Alpaca Health

Houston Autism Starter Checklist



Get matched with a BCBA
secure.alpacahealth.io/signup

Gather the paperwork in week 1

Health plans, clinics, schools and grant programs each ask for some of these papers. Keep them in one folder and make copies of the diagnosis report.

- [ ] **The full written diagnosis report**
  Texas Medicaid looks for the DSM criteria, the severity level and the name of the standardized test used, such as the ADOS. A screening checklist like the M-CHAT does not count on its own.

- [ ] **A signed referral for an ABA evaluation**
  Texas Medicaid needs a signed, dated referral before any ABA evaluation or therapy. Your child's primary care provider or the diagnosing doctor can write it.

- [ ] **Earlier evaluations and school reports**
  Texas Children's asks families to fax recent school evaluations and other therapists' reports before the first visit.

- [ ] **A written evaluation request to your school district, if your child is 3 or older**
  Give it to the district's special education director or your principal, and keep a dated copy. A request made only by phone or in person does not start the 15 school day clock.

- [ ] **Papers for a Medicaid or CHIP application**
  Your Texas Benefits asks for each applicant's Social Security number and birth date, citizenship or immigration status, income, and the bills you pay.

- [ ] **Last year's tax return and proof of where you live**
  Hope For Three asks for both. For SSI, Social Security counts part of the parents' income and resources.

- [ ] **A folder for every letter you get**
  When your child's name reaches the top of a waiver interest list, a state office or your local IDD authority contacts you.

Make the first calls in week 1

Who to call and how	What they do
Early Childhood Intervention (ECI), under 3. Statewide referral line 1-877-787-8999 finds the program for your ZIP code at any hour. Easter Seals Greater Houston runs ECI in Harris, Fort Bend, Montgomery, Liberty and other nearby counties, at 713-838-9050.	Evaluates development and coaches you at home or child care. The evaluation costs you nothing. Later services are billed to Medicaid, CHIP or insurance, with a sliding-scale share for some families. Anyone can refer.
Houston ISD special education, ages 3 to 21. Parent Liaisons at 713-556-7042 or spedsupportingparents@houstonisd.org.	For a child not yet in school, contact your neighborhood HISD school. The district has 15 school days from a written request to send consent forms or a written refusal.
Your local IDD authority (LIDDA), any age. Find yours by county or ZIP code at resources.hhs.texas.gov/directories/lidda.	Checks eligibility for IDD services, adds your child to the HCS and TxHmL waiver interest lists when they apply, and assigns a service coordinator once services open.
Texas Parent to Parent, for families of children and adults. 866-896-6001.	Staff who are parents of children with disabilities take calls, run weekly Zoom support groups in English and Spanish, and share a Care Notebook for records.
PATH Project, Partners Resource Network, birth to 26. 1-800-866-4726.	A federally funded parent center that explains special education rights under IDEA at no cost to parents, and connects you with the coordinator for your area.

Gulf Coast Center, at 800-643-0967, is the local IDD authority for Brazoria and Galveston counties.

Set up how therapy gets paid for

Start with the coverage your child has now. If your child has no coverage yet, the Medicaid application is the first thing to send.

- [ ] **Know that Texas Medicaid covers ABA for children under 21**

  Since February 1, 2022, Texas Medicaid has covered applied behavior analysis (ABA) evaluation and treatment for members 20 and younger with an autism diagnosis, through Texas Health Steps. The ABA provider asks your child's health plan for approval before therapy starts.

- [ ] **Learn what EPSDT means for your child**

  EPSDT stands for Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnostic and Treatment. In Texas it is called Texas Health Steps, and it covers Medicaid members from birth through age 20. Federal law requires Texas Medicaid to pay for a listed service that is medically necessary to correct or improve a child's condition, even when Texas Medicaid does not cover that service for other members.

- [ ] **Find out whether your child belongs in STAR Kids**

  STAR Kids is the Texas Medicaid program for children and youth 20 and younger with disabilities. A child on Medicaid is enrolled if the child also gets SSI, has Medicare, or is in a waiver such as MDCP, YES, CLASS, HCS or TxHmL. Every STAR Kids member gets a service coordinator through the health plan.

- [ ] **Save your STAR Kids plan's member services number**

  Three plans serve the Harris service area, which covers Austin, Brazoria, Fort Bend, Galveston, Harris, Matagorda, Montgomery, Waller and Wharton counties. Texas Children's Health Plan is 1-800-659-5764, UnitedHealthcare Community Plan is 1-877-597-7799, and Wellpoint is 1-844-756-4600.

Set up how therapy gets paid for (continued)

- [ ] **If your child does not have Medicaid yet, apply online or call 2-1-1**

  Apply at YourTexasBenefits.com or call 2-1-1. Texas HHS says that when you apply for Medicaid, it also checks whether your child can get CHIP, the program for families who earn too much for Children's Medicaid.

