



Autism Society  
of NORTH CAROLINA

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# MOVING TO NORTH CAROLINA

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# MOVING TO NORTH CAROLINA: Introduction

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If you are planning to move to North Carolina, welcome! We hope that you will find it to be a pleasant place for you and your family to live. The Autism Society of North Carolina (ASNC) has Parent Advocates and an 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.

In addition, ASNC sponsors approximately 50 local Chapters and support groups across North Carolina. Chapters are run by parent/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. They are an excellent resource for getting the “inside scoop” on a particular community. ASNC Chapters are open to all persons interested in the welfare of individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and their families

## Considering a Move to North Carolina

Deciding to relocate to a new state is always a big decision, especially when you have a loved one with ASD whose needs must be considered. There are numerous factors which 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 healthcare, 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 that are available in each state vary widely. 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, including speaking with 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 a Parent Advocate to learn more about the resources available in each region of the state.

## Factors to Consider Before Moving

This is a look at some of the critical things you should consider when you are planning to relocate with a family member with ASD. Remember that Parent Advocates and local Chapters are also available to answer any specific questions that you may have.

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# MOVING TO NORTH CAROLINA: Education

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## Quick Facts

**Public Schools:** visit the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) website 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 <http://abcs.ncpublicschools.org/abcs/> or <http://www.ncreportcards.org/src/>. DPI can be reached by telephone at 919-807-3969.

**Special Education:** Called the Exceptional Children Division or EC for short, DPI maintains an Exceptional Children Division directory, and each school district has its own EC director as well. There are also school level EC directors, who are responsible for special education at a particular school.

**Training and Information:** The Autism Society of North Carolina offers workshops and training for parents, professionals and the community. In addition, every state maintains a federally-funded parent training and information center for educational advocacy. North Carolina's Parent Training Information Center 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.

**Special Education/EC Services:** The federal law IDEA mandates a "free and appropriate" public education for all students with a disability aged 3–22. However, having a disability like 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 impacts 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 making the decision 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.

**Private Schools for children with autism:** There are a few schools in North Carolina that specialize in teaching children with autism - ABC of NC Child Development Center and the Mariposa School.

**Residential Schools:** There are no residential schools for children with ASD in North Carolina. Parents seeking residential schools may contact the National Association of Private Schools for Exceptional Children in Washington, DC at 202-408-3338.

## Tips on Finding a School

The Autism Society of North Carolina is unable to endorse one school system or school over another. As there is no perfect school for all children with ASD, your experience may be different than that of another family in the same school district. Here are some steps that you can take 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 factual information. Each school will also maintain their 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 one 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 other parents who live in the school district. They will be the ones who are able to provide a local 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 if services at the new school would likely be comparable. Some families have found that they have better access to services like ABA therapy and one-to-one aides in their current situation than they might in North Carolina.

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## MOVING TO NORTH CAROLINA: Health Insurance/Medicaid Waivers

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### Quick Facts

**Autism Health Insurance Mandate:** Although ASNC is working diligently on autism insurance reform, North Carolina does not currently have an autism insurance mandate requiring health insurers to cover autism related treatments. Some private employers may opt to offer autism coverage on their health insurance plans; speak to the human resources department at your employer in North Carolina for specifics on your health insurance plan.

**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. 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. The Medicaid waivers are administered by local management entities (LMEs) and public managed care organizations (MCOs). Both are sometimes called local area mental health centers. Visit the NC Division of Mental Health, Development Disabilities and Substance Abuse (NCMHDDSAS) website to locate the appropriate LME or MCO entity in your county.

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# MOVING TO NORTH CAROLINA: Access to Services

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When considering moving to North Carolina or seeking a town in which to reside, 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 providers accept. 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 healthcare plan may not cover services for autism.

The Autism Society of North Carolina offers direct care services in many areas of the state. Services may include home and community supports, day supports, personal care, supported employment, or specialized consultative services. Services may include those funded through the local mental health center (Local Management Entity or Managed Care Organization). Some services may be available through private pay. Check our website for service locations.

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

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# MOVING TO NORTH CAROLINA: Support

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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 for 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 chapter meetings and speakers, free family activities, autism awareness events, and more. Some Chapters maintain email lists and/or Facebook pages 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!

Additional statewide organizations that serve individuals with developmental disabilities including autism are: the Arc of North Carolina, Family Support Network of North Carolina, and Easter Seals UCP of North Carolina and Virginia.

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# MOVING TO NORTH CAROLINA: Community and Recreation

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There are many communities in North Carolina which are warm and welcoming for individuals with autism. A personal visit is the best way to get a feeling for a town, a region, or a neighborhood to determine if it will be a good fit for your family. Some families have chosen to take their loved one with ASD to the types of 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

*Tip: 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.*

Opportunities for recreation and leisure activities are something that is 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 which are available to all residents. Some do not. Some possible sources of recreation for individuals with autism that you may wish to investigate include:

- **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. *Tip: 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.*

- **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.
- **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.