The Support Shelf

Next Steps Roadmap

A plain-language map of what typically happens after a diagnosis and who to call first.

SHELF 2 · MAKE A PLAN

Made by a Registered Behavior Technician who works with autistic kids and their parents every day.

thesupportshelf.org

How to use this

Someone handed you a report and a list of words. This is the map of what usually happens next, in the order it usually happens, and the first phone calls to make.

Read page 2 once. Then make the calls on page 3, in order, over the next week or two. Every other page is for when you reach that stage. You do not need to understand the whole map to start.

This is about the process: who to call, which paperwork, what to write down, and the honest truth that most of it involves waiting. It does not answer medical questions. Those belong to your child's doctor.

START HERE IF

You have the report, or it is coming, and you haven't called anyone yet	Page 3
The pediatrician gave you referrals and you don't know what to do with them	Page 5
You are on a waitlist and nothing is happening	Page 6
Your child is in school, or starts soon	Page 6
A provider called and said "intake"	Page 7
You keep hearing words you don't know	Page 8

> **ABA is one path, not the path.** This map follows ABA closely because it has the most paperwork and the longest waits. Speech therapy, occupational therapy, a developmental pediatrician, and school services run on nearly the same steps: referral, insurance, waitlist, intake. Most families end up with a mix, and the mix changes as the child grows. Nothing here says which mix is right for your child. That is a conversation between you and your child's doctor.

The map

Eight stages, in the order most families meet them. The right column is how long each tends to take. Where it says "varies," that is the truth, not a dodge.

1
Diagnosis report in hand
The written report from the evaluation. It carries the diagnosis, a code insurance will ask for, and usually recommendations. Everything below needs a copy. Page 4

USUALLY TAKES
Varies. The written report can arrive weeks after the visit. Ask for the date.

2
Tell the pediatrician and ask for referrals
The pediatrician's office is the hub. They write referrals for ABA, speech, OT, and a developmental pediatrician. Insurance often wants those on file. Page 4

USUALLY TAKES
One visit or a phone call, then a few days for the paperwork to go out.

3
Insurance: what's covered, what needs authorization
One call to the number on your card: what is covered, who is in-network, and what needs approval before it starts. Page 5

USUALLY TAKES
About an hour on the phone. Approvals later take longer and vary by plan.

4
Get on waitlists (more than one)
Call several providers and get on each list. Being on a list is not a commitment. Page 6

USUALLY TAKES
Weeks to many months. Varies widely by area, insurance, and the hours you can do.

5
School: request an evaluation in writing, if school-age
An email or letter to the school asking for a special education evaluation. Keep a dated copy. Runs alongside stages 3 and 4. Page 6

USUALLY TAKES
Once you ask in writing, the school has deadlines set by law. Ask what they are.

6
Intake and assessment with whoever accepts you first
Paperwork, a long conversation about your child, then a BCBA or therapist spends time with your child and writes a plan. It goes to insurance. Page 7

USUALLY TAKES
Several appointments over a few weeks, then a wait for authorization.

7
Services begin
Sessions start, often with fewer hours than the plan says, then build. You meet the people who work with your child. Page 7

USUALLY TAKES
Starts slow by design. Ask what the first month is for.

8
Reassess every few months
The plan is reviewed, rewritten, and sent back to insurance on a schedule. What you notice at home feeds it. Page 7

USUALLY TAKES
Often tied to how long the authorization lasts. Ask for the date and put it on the calendar.

Stages 3, 4, and 5 run at once. That is normal. Page 9 keeps track of which ones are moving.

Who to call first

In this order. One call a day is a fine pace. Write the number down the first time, and write what they said before you hang up.

#	WHO	ASK FOR	PHONE	DATE	WHAT THEY SAID
1	**The clinic or doctor who did the evaluation**	"I need a copy of the written report. When will it be ready? Who do you suggest I call next?"			*report mailed 11/4, ask Dr. Okafor*
2	**Your pediatrician's office**	"My child was diagnosed. I'd like referrals for ABA, speech, and OT, and a developmental pediatrician if it fits. Please send me a copy of each."			
3	**Your insurance** (number on your card)	The questions on page 5. Get the reference number for the call.			
4	**Three ABA providers**, or whichever therapy comes first	"Are you taking new clients? Do you take my insurance? How do I get on your list today?"			
5	**A speech clinic and an OT clinic**	Same three questions. If the pediatrician's referral names a clinic, start there.			
6	**The school**, or the district special education office	"I want to request a special education evaluation in writing. Who do I send it to?"			
7	**A local Autism Society chapter** or parent group	"Which clinics near us actually have openings? What do you wish you'd known in the first month?"			

Under three? Ask the pediatrician about your state's early intervention program instead of the school. **In Texas:** ask about Medicaid waiver programs and their interest lists while you are on the phone. The waits are long, so get on now even with private insurance. Texas specifics: thesupportshelf.org/find-care.

The report, and the pediatrician

Stages 1 and 2. These two unlock everything else, and both are mostly about getting the right paper into your hands.

