and how autism is diagnosed, read our article [Diagnosing Autism](#). You may also be interested in our article about how [autism presents differently in girls](#) than in boys, resulting in girls being misdiagnosed more often.

Studies show that between [30% and 50%](#) of autistic individuals present with ADHD symptoms as well. If your child also has ADHD or another co-occurring diagnosis, which is common, see our article [Autism and Co-Occurring Diagnoses](#).





Apply for Regional Center Benefits

✓ 5



1



Apply for the Medi-Cal waiver

✓ 9



2



Apply for IHSS

✓ 6



1



## Enrolling in public benefits

Children who are diagnosed with autism may be eligible for Regional Center, Medi-Cal, In-Home Supportive Services, and other public benefits to pay for therapies and other services.

**What resources should you see if your child is eligible for after receiving a new diagnosis of a developmental delay?**

<b>Program</b>	<b>Age 0-3</b>	<b>Age 3+</b>
Early Start	✓	
California Children’s Services	✓	✓
Regional Center	✓	✓
Medi-Cal	✓	✓
In-Home Supportive Services (IHSS)	✓	✓
Individual Education Program (IEP) or 504 Plan		✓

# Regional Center

Whether your child has an official autism diagnosis or not, finding your local Regional Center should be your first step. [Regional Centers](#) are a statewide network of local agencies tasked with serving children and adults with developmental disabilities as defined by California law. Clients are assigned to their local Regional Center by zip code. Each Regional Center operates independently, so services offered (as well as eligibility criteria for specific services) may vary slightly, but here are some of the most common services that children with autism receive:

- Specialized supervision
- Respite for parents
- Social skills classes
- Social-recreational program funding
- Funding to cover gaps in services/equipment denied by insurance

Each Regional Center provides a list of the services it will fund in a document on their website, which is usually called “Service Standards” or “Purchase of Service Standards.”

**Before age 3**, a formal diagnosis is not necessary to be eligible for [early intervention therapies from Regional Center](#) (also called Early Start) as long as the child is showing delays in certain developmental areas.

**After age 3**, Regional Center eligibility requires both a formal diagnosis and significant functional limitations in at least three of the following areas: self-care, receptive and expressive language, learning, mobility, self-direction, and capacity for independent living and economic self-sufficiency (as appropriate based on the child’s age).

For tips on applying, see our article [How to Get Started with Regional Center](#).



## CCS

[California Children's Services](#) funds services for children with certain significant medical disabilities. Eligibility is diagnosis-specific and income-based. CCS may be an avenue of assistance for children with significant medical needs who are not Regional Center clients.

## Medi-Cal

[Medi-Cal](#) is California's Medicaid program. Eligibility for Medi-Cal is usually based on household income. However, children who have developmental disabilities and are Regional Center clients may be eligible for a special [waiver program](#) that extends full Medi-Cal coverage to children with certain significant disabilities without regard to family income. Medi-Cal will always be [secondary coverage](#) for children with private primary insurance, but it can help fill some of the funding gaps by covering coinsurance payments and other out-of-pocket expenses when your child sees Medi-Cal-contracted providers. Medi-Cal may also fund medical supplies (such as diapers and g-tube formula) and durable medical equipment.

## IHSS

[In-Home Supportive Services \(IHSS\)](#) are personal care and related services that Medi-Cal may fund so that people with disabilities can remain safely in their homes. Children with disabilities may be eligible for IHSS to the extent that their disability-related care needs exceed those of a typically developing child of the same age. In addition, a parent may be eligible to be paid as an IHSS provider for their child.

## Social Security

The [Social Security Administration \(SSA\)](#) offers cash benefits for some children with disabilities. If a child's parent or legal guardian is receiving Social Security retirement or disability benefits, or if the parent or guardian has passed away and has sufficient work history under SSA rules, all children in the home may be eligible for dependent or survivor benefits. For children with disabilities, that benefit may continue into adulthood if the person with a disability remains eligible. Children with disabilities

who receive long-term dependent or survivor benefits are eligible for Medicare after 24 months of receiving benefits.

[Supplemental Security Income \(SSI\)](#) is a need-based cash benefit for children and adults with disabilities who have very low household income and/or insufficient work history to qualify for retirement or disability insurance benefits. SSI may also be available to children who reside in institutions (e.g. a child undergoing a months-long hospitalization). A person who receives SSI is automatically eligible for Medi-Cal.