- [ ] **If you have private insurance, ask whether the Texas autism law applies to your plan**

  Texas Insurance Code section 1355.015 requires the plans it covers to pay for autism screening at 18 and 24 months, and for treatment your child's primary care doctor prescribes, which can include ABA, speech, occupational and physical therapy. Treatment coverage applies when the diagnosis was in place before age 10, and from age 10 a plan may cap ABA at $36,000 a year. Deductibles, copays and coinsurance can still apply. The Texas Department of Insurance says it does not regulate most health plans, including self-funded employer plans, so ask your plan whether this law covers you. The TDI help line is 800-252-3439.

- [ ] **Ask your local IDD authority about Community First Choice**

  Community First Choice is a Texas Medicaid program that pays for help with daily activities, such as eating, toileting and grooming, for children and adults with disabilities. For a child with an intellectual or developmental disability, the local IDD authority does the assessment. Find yours at resources.hhs.texas.gov/directories/lidda.

Join the waiver interest lists this month

Waiver and who it is for	Who takes your call
HCS and TxHmL, for people with an intellectual or developmental disability. TxHmL is for people living in their family home or their own home.	Your local IDD authority. Find yours by county or ZIP code at resources.hhs.texas.gov/directories/lidda.
CLASS, for a related condition, which Texas defines as a disability other than an intellectual disability that began before age 22 and affects daily life.	The Texas HHS interest list line, 877-438-5658.
MDCP, for children and young adults 20 and younger who need a high level of medical care.	The Texas HHS interest list line, 877-438-5658, in the same call as CLASS.
YES Waiver, for children ages 3 to 18 with serious mental health or behavior needs. The child has to be eligible for Medicaid, and parent income is not counted.	Call your local mental health authority and ask for the YES Waiver inquiry list. Find it by county or ZIP code at resources.hhs.texas.gov/directories/lmha.

Texas HHS serves the person who has waited longest first, and your child can use Medicaid and other services while waiting without losing a place. Texas HHS says to add your child's name to the lists as soon as possible, so call this month.

Get a full evaluation if you still need one

Where	How to get an appointment	Contact
Texas Children's Meyer Center for Developmental Pediatrics and Autism. Under 12.	Your child's doctor sends the referral, since the clinic does not take referrals from parents. Fax earlier evaluations before the visit. The center diagnoses and plans care and does not provide ongoing therapy.	Phone 832-822-3400. Fax records to 832-825-9065.
UTHealth Houston, Dan L Duncan Children's Neurodevelopmental Clinic at the Children's Learning Institute. Children, teens and young adults.	Call the clinic directly, because it does not book through UT Physicians central scheduling. Some clinicians require a referral. Bring a photo ID for the security desk.	713-500-8300. 7000 Fannin Street, Suite 1910, Houston, TX 77030.
Early Childhood Intervention (ECI). Under 3.	ECI evaluates development and starts services. Under Texas rules, ECI does not diagnose autism, and it can refer your child to clinicians who do.	Evaluations at no cost to parents. 1-877-787-8999.

Texas Medicaid accepts an autism diagnosis from a developmental pediatrician, neurologist, psychiatrist, licensed psychologist or diagnostic team. Ask each clinic whether it takes your child's plan and how long the current wait is.

Apply for grants and money

Program and who can apply	What it pays for and how to apply
FACES, the Foundation for Autism Care, Education and Services. Houston-area children with autism.	Scholarships for ABA therapy, based on a family's need for help paying beyond what insurance covers. Families choose their own ABA center. Apply at facesautism.org or call 281-757-6750.
Hope For Three, Family Assistance and Resource Support (FARS). Fort Bend County residents only.	Up to $3,000 a year for therapy, supplies, safety equipment, respite and prescribed services, paid to the approved provider. Call 281-245-0640 or email familyassistance@hopeforthree.org. Families anywhere can ask it for referrals.
SSI, Supplemental Security Income. Apply at ssa.gov or call 1-800-772-1213, weekdays 8 a.m. to 7 p.m. local time.	A monthly payment for a child under 18 whose condition causes marked and severe functional limits expected to last at least 12 months. Social Security counts part of the parents' income. Texas puts children on SSI and Medicaid in STAR Kids.
PDSES, Parent-Directed Special Education Services. Texas public school students, Pre-K to 12th grade, with an IEP.	A one-time $1,500 account for learning materials and services such as extra speech therapy or tutoring, first-come, first-served. Call SPEDTex at 1-855-773-3839 or join the 2026 to 2027 email list at spedtex.org.

Find sensory-friendly outings and respite

These Houston programs are set up for children with sensory needs or disabilities. Call ahead before you go, since schedules change.