STAGE 1

Diagnosis report in hand

WHAT THIS IS

The written report from whoever evaluated your child. It names the diagnosis, includes a diagnosis code that insurance and providers will ask for, and usually lists recommendations. You will be asked for a copy at almost every stage below, so get three.

WHO TO CALL

The clinic or doctor who did the evaluation. Ask for the report, a date if it isn't ready, and a copy sent to your pediatrician too.

HAVE READY

- [ ] The date of the evaluation and who did it
- [ ] An email address or mailing address for the copy
- [ ] A folder. This is the first thing that goes in it.

WRITE DOWN

Date the report is due:

Diagnosis code on page 1 of the report:

WHERE I AM

Evaluated 10/14, report not here yet

WHAT I'M WAITING ON

The report, promised by 11/4

STAGE 2

Tell the pediatrician and ask for referrals

WHAT THIS IS

A referral is a note from your doctor saying your child should see a specialist. Many clinics will not start without one, and many insurance plans want it on file. One visit or phone call can produce several: ABA, speech, occupational therapy, a developmental pediatrician.

WHO TO CALL

Your pediatrician's office. The nurse line or front desk often handles referrals without an appointment. Ask them to send the referral to the clinic and a copy to you.

HAVE READY

- [ ] The diagnosis report, or at least the diagnosis and the date
- [ ] Your insurance card
- [ ] Names of any clinics you already want to use

WRITE DOWN

Referrals sent (which ones, to where):

Date sent, and when to call if nothing arrives:

WHERE I AM

WHAT I'M WAITING ON

The insurance call

Stage 3. One call, this page in front of you, a pen in your hand. Ask every question even if the first answer is yes. With Medicaid or CHIP the questions are the same and the answers often differ.

DATE AND TIME

WHO I SPOKE TO, AND THE REFERENCE NUMBER FOR THIS CALL

Marcus, ref 48213-A

ASK

Is ABA, applied behavior analysis, a covered benefit on my plan? Is speech therapy? Occupational therapy?	*ABA yes, speech yes, OT 30 visits/yr*
Does any of it need prior authorization? Who submits that, me or the provider?	
Do I need a referral from the pediatrician on file first?	
Which providers are in-network near my ZIP code? Can you email me the list?	
What is my deductible, and what will I pay per visit after it's met?	
Is there a yearly visit limit, an age limit, or a dollar cap on any of these?	
If a claim is denied, what is the appeal process and the deadline?	

Have ready: insurance card, your child's date of birth, the diagnosis report for the diagnosis code, and the names of any providers you're considering.

Authorization is not the same as coverage. "Covered" means the plan pays for that kind of service. "Authorized" means the plan approved it for your child, for a set number of hours and a set time. The provider usually requests it after assessment. Until that letter exists, ask before assuming a session is paid for.

WHERE I AM

WHAT I'M WAITING ON

In-network list by email

Waitlists, and the school

Stages 4 and 5. They run at the same time. One is a phone job, the other is a writing job, and neither waits for the other.

STAGE 4

Get on waitlists, more than one

WHAT THIS IS

Most providers have more families asking than openings. The list is the line. You can be on several at once, and you should be. Being on a list is not a promise to use them.

WHO TO CALL

Three to five providers for the therapy you're starting with. In-network ones from the insurance list first, then any the pediatrician or other parents named.

HAVE READY

- [ ] Insurance card and the diagnosis report
- [ ] The days and hours you could realistically do
- [ ] Clinic, home, or either

WRITE DOWN

Rough wait they quoted:

Paperwork they want now so I hold my spot:

How often to check in, and with whom:

The Waitlist Playbook, free on this shelf, is the long version: a call tracker, the questions to ask at intake, a follow-up schedule, and what is worth doing while you wait.

STAGE 5

School: ask for an evaluation in writing

WHAT THIS IS

A diagnosis does not automatically bring school services. The school does its own evaluation, and it starts when you ask in writing. A dated email counts. A phone call does not.

WHO TO CALL

The principal or the district's special education office, to ask who the request goes to. Then send it, and keep a copy. If your child is under three, ask the pediatrician about early intervention instead.

HAVE READY

- [ ] The diagnosis report, to attach
- [ ] Two or three sentences on what is hard at school or daycare
- [ ] Your child's full name, birthdate, grade, and teacher

WRITE DOWN

Date I sent the request, and to whom:

The deadline they gave me:

Meeting date:

Once your request is in writing, the school has deadlines set by law. Ask what they are and write the dates down. **IEP Meeting Prep** on this shelf picks up when the meeting is scheduled.

WHERE I AM

On 2 lists, school request sent 11/6

WHAT I'M WAITING ON

Intake, first sessions, and after

Stages 6, 7, and 8. The phone calls are mostly over. Now you are meeting people, signing things, and keeping notes that feed the plan.

