



State-funded early childhood services for young children with Autism Spectrum Disorder

State funded early childhood intervention services provide support to children with a disability or developmental delay, and their families, from birth to school entry. This includes children diagnosed with autism or Asperger syndrome. The aim of these services is to provide parents and families with the knowledge, skills and support to meet the needs of their child and to help their child develop to their full potential.

In metropolitan South Australia there are two main providers of specialist early childhood intervention services for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder: Autism SA and Community and Home Support SA – Disability Services. Autism SA provide early intervention services to children with autism or Asperger syndrome. Disability Services provide early intervention to children with significant global developmental delay, including children with autism.

Families of children diagnosed with autism are able to choose whether they receive their state funded services from Autism SA or Disability Services. *Families cannot receive specific early childhood intervention services from both agencies at one time.* If families commence with one agency but feel that the other service would better meet their needs, they can transfer their services but waiting times may apply.

The services offered by Disability Services are targeted to children with global developmental delay (including children with autism), in most circumstances children with a diagnosis of Asperger syndrome and high functioning autism will receive early childhood interventions services from Autism SA.

To assist families in making a decision, the services provided by each of the agencies are described below.

NB: The arrangements for children and families in country areas are different to those in the metropolitan area, please refer to information below.

Autism SA Early Development Program

Autism SA's Early Development Program is a multi-disciplinary team offering therapy and education services to clients with an Autism Spectrum Disorder in conjunction with their families. The team is made up of Consultant Teachers, Speech Pathologists, Occupational Therapists and Early Intervention Consultants.

Therapy sessions

Through Autism SA's multi-disciplinary team, a variety of short term therapy options are offered including individual therapy from an occupational therapist or speech pathologist.

Foundation skills group

The Foundation Skills Group, based at Salisbury East, focuses on the development of communication, social and play skills, as well as skills each child will need for preschool and school.

It is staffed by a multi-disciplinary team including speech pathologists, occupational therapists and education staff. Children attending this group are still eligible to attend regular preschool sessions through the Department of Education and Children's Services, Catholic Education or the private system.

Kindergarten to school transition

As well as therapy options, consultant teachers may assist children at home, at kindergarten and with the transition to school. The consultant teacher can provide programming ideas and recommendations to kindergartens to assist with the inclusion of children with ASD. Autism SA can also attend a child's Negotiated Education Plan meeting. The Transition Program assists in the transition from kindergarten to school.

Short-term consultations

In addition to therapy options, Autism SA offer a solution-focused, short-term consultation service to provide advice and practical strategies on topics such as toileting, behaviour and sleeping. Consultation may occur at home, kindy, child care or during the school transition process.

Small group programs

The small groups target a specific therapy focus. They may include:

- ▶ School skills preparation: "Getting Ready for School"
- ▶ Gross Motor: "Motor Magic" and Fine Motor: "Making Things is Fun"
- ▶ Early Play
- ▶ Sensory Motor and Social Skills: Music
- ▶ Social Skills: "Friends Group".

Family-focused training programs*

The family-focused training includes a range of topics for parents/carers including:

- ▶ Communication and the impact on behaviour
- ▶ Meal time issues
- ▶ Motor skills development and Sensory Motor
- ▶ Children's development and play
- ▶ Using PECS (Picture Exchange Communication System) with your child
- ▶ Visual strategies
- ▶ Independent living skills (sleeping, toileting, dressing)
- ▶ Behaviour management.

Playgroups*

The purpose of the playgroup is to provide an opportunity for children with an Autism Spectrum Disorder to play in a safe, developmentally appropriate environment. It is also an opportunity for parents to exchange ideas, information, and talk with other parents and Early Intervention Consultants. Playgroup is not a therapy group.

Playgroups welcome children diagnosed with an Autism Spectrum Disorder, their siblings and their families.

Parent Support Networks*

There are a number of family support groups in the metropolitan and country areas. Further information is available on the Autism SA website and through the Info Line.

**These services are available to all families, including clients of Disability Services.*

Disability Services Early Childhood Program

Disability Services Early Childhood Program is a interdisciplinary team offering a range of support services to children with global developmental delay or conditions associated with intellectual disability, including autism. The team provides information and strategies to support children's development in the following areas:

- ▶ Motor skills (eg sitting, crawling, walking, ball skills and balance)
- ▶ Self-help skills (eg dressing, toileting)
- ▶ Visual and hand skills
- ▶ Social skills, communication and play skills
- ▶ Eating and drinking skills
- ▶ Behaviour.

What support is available?

Services provided may include:

- ▶ Information about children's developmental difficulties and the effect that particular diagnostic conditions may have
- ▶ Developmental assessments and recommendations to promote your child's learning and development of functional skills or abilities
- ▶ A range of developmental groups.
- ▶ Assistance in accessing other services and community activities
- ▶ Family/carer education programs
- ▶ Family/carer information sessions
- ▶ Service coordination, family/carer support, and short -term counselling
- ▶ Opportunities to link with other families/carers
- ▶ Program support to staff working in childcare and preschool settings
- ▶ Support and planning for preschool and school transitions.

All young children learn through play and the therapists will use play to encourage children's development. The focus of all programs is to help families/carers carry out activities that will promote the child's development. The type of therapy and number of visits a family receives are determined by the needs of the child and family.

Group programs

A range of small group and parent education programs are provided. The availability of these programs varies across regions but may include: aquatic physiotherapy; play skills and communication; toilet training; addressing sleep difficulties; managing difficult behaviour and understanding preschoolers with autism.

Family/carer information sessions*

Sessions include: sibling support; transition to school; meal time issues and positive sleep practices.

**These sessions are available to all families, including clients of Autism SA.*

Country services

In country regions, early childhood allied health services are provided by regional community health services. Families can also access a visiting support services from Autism SA and are able to attend any of the programs available in the metropolitan area if they are able to travel to them. Disability Services also provide family support and specialist interventions for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder from service coordinators and senior developmental programmers.

Information Services

All information services are available to the general public. You can access information services even if you are not a client of Autism SA or Disability Services.

Autism SA Info Line

Provides non-clinical information about Autism Spectrum Disorder and refers internally to Autism SA staff and externally to other agencies and professionals. The Info Line is available 9am–4pm weekdays on 1300 288 476.

Disability Information Service

Provides information on disability issues and services provided by Disability Services. Available 9am–5pm weekdays on 1300 786 117.

Autism SA Resource Centre

The Autism SA Resource Centre has a range of books and videos on autism and Asperger syndrome, and subscribes to international journals. Staff are available to help you find information. The catalogue of resources is available on the Autism SA website. Autism SA publications are on display and are available for purchase.

Library and Information Service—Disability Collection

The Library and Information Service has a range of excellent resources for families/carers and children with disabilities. The friendly staff are happy to find resources for you and you can have a cuppa as you browse. For further information call 8266 8556 or email disability.library@dfc.sa.gov.au.

Autiser and Information Email Service

The Autiser includes updates of recent events, service delivery, innovations, upcoming training and good news stories. It is circulated via post or email three times per year. The Information Email is emailed each fortnight. It includes such information as services provided by Autism SA, information for families/carers on relevant press releases, training and research projects.

Further Information and Advice

Autism Advisor

Telephone: 1300 288 476
mstevens@autismsa.org.au

Autism SA—Early Development Program

Telephone: 8379 6976
admin@autismsa.org.au

Disability Information Service

Telephone 1300 786 117
Email: disabilityinfo@dfc.sa.gov.au

