



## **Things to Think About: Picking Support Professionals, Pediatricians, and Therapists**

For many children with special needs, services provided by direct support professionals, therapists and other special needs staff can help maximize their abilities and help them develop workarounds for some limitations. Of course, just like with any medical or support professional, the person hired to work with your child has to be a good fit. Parents should know that they can ask for an interview with any individual they're hiring to work with their child to assess fit, experience and background. It can sometimes be a little intimidating to interview special needs professionals, so here is a short checklist of some of the things parents can think about in an interview:

### **General Questions**

- What is your general background?
- What kind of formal training have you had?
- How many hours/years of work experience have you had?
- Why did you choose to work with special needs kids specifically?
- What do you do if a child displays difficult behavior?
- What kind of [positive reinforcement techniques](#) do you use?

When interviewing any professional that will be working with your child, it's important to also take into account things that might not be apparent just by the professional's answers to your questions. It's also important to evaluate whether the professional is communicative, engaged, and interested in your child's overall well-being. If a professional seems disengaged, bored, or uncommunicative, this could potentially become an issue later on.

It's also important to consider the professional's demeanor and flexibility towards your child, as well as how they build rapport with your child. Does the professional take into account the child's preferences and dislikes when completing a task the child might not like, like getting shots or having their teeth brushed? Are they empathetic, understanding and patient?

### **Interviewing a Therapist**

- What kind of services do you provide?
- Do you specialize in a specific population or in specific disorders?
- Are you part of a large or small practice? Will my child see you specifically for each appointment?
- How do you track my child's progress? Can I see my child's progress data and appointment notes?
- Are your services covered by my insurance?
- How do you keep up with new developments in the field? Do you attend conferences? How often?



For more detailed questions about interviewing a therapist for your child, please see Special Needs Parenting Magazine's guide to [choosing a therapist](#).

## Interviewing a Pediatrician

When parents are searching for a pediatrician, they many want to first check the list of providers that are members of the [American Academy of Pediatrics](#). Parents may also want to check to see if their potential pediatrician has had any disciplinary action by running their name through their state's [medical boards](#). When interview time comes, the general questions you ask are fairly similar to the questions that you ask a therapist in order to get a better idea of the kinds of services they provide. Because pediatricians are medical professionals (and not therapists), however, there are some additional questions parents may want to ask:

- What medical school(s) did you go to? Where did you do postgraduate and residency work?
- What hospital(s) do you work with?
- Who do you refer to if my child needs subspecialty care?
- What are your policies for insurance claims, lab policies, payments and billing?
- Will my insurance cover all your services?
- Do you do testing in-house? If not, where do you send lab tests?
- How do you handle acute illnesses? If my child has to see a doctor urgently, can I make an appointment on short notice?
- What are your hours? Do you have evening, weekend, or holiday hours?

For more information on interviewing a potential pediatrician, please see this [handy checklist](#), as well as The Bump's [Pediatrician Question Guide](#), and the American Academy of Pediatrics' [Guide to Picking a Pediatrician](#).

It is also important to remember that pediatricians can subspecialize in particular areas. If you are concerned about your child's development, your child's regular pediatrician may refer you to a specialist [developmental-behavioral pediatrician](#) in your area. For more information on developmental-behavioral pediatrics, please see the following resources:

- [What is a Developmental-Behavioral Pediatrician?](#)
- [Society for Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics: Find a Clinician](#)
- [What Parents Need to Know about Developmental-Behavioral Pediatricians](#)

## Interviewing a Direct Support Professional (DSP)

Children with complex needs may sometimes benefit from having a person available in the school, home or recreational settings that can support them throughout the day with tasks like taking notes, bathing, dressing, and reminders to take medications. These [skilled professionals](#) are not medical staff and don't provide medical care, but can still help with tasks that children



may not be able to carry out themselves. They are likely to spend a significant portion of the day with your child, especially if your child has highly limited mobility, severe developmental delays, or other complex disabilities. Because of this, it's very important to not only ask about the direct support professionals' background, but also to see how well they (1) interact on your child on a daily basis and (2) manage challenging situations that can arise over the course of the day.

Questions you can ask a direct support professional include:

- How long have you worked with children with disabilities?
- Why did you choose this specific career path?
- What do you do in [challenging situations](#)? What do you do if a child has a meltdown? How do you encourage children to complete necessary tasks? What do you do if a child has sensory overload?
- Why do you feel you are well-equipped to be a direct support professional?
- How do you do your job while maintaining a client's dignity and respect?

It's also important to note that parents often do not hire DSPs individually - they can often use an agency that will take care of the 'heavy lifting' of interviewing and finding [qualified, credentialed](#) candidates. If parents do decide to interview a direct support professional themselves, it's important to (1) do a criminal background check and (2) check the person's driving records, especially if the direct support professional will be spending time alone with the child or driving them to appointments, etc.

Often, parents who need the help of a DSP will be referred to an agency by a state Council on Developmental Disabilities or other large organization that has professional relationships with trusted groups. By going through the state, parents avoid the hassle and uncertainty of trying to evaluate a support professional's credentials themselves when they might not be familiar with the formal qualifications needed to be successful.

For more direct support professional questions, please see the following:

- Altus Dynamic's [Top 5 Most Important DSP Interview Questions](#)
- Friendship Circle's [10 Questions to Ask When Hiring Someone to Work with Your Special Needs Child](#)
- [Structured Behavioral Interview Questions](#) for Direct Support Professionals
- [Sample Direct Support Professional Structured Interview Questions](#)
- Glassdoor's Crowdsourced [Questions DSPs Have Answered](#)

Hiring any professional to work with your child is a significant choice, especially since it means that you are entrusting the person you've hired with the care of your child. It's important to remember that you know your child best, and you are one of the people best positioned to know what does and doesn't work for your child. If you are concerned about an individual's professionalism, knowledge, or attitude towards your child, bring up your concerns and don't be afraid to switch care providers if it is possible and within your child's best interests.



**Disclaimer:** This brochure is intended only as a general educational document rather than as hiring advice. It is the responsibility of placement agencies and medical/therapeutic professionals to communicate with parents regarding candidate fit and their child's health, behavior and other concerns. This document is not intended as a guide for evaluating an individual's fit for position and is merely a list of possible questions parents may be concerned about when hiring a professional for the care of their child.