Looking for a step-by-step guide to applying for Regional Center, Medi-Cal, IHSS, or another program? Get started at [www.undivided.io/app/join](http://www.undivided.io/app/join).



Request an educational assessment

✓ 5



1



Prepare for my first IEP

✓ 15



9



Transition to elementary school

✓ 14



7

## Accessing educational support

If your child is over age 3, your school district is responsible for providing services that help your child access a free, appropriate education. If you haven't already, request that your child be evaluated for special education services through an [Individualized Education Program \(IEP\)](#). Of the [13 eligibility categories](#) that qualify a child for an IEP, autism falls into the classification of "Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)." If your child is not found eligible for an IEP, you may still be able to request accommodations and services through a [504 plan](#).

## IEPs for students with autism

The IEP process will begin with [assessments](#) of your child's needs. Then, you will work with your child's teacher(s) and other education professionals to develop [accommodations](#) and/or [services](#) that help address the barriers to learning that result from your child's disability.

Many students who qualify for special education under autism eligibility may benefit from the following services:

- [Speech and language services](#) to support deficits in receptive and/or expressive language, articulation, and social pragmatic language. If a student requires the use of [Alternative and Augmentative Communication \(AAC\)](#), ensure that the AAC provider is listed on the services page of the IEP, at the very least to provide annual consult/training to any direct staff who may support your child throughout the year.
- [Occupational therapy](#) to support deficits in fine motor skills and sensory differences.
- Social skills to facilitate and supplement social interaction and social language development. Make sure the student is getting social time with both general education peers and SpEd peers.
- Adaptive PE if the student struggles with motor coordination and/or motor planning. Group APE is great for social skills as well.
- Recreational therapy to support the student's development of recreational skills.
- [Assistive technology](#) supports and consultation if the student struggles with access to their curriculum and may benefit from tech tools to support reading, writing, math, etc.
- Behavior intervention services to oversee the implementation of any behavior goals and/or the behavior intervention plan.

## The most common accommodations that help students with autism achieve academic success

- ✓ Allowing noise-canceling headphones
- ✓ Providing visual supports (schedules, first-then strips, checklists, visual models/directives)
- ✓ Limiting language when presenting directives (being concise and to the point)
- ✓ Embedding [motivation](#)
- ✓ Using [reinforcement](#)
- ✓ Priming
- ✓ Pairing verbal directives with visuals (modeling, written directives, etc.)
- ✓ Using [visual schedules](#) (picture-based, words)
- ✓ Building on behavior momentum
- ✓ Modeling and using [Social Stories](#)
- ✓ Incorporating mindfulness regarding sensory needs and embedding sensory strategies
- ✓ Providing social facilitation and social pragmatic supports
- ✓ Providing support for [executive functioning](#) needs such as organization systems and limiting distractors in the classroom (e.g., posters on the walls)
- ✓ Providing assistive technology supports and tools for access to instruction (low tech and high tech – for ideas, see [IEP Assistive Technology Tools to Empower Students with Disabilities](#))
- ✓ Allowing the use of fidgets
- ✓ Allowing flexible seating options (standing, wobble chair/stool, rocker, etc.)
- ✓ Providing a calming corner and/or sensory room access
- ✓ Scheduling movement breaks and allowing for more opportunities to move around throughout the school day
- ✓ Allowing extended processing time (specify number of seconds)
- ✓ Allowing extended time on tests/quizzes/assignments
- ✓ Chunking assignments
- ✓ Giving options to respond in a variety of ways
- ✓ Providing supports such as sentence and paragraph frames, an editing checklist, a transition word list, or a math operations word list



See our article [Getting a Child with Autism the School Supports They Need](#) for more examples of services/equipment/accommodations that may be beneficial for a child with autism plus other resources where you can learn more.

## Tips for writing IEPs to support students with autism

### RELATED SERVICES AND GOALS

- Remember: Goals drive services. To receive a service, it must be attached to service provider and an IEP goal.
- The more goals there are in any given area, the more service minutes your child will need to meet those goals.
- Make sure you add the service minutes that the district's BCBA or Behavior Specialist will need to train teachers and aides.
- The more related service minutes your child has, the more classroom instruction time they will miss. Discuss the risks and benefits with your IEP team.

