



Autism Society  
of NORTH CAROLINA



# Moving to North Carolina

## Considering a Move to North Carolina

If you are planning to move to North Carolina, welcome! We hope you will find it to be a pleasant place for you and your family to live. The Autism Society of North Carolina (ASNC) has Autism Resource Specialists and a Hispanic Affairs Liaison who are here to help make your transition as smooth as possible. These advocates assist families in all 100 North Carolina counties. You can find their contact information here: [www.autismsociety-nc.org/resourcespecialists](http://www.autismsociety-nc.org/resourcespecialists).

In addition, ASNC sponsors over 60 local Chapters and support groups across North Carolina. Chapters are run by parent or family member volunteers who join together with other concerned individuals to create welcoming and inclusive local communities of support for families of children and adults with autism. ASNC Chapters are open to anyone interested in the welfare of individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and their families. You can find contact information here: [www.autismsociety-nc.org/chapters](http://www.autismsociety-nc.org/chapters).

## Factors to Consider Before Moving

Relocating to a new state is always a big decision, especially when you have a loved one with ASD. Numerous factors must be weighed to find the best situation for the family member with autism, as well as for the rest of the family. Some of these factors include the support of extended family, employment, education, access to health care, recreational opportunities, support, services, community acceptance, and quality of life. These things can vary considerably from one town to the next, and it is important to realize that there is no one “perfect” place to live. The best community in North Carolina for your family will depend on your specific situation, as well as the particular needs of your loved one with ASD.

It is important to understand that the level of services for autism vary widely from state to state. Within states, services and supports may also be quite different from one region to another. The ideal place to live is a very subjective matter, so the more information you can gather before making a decision, the more likely you are to be happy with the outcome. It is best to review information from a number of different sources, parents and schools in the towns you are considering.

The Autism Society of North Carolina is not able to recommend one particular community in North Carolina over another; however, you can contact one of our Autism Resource Specialists to learn more about the resources available in each region.

This is a look at some of the critical considerations when you are planning to relocate with a family member with ASD. Remember that Autism Resource Specialists and local Chapters are also available to answer any specific questions you may have.

# Education

## Quick Facts

**Public Schools:** Visit the NC Department of Public Instruction (DPI) website at [www.ncpublicschools.org](http://www.ncpublicschools.org) to find information about public education in North Carolina. For official information on each school district and individual schools, including class sizes, test results, teachers, and more, visit [abcs.ncpublicschools.org/abcs](http://abcs.ncpublicschools.org/abcs) or [www.ncreportcards.org/src](http://www.ncreportcards.org/src). For information about the exceptional children's program at a specific school, contact the school district's EC director or the person in charge of special education at that school; find DPI's directory here: <https://ec.ncpublicschools.gov/directory>.

**Special Education/EC Services:** The federal law IDEA mandates a "free and appropriate" public education for all students with a disability ages 3–22. However, having a disability such as autism does not automatically make a student eligible for special education services. In other words, a public education is an entitlement, but special education is not, unless the student is found to have a disability that affects his or her education (functionally or academically). It is also important to know that special education services are very different from one state to the next. Before deciding to move, it is advisable to compare the services your child currently receives at school to those he or she would likely receive in North Carolina.

**Training and Information:** The Autism Society of North Carolina provides training and information related to education for parents, professionals, and community agencies.

- Workshops: [www.autismsociety-nc.org/autism-workshops](http://www.autismsociety-nc.org/autism-workshops)
- Webinars: [www.autismsociety-nc.org/autism-webinars](http://www.autismsociety-nc.org/autism-webinars)
- Toolkits: [www.autismsociety-nc.org/toolkits](http://www.autismsociety-nc.org/toolkits)

In addition, every state maintains a federally funded parent training and information center for educational advocacy. North Carolina's is called the Exceptional Children's Assistance Center (ECAC). The center provides training and information and a free lending library of books about education and disabilities.

**Private Schools:** A few schools in North Carolina specialize in teaching children with autism. You can search for them in our online resource directory: [www.autismsociety-nc.org/resource-directory](http://www.autismsociety-nc.org/resource-directory) or contact one of our Autism Resource Specialists for more information.

**Residential Schools:** There are no residential schools for children with ASD in North Carolina. Parents seeking residential schools may learn more through the National Association of Private Special Education Centers, which offers an online directory at [www.napsec.org/geographical-listing.html](http://www.napsec.org/geographical-listing.html).