STAGE	WHAT THIS IS	HAVE READY	WRITE DOWN
6 · Intake and assessment with whoever accepts you first	Intake is paperwork and a long conversation: history, what is hard, what your child loves, your schedule, your insurance. Assessment is the BCBA or therapist spending time with your child, sometimes over several visits, and writing a plan. That plan goes to insurance for authorization.	The diagnosis report. Insurance card. A short list of what is hard at home and what your child enjoys. Your real availability, not your hopeful one.	The BCBA's name and direct contact. When the plan will be ready. How many hours they recommend and why. The earliest start date.
7 · Services begin	Sessions start, often with fewer hours than the plan says, then build as your child settles in. You meet the RBT who will be with your child most days and learn how you'll hear what happened in session.	A place to keep session notes. The questions you've been saving. A calendar with the schedule on it.	The weekly schedule. Who to call when someone is sick. When parent training happens. What the first month is for.
8 · Reassess every few months	The plan is reviewed, rewritten, and sent back to insurance on a schedule, often matched to how long the authorization lasts. What you see at home is part of it, so your notes matter here.	Your notes from home: what changed, good and hard. The current plan. The questions you didn't ask last time.	The date of the next review. What changed in the plan and why. When the new authorization starts and ends.

WHERE I AM

STAGE 6

Intake call done, assessment 12/2 and 12/9

WAITING ON

Plan to go to insurance after 12/9

STAGE 7

WAITING ON

STAGE 8

WAITING ON

When the plan arrives, **Read Your Child's Treatment Plan** on this shelf walks through it section by section and lists the questions worth asking.

If the waiting feels unsafe at home, if your child runs off or hurts themselves or others, do not wait for a list. Tell your pediatrician this week, or see thesupportshelf.org/crisis.

The words you'll hear

Nine words that come up in the first few months, one plain sentence each. The full glossary is at thesupportshelf.org/learn.

Referral
A note from your doctor saying your child should see a specialist; insurance and many clinics want it on file before they start.

In-network
A provider with a contract with your insurance plan, so you pay the lower price and the paperwork is simpler.

Authorization
Insurance's written approval to pay for a service before it happens, for a set number of hours and a set time.

Waitlist
The line for a provider's next opening. You can be on several at once, and you can leave one without explaining.

Intake
The first step with a new provider: paperwork and a long conversation about your child, before any sessions.

Assessment
The provider spends time with your child to see where they are now, then writes the plan from what they saw.

BCBA
Board Certified Behavior Analyst, the person who assesses your child, writes the ABA plan, and supervises the people who carry it out.

RBT
Registered Behavior Technician, the person who works with your child in most sessions, following the plan the BCBA wrote.

IEP
Individualized Education Program, the written plan the school makes for a child who qualifies for special education services.

WORDS I HEARD THAT AREN'T HERE

Write them down when you hear them. Ask the next person you talk to. Nobody minds the question.

THE WORD	WHAT I THINK IT MEANS	WHO I'LL ASK
FBA	*Some kind of school assessment about behavior?*	*The diagnostician at school*

My roadmap

The whole map on one page, in pencil. Put it on the fridge or in the front of the folder. Update it after each call so you always know what you are waiting on, and on whom.

CHILD

DATE OF THE DIAGNOSIS REPORT

STAGE	STARTED	WAITING ON	DONE	NOTES
1 Diagnosis report in hand	*10/14*	*Mailed copy, due 11/4*	☐	
2 Pediatrician told, referrals asked for			☐	
3 Insurance: coverage and authorization known			☐	
4 On waitlists (how many: ___)			☐	
5 School evaluation requested in writing			☐	
6 Intake and assessment			☐	
7 Services began			☐	
8 Next reassessment date			☐	

"Done" for stage 4 means someone called with an opening. For stage 8, it never stays done; write the next date in the notes and keep going.

What now

The first two weeks are phone calls and one email. After that, most of it is waiting well.

THIS WEEK AND NEXT

- [ ] Get the written report, or a date for it. Make three copies.
- [ ] Call the pediatrician's office. Ask for referrals and a copy of each.
- [ ] Call insurance with page 5 in front of you. Get the reference number.
- [ ] Get on at least two waitlists. Not one.
- [ ] If your child is school-age, send the evaluation request in writing today.
- [ ] Fill in the first "waiting on" column on page 9.

EVERY TWO WEEKS AFTER THAT

Look at page 9. Anything you have been waiting on for more than two weeks gets a follow-up call. Anything that moved gets written down. That is the whole routine until services start.

NEXT ON THE SHELF

The Waitlist Playbook (Make a Plan, free) is the long version of stage 4: a call tracker, the questions to ask at intake, a follow-up schedule, and what is worth doing at home while you wait.

Read Your Child's Treatment Plan (Make a Plan) is for the day stage 6 produces a document: each section in plain English, what a good one looks like, and what to ask about it.

If either one isn't out yet, the email box on its shelf at thesupportshelf.org/shelf will tell you when it is. One email, then nothing else.

The Support Shelf is made by a Registered Behavior Technician, not a doctor. This map describes a process that is common, not a promise of how yours will go. Which therapies fit your child, and how much of each, are questions for your child's doctor and team.