### ACCOMMODATIONS AND ASSISTIVE TECH

- If your child uses AAC, list the AAC provider who will provide staff training and consult throughout the year.
- If there are specific tools and accommodations your child needs in order to achieve a goal, write those into the goal to hold the school team accountable and make sure your child has access when they need them.
- Remember: Anything that has to be purchased or made for a student qualifies as Assistive Technology, both high tech and low tech.



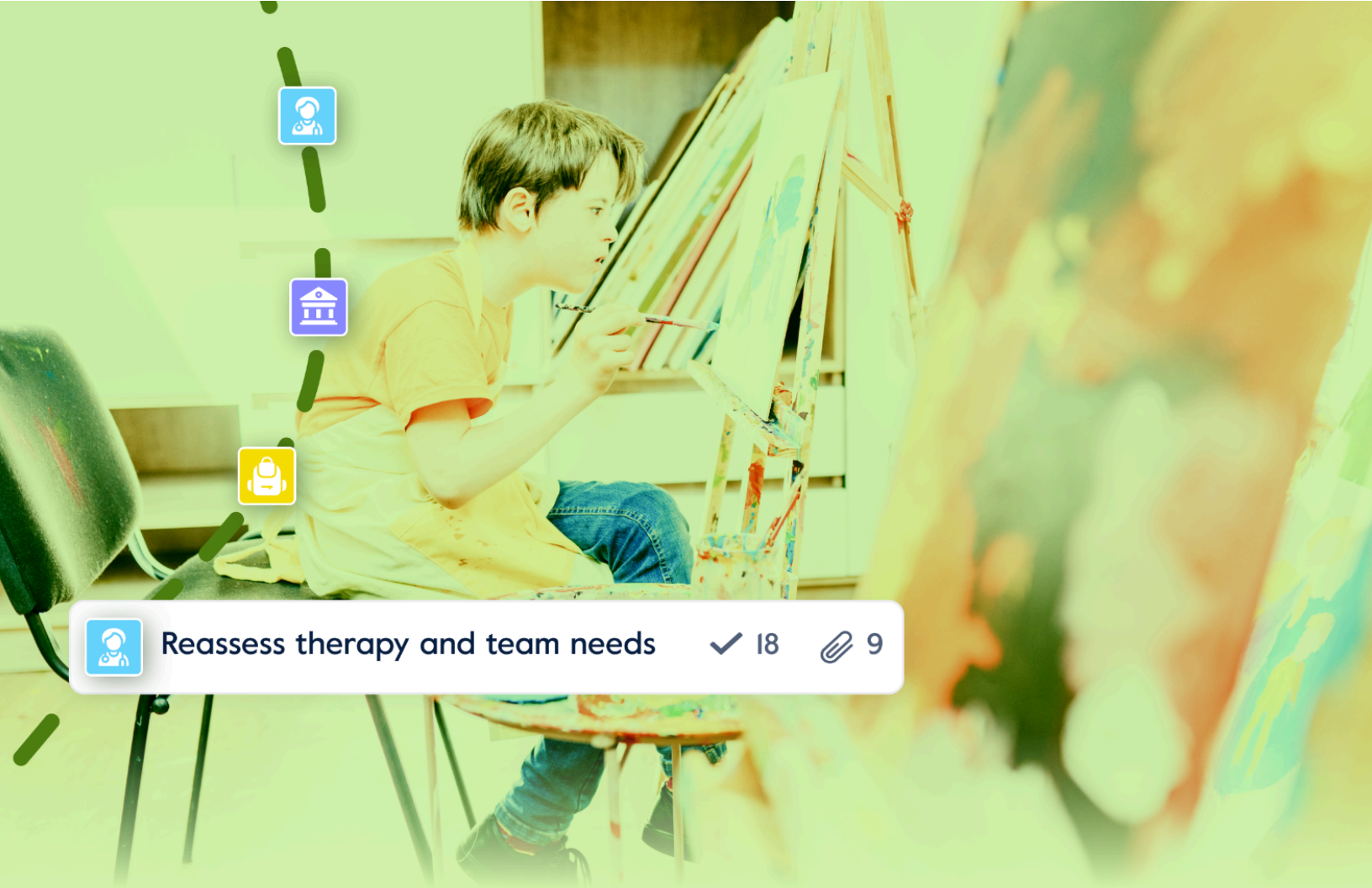
Make sure your child is getting time with both general education peers and SpEd peers for social skills.