## Tips on Finding a School

The Autism Society of North Carolina is unable to endorse one school system or school over another. Each child with autism has different needs and strengths, so your experience may differ from another family's. Here are some steps to help determine which school is likely to be a good fit for your child:

1. **Start by researching school districts online to gather basic facts.** Each school will also maintain its own website. Keep in mind that the needs of students with autism are unique, and finding the best situation will take more than looking at official rankings and test scores. Reputation and rankings are only part of the equation.
2. **Contact schools you are considering.** Pay careful attention to the type of responses you receive from educators, administrators, and other professionals. Schools in North Carolina tend to have their own identities, and the culture comes from the staff, especially the administrators. Communication and flexibility are key traits to look for.
3. **Speak to parents who live in the school district.** They will be the ones who are able to provide a perspective about the culture and quality of special education services. The local ASNC Chapters are a terrific resource for connecting with parents, either in person at events or online.
4. **Visit potential schools if at all possible.** Speaking with staff and visiting classrooms will give you a good sense of what the school is like. However, be aware that not every school will allow you to visit special education classes during school hours because of how they may interpret privacy laws. Speak to the EC director at each school about your child's current IEP and special education services to find out whether services at the new school would likely be comparable. Some families have found that they have better access to services such as ABA therapy and one-to-one aides in their current situation than they might in North Carolina.

# Access to Services

When considering whether to move to a certain area of North Carolina, it is important to investigate access to the services your loved one with ASD requires. While many parts of North Carolina have good autism awareness, that does not always translate into access to services. Things to look into include:

- Number of quality service providers/therapists
- Proximity of providers to your location/distance to travel to services

What, if any, insurance is accepted by providers. As there is no disability entitlement in North Carolina, non-school based services are often private-pay. Some providers may accept Medicaid; fewer accept private insurance (outside of hospitals). And remember that your health-care plan may not cover services for autism.

The Autism Society of North Carolina offers direct supports in many areas of the state. Services may include skilled support, LifeLong Interventions clinical treatment, social recreation, day programs, supported employment, and specialized consultative services. Services may include those funded through Medicaid waivers and through private pay. Check our website for service availability.

Another resource available in North Carolina is the TEACCH Autism Program through the University of North Carolina School of Medicine. Regional TEACCH centers offer diagnostic evaluations, parent training, individual counseling, and supported employment. Some services are free and others are offered at rates that are typically less than at a private clinic. Families should apply to the regional TEACCH center that covers their county in North Carolina.

# Health Insurance/Medicaid Waivers

## Quick Facts

**Autism Health Insurance Mandate:** In North Carolina, autism treatments such as Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) and other evidence-based treatments must be covered under certain health insurance plans for dependents up to age 18. For more information about which plans are subject to the law, please see the Accessing Services page of our website: [www.autismsociety-nc.org/accessing-services](http://www.autismsociety-nc.org/accessing-services). Some private employers opt to offer autism coverage on their health insurance plans; speak to the employer's human resources department.

**Medicaid Waivers:** Children and adults in North Carolina with developmental disabilities are eligible to apply for a Medicaid waiver to receive services.

However, the waiting lists can be extremely long, potentially years. NC offers very limited amounts of state-funded and Medicaid supported services that may not be listed here. Because funding is so limited, types of services and availability varies across the state. Services for developmental disabilities, including ASD, are not an entitlement in North Carolina, and therefore individuals with disabilities are not guaranteed any services or support. This can be a particularly important consideration for adults with ASD who have graduated or aged out of the public school system.

For more information about how to apply for services, the types of services that are available, and how they are funded, please see the Accessing Services page of our website: [www.autismsociety-nc.org/accessing-services](http://www.autismsociety-nc.org/accessing-services).

## Support

Support is an essential factor to consider when deciding whether or where to move. Remember that support for parents and siblings can be just as important as support for the individual with ASD! We are fortunate to have wonderful autism awareness and support in many areas of North Carolina.

**Family:** When you move to North Carolina, will you have a network of family members in place that can help you?

**Parent Support Groups:** ASNC Chapters and support groups are run by parent volunteers. Each group sets its own calendar of activities, including informal parent gatherings, informative meetings and speakers, free family activities, autism awareness events, and more. Our Chapters maintain Facebook groups and/or email lists to help keep members informed about local events in the autism community. Contacting your local Chapter is an excellent way to make connections in your new town!

# Community Life

*Take pictures of the places you visit with your loved one with autism so you can make a book of the places they liked. It can help to ease the transition to their new home when the time comes to move.*

Many communities in North Carolina are warm and welcoming for individuals with autism. A personal visit is the best way to get a feeling for a town, region, or neighborhood to determine whether it will be a good fit for your family. Some families have chosen to take their loved one with ASD to the places they would be likely to frequent to experience firsthand the level of acceptance within the community. These are some of the places you might wish to visit when seeking the right community for your family:

- Parks and playgrounds
- Children's museums
- Grocery stores
- Restaurants
- Churches

Opportunities for recreation and leisure activities are important to the quality of life for your entire family. Consider the interests of all members of your family, including the person with ASD. Some regions in North Carolina have an abundance of adaptive and inclusive recreation activities, as well as public parks and other facilities that are available to all residents. Some do not. Some possible sources of recreation for individuals with autism that you may wish to investigate include:

*If you live in a town that has its own Parks & Rec Department, contact them to see how you might be able to take advantage of programs offered by your county Parks & Rec Department too.*