[www.undivided.io](http://www.undivided.io)





Undivided provides 1:1 support and step-by-step guides to help with your child's IEP. Get started at [www.undivided.io/app/join](http://www.undivided.io/app/join).



Reassess therapy and team needs

✓ 18

📎 9

## Finding therapies and building your care team

The specialist who diagnoses your child may help you build a treatment plan, or they may refer you to other professionals for therapies and services. Depending on your child's support needs, they may be referred for clinic-based and/or school-based services.

To learn more about finding and coordinating services from specialists such as a psychologist, neurologist, or behavioral therapist, see our article [How to Build a Care Team](#).

Treatment for every child with an autism diagnosis will look different depending on their needs, but one of the most common interventions is behavior therapy.

[Behavioral intervention therapies](#) involve a wide variety of acronyms: ABA, FBA, PBIS, and more. These different therapies help kids build communication and self-regulation skills at school, at home, and in their communities. Tailored to the individual, behavioral therapy addresses the distinct ways autism manifests in individuals.

### [Applied Behavior Analysis \(ABA\)](#)

A type of therapy most often used to support individuals with autism that seeks to improve or teach specific behaviors in areas such as social skills, communication, self-care, and academics.

### [DIR Floortime](#)

A play-based therapy that seeks to help your child progress through creativity and connection. It is a child-led but still targeted approach where all or most of the child's senses will be engaged while using their emotional and motor skills.

### [Relationship Development Intervention \(RDI\)](#)

Guides parents of children with autism and primary caregivers to adopt new perspectives and behaviors, aiding them in effectively using their time to improve their child's mental development.

### [Play Therapy](#)

A form of therapy that employs play activities to assist children in expressing emotions, enhancing communication, and working through various challenges. Particularly beneficial for children with autism who may engage in solitary play and repetitive actions, this therapy encourages sharing, exploring their environment, taking turns, and interacting with peers.

## [Cognitive Behavioral Therapy \(CBT\)](#)

A psychological treatment that helps improve emotional regulation to protect against irrational fears or behaviors due to anxiety, depression, obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD), oppositional defiant disorder (ODD), Autism and other diagnoses.

## [Dialectical Behavior Therapy \(DBT\)](#)

An approach that combines cognitive-behavioral techniques with mindfulness strategies, emphasizing the development of skills for emotional regulation, improving social interactions, handling distress and more.

There are other therapies that are often recommended for individuals with autism.

## [Occupational Therapy\(OT\):](#)

Encompasses a wide range of treatments and interventions for both physical and neurological disabilities that might interrupt a child's ability to go about their daily life. Particularly beneficial for children with autism, OT targets areas such as fine motor skills, visual motor skills, executive functioning, motor planning, self-care, sensory processing skills and more.

## [Physical Therapy \(PT\)](#)

Uses prescribed exercises and hands-on care to treat a range of injuries, disabilities, and other conditions that affect a child's ability to learn and use the large muscles (arms, legs, and torso) in their body – otherwise known as gross motor skills.

## [Educational Therapy](#)

A professional combines educational and therapeutic approaches for evaluation, individualized intervention, case management, and advocacy on behalf of children and adults with learning disabilities or other learning challenges.

## [Speech-Language Pathology](#)

Treats communication difficulties and disorders such as oral motor dysfunction, fluency, speech sounds related to apraxia or dysarthria, and communication issues.

## [Social skills training](#)

Therapy centers and hospitals host social skills groups for many age brackets, from younger children well into the teen years. Programs for younger children are often based on experiential play, where they can put communication, problem solving, decision making, and peer relations into practice. These programs can be helpful for children and teens with autism or other developmental disorders that can make socializing with same-age peers a struggle.

You can read more about various approaches in our list of [Autism Therapies and Specialists](#).

It's important to communicate with your child's clinic-based and/or school-based therapists and teachers about how to support their skill-building at home. [Executive functioning](#) support can be helpful for autism, which is provided by some [educational therapists](#). You may also want to talk to an occupational therapist about implementing a [sensory diet](#) at home.