- **County/City Parks and Recreation Departments:** Some of our Parks & Rec Departments have inclusion specialists, adaptive recreation programs, social skills groups, and other activities especially for those with autism.
- **Camp Royall, the Autism Society of North Carolina's camp located in Pittsboro:** It is the nation's oldest and largest summer camp program for individuals on the autism spectrum, serving both children and adults. Camp Royall also offers a wide variety of recreational activities for people with ASD and their families year-round. Learn more at [www.camproyall.org](http://www.camproyall.org).
- **Special Olympics North Carolina** offers activities such as track & field, aquatics, and softball in communities across the state.
- **Area parks, swimming pools, bike paths, and nature trails**
- **ASNC Chapter activities for families:** Individual Chapters organize events and outings that are specially geared to be autism-friendly. Your Chapter is also a good source of information about other autism-friendly groups and activities.

Ultimately, parents of individuals with autism just want for their children what all parents want: a safe, welcoming place where they will be accepted and respected for who they are, a place where they can grow and thrive. If you choose to make North Carolina your home, please contact us so that we can help with your transition and welcome you to our great state.

# About Autism

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) refers to a group of developmental disabilities – including classic autism, Pervasive Developmental Disorder-Not Otherwise Specified (PDD-NOS), and Asperger’s Syndrome – that affect a person’s ability to understand what they see, hear, and otherwise sense. It is a brain disorder that affects communication, social interaction, and behavior.

Individuals with ASD typically have difficulty understanding verbal and nonverbal communication and learning appropriate ways of relating to other people, objects, and events. No two people with ASD are the same. As its name implies, ASD is a spectrum disorder that affects individuals differently and with varying degrees of severity. Additionally, ASD is often found in combination with other disabilities.

It is estimated that up to 1 out of every 68 children has some form of ASD. Evidence suggests that the prevalence rate in North Carolina is even higher than the national average, at 1 in 59. More than 60,000 individuals live with ASD in North Carolina.

The overall incidence of ASD is consistent around the globe, but it is five times more prevalent in boys than in girls. ASD knows no racial, ethnic, or social boundaries, and family income, lifestyle, and educational levels do not affect the chance of occurrence. While ASD is typically diagnosed in children, it is a lifelong disorder that affects individuals of all ages.

## What Causes ASD?

Although it was first identified in 1943, to this day no one knows exactly what causes ASD. However, research to discover its cause is ongoing. Many researchers believe that there is a strong genetic component. Some research suggests a physical problem that affects the parts of the brain that process language and information; other research points to an imbalance of brain chemicals. A variety of possible external or environmental triggers are also being studied. It is possible that ASD is caused by a combination of several factors.

## Signs and Symptoms

People with ASD may have problems with social, behavioral, and communication skills. They might repeat behaviors and might not understand change in their daily activities. Many people with ASD also have different ways of learning, paying attention, or reacting to things.

### A person with ASD might:

- have severe language deficits or differences
- talk about or show interest in a restricted range of topics
- not point at objects to show interest, such as an airplane flying over
- not look at objects when another person points at them
- have trouble relating to others or not have an interest in other people at all
- avoid eye contact and want to be alone
- have trouble understanding other people’s feelings or talking about their own feelings
- prefer not to be held or cuddled or might cuddle only when they want to
- appear to be unaware when other people talk to them but respond to other sounds
- repeat or echo words or phrases said to them, or repeat words or phrases in place of normal language (echolalia)
- have trouble expressing their needs using typical words or motions
- laugh, cry, or show distress for no apparent reason
- repeat actions over and over again
- have trouble adapting when a routine changes
- have unusual reactions to the way things smell, taste, look, feel, or sound
- be oversensitive or under-sensitive to pain
- lose skills they once had (for instance, stop saying words they were once using)



## Autism Society of NORTH CAROLINA

The Autism Society of North Carolina improves the lives of individuals with autism, supports their families, and educates communities.

We respect and value the uniqueness of all individuals with autism; when provided the opportunity, each person can make a unique contribution to their family, community, and society. For almost 50 years, we have improved the lives of individuals with autism, supported their families, and educated communities across North Carolina.

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**We improve lives:** Our services and programs are tailored to the unique needs of individuals with autism. We enable them to have healthy, safe, and fulfilling lives in their own communities. Our expertise helps individuals – many of whom have significant lifelong needs – be as independent as possible and achieve their goals and dreams.

**We support families:** Autism Resource Specialists are often the first people parents talk to after their child is diagnosed. We help families connect with resources, keep their children safe, find services, and resolve school issues. We also provide guidance on lifelong issues including employment, residential options, and planning for children's needs beyond parents' lives.

**We educate communities:** Our training for professionals such as doctors and teachers has increased the quality of care for individuals with autism. We advocate for the needs of the autism community with state policy-makers. Our education efforts have increased public awareness of autism and helped NC have a lower average age of diagnosis than the U.S.