Get find support

✓ 5

📎 0

## Learning about advocacy and support

Be sure to talk to your child about their disability. Understanding how their brain works and the potential benefits that come with having autism can help empower them and develop their advocacy skills.

You deserve support just as much as your child. The following resources and organizations are a great place to find information and community.

### [AutismOne](#)

“AutismOne is a nonprofit organization dedicated to all that is autism. AutismOne is here to support a parent when you are searching questions about autism, medicine, nutrition, schooling, social skills, recreation, and more. AutismOne has access to a variety of resources to connect you with, whether they are doctors, specialists, or parents, who have successfully experienced improvements. Or AutismOne can simply listen. We are all in this together.”

### [National Autism Association](#)

“The mission of the National Autism Association is to respond to the most urgent needs of the autism community, providing real help and hope so that all affected can reach their full potential.”

### [Autism Society of America](#)

“The Autism Society of America has been improving the lives of all affected by autism for over 50 years and envisions a world where individuals and families living with autism are able to maximize their quality of life, are treated with the highest level of dignity, and live in a society in which their talents and skills are appreciated and valued. We provide advocacy, education, information and referral, support, and community at national, state and local levels through our strong nationwide network of affiliates.”

### [Autism Research Institute:](#)

The Autism Research Institute “supports the health and well-being of people affected by autism through innovative, impactful research and education.”

### [Autistic Self Advocacy Network](#)

“The Autistic Self Advocacy Network seeks to advance the principles of the disability rights movement with regard to autism. ASAN believes that the goal of autism advocacy should be a world in which autistic people enjoy equal access, rights, and opportunities. We work to empower autistic people across the world to take control of

our own lives and the future of our common community, and seek to organize the autistic community to ensure our voices are heard in the national conversation about us. Nothing About Us, Without Us!”

### **The Arc:**

The Arc’s mission is “promoting and protecting the human rights of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities and actively supporting their full inclusion and participation in the community throughout their lifetimes.”

### **Color of Autism**

Color of Autism is a non-profit organization committed to educating and assisting African American families with Autistic children. Their goal is to help families identify the warning signs of autism early on and start to overturn disparities by helping African-Americans with autism reach their full potential. They empower families with information on autism that they can use to advocate for services for their child.

If you’re a California resident, be sure to also check out these local groups:

### **Autism Society California**

The Autism Society of California works to connect all members of the autism community with support by “increasing public awareness about the day-to-day issues faced by people on the spectrum, advocating for appropriate services for individuals across the lifespan, and providing the latest information regarding treatment, education, research, support and advocacy.”

### **The Center for Autism and Neurodevelopmental Disorders**

This group works “to provide hope and help to children, teens, young adults, adolescents, and their families living with autism and other neurodevelopmental disorders through excellent clinical care, innovative research, quality education and training, and community engagement.”

### **Autism + Moms SoCal and Beyond**

This is an “online support group for parents and family members of children and other family members who have autism and other related disorders.”

## [LA FEAT](#)

“Families for Early Autism Treatment, Inc. (FEAT) is a non-profit organization of parents, family members, and treatment professionals, designed to help families with children of all ages who have autism. It offers a network of support where families can meet each other to discuss issues surrounding autism and treatment options. FEAT has a Board of Directors that meets monthly to discuss issues, establish priorities, and vote on the direction of the organization.”

## [California Autism Foundation](#)

“The mission of the California Autism Foundation is to provide people with autism and other developmental disabilities the best possible opportunities for lifetime support, training and assistance to help them reach their highest potential for independence, productivity and fulfillment.”

You can also connect with other parents of kids with autism in Undivided’s private Facebook group for parents, [Supporting Parents Raising Kids with Disabilities](#).

## About Undivided

Undivided is a parent-driven support system for families raising kids with disabilities. We provide an inclusive community, experienced parent coaches, and expert-backed resources, all organized on our innovative app, to help families get more for their children. Whether you need help accessing Regional Center services, developing an IEP, or finding funding resources for therapies, an Undivided Navigator can walk you through each step with expert-backed answers.



Get started at [www.undivided.io/app/join](https://www.undivided.io/app/join).