- [ ] **Register for a Sensory Friendly Day at Children's Museum Houston**
  On these Mondays the museum at 1500 Binz St. is closed to the public, plays no music and has sound-reducing headphones. It holds four Sensory Friendly Days each school year, so check the sensory-friendly page at cmhouston.org for the next date. Pre-registration is required, at ldungus@cmhouston.org or (713) 535-7238. On any visit you can borrow a KultureCity sensory bag at the Welcome Center.

- [ ] **Plan a Houston Zoo visit with a sensory bag**
  The Zoo is a Certified Autism Center, which means all staff and volunteers finished autism training. Sensory bags with fidget toys and soundproof headphones are available at Guest Services, and the accessibility page has sensory guides for each area. Call 713-533-6500 about accommodations.

- [ ] **Watch the Houston Public Library calendar for sensory events**
  The library held a Sensory Festival on March 21, 2026 at the Stimley-Blue Ridge Neighborhood Library, with fidget toys, noise-cancelling headphones and a quiet space. Search calendar.houstonlibrary.org for sensory to find the next one.

- [ ] **Sign up for Family Day Out with Easter Seals Greater Houston**
  Family Day Out is a Saturday camp for children with disabilities ages 6 to 14 and their siblings ages 6 to 10. Each camper is paired with a volunteer buddy, and nurses on site help with toileting, medication and specialized feeding. New campers apply first and space is limited. Email playgroup@eastersealshouston.org or call 713-838-9050 ext. 309.

- [ ] **Ask Easter Seals Greater Houston about in-home respite care**
  The Respite Care program is for parents or guardians caring for a child with a disability. A provider you choose, such as someone you already know and trust, cares for your child at home while you go out. Email respite@eastersealshouston.org or call 713-838-9050 ext. 307.

Save these crisis numbers now

Put these numbers in your phone before you need them. If anyone is in physical danger, call 911.

- [ ] **988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline**
  Call or text 988, or chat at 988lifeline.org, at any hour of any day. Conversations are free and confidential, and text and chat are available in Spanish.

- [ ] **The Harris Center 24/7 Crisis and Access Line, 713-970-7000**
  Counselors answer at any hour for anyone in Harris County who needs mental health support.

- [ ] **Texana Center 24/7 crisis hotline, 1-800-633-5686**
  Texana Center serves Fort Bend, Austin, Colorado, Matagorda, Waller and Wharton counties.

- [ ] **Crisis lines for other nearby counties**
  Gulf Coast Center serves Brazoria and Galveston counties at 866-729-3848. Tri-County Behavioral Healthcare serves Montgomery, Liberty and Walker counties at 800-659-6994.

- [ ] **NAMI HelpLine, 1-800-950-6264, on weekdays**
  NAMI Greater Houston lists the HelpLine for mental health information and local resources, Monday through Friday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Its Houston office is 713-970-4419.

Your call log

Date	Who I called	Who I spoke to	What they told me	Next step and date

Questions to ask on each call

Write down each answer with the date and the name of the person you spoke to.

- [ ] **Does my child's diagnosis report meet Texas Medicaid's rules for ABA?**
  Ask the evaluator. Texas Medicaid looks for the DSM criteria, the severity level and a standardized diagnostic test, made or reconfirmed within the last 3 years.

- [ ] **Who will sign the referral for an ABA evaluation?**
  Ask your child's primary care provider or the doctor who made the diagnosis. Texas Medicaid needs a signed and dated referral.

- [ ] **Is my child in STAR Kids, and who is our service coordinator?**
  Ask your STAR Kids plan's member services line.

- [ ] **On what date did the school district receive my written request?**
  The 15 school days start on that date. Once you sign consent, Texas gives the district 45 school days to finish the evaluation.

- [ ] **Is my child on the HCS and TxHmL interest lists, and what is our request date?**
  Ask your local IDD authority. The person who has waited longest is served first.

- [ ] **Is my child on the CLASS and MDCP lists?**
  Ask the Texas HHS interest list line at 877-438-5658, and write down the date of your call.

- [ ] **Does my private plan follow Texas Insurance Code 1355.015?**
  Ask your health plan whether it is state-regulated or self-funded, and whether ABA needs approval before it starts.

- [ ] **Does this clinic take my child's plan, and how long is the current wait for an evaluation?**
  Ask Texas Children's and UTHealth, and compare the answers in your log.

Sources

Sources change over time, so check each one before you act on it.

Easter Seals Greater Houston, ECI Infant Development Program
https://eastersealshouston.org/eci-infant-development-program/

Texas HHS, Early Childhood Intervention services
https://www.hhs.texas.gov/services/disability/early-childhood-intervention-services

Houston ISD, Do you think your child needs special education services?
https://www.houstonisd.org/schools-academics/special-education/child-sped-services

Houston ISD, Special Education contacts and 2026 to 2027 changes
https://www.houstonisd.org/schools-academics/special-education

Texas Education Agency, Special Education Initial Referral Timeline (PDF, 2024)
https://spedsupport.tea.texas.gov/sites/default/files/2024-09/special-education-initial-referral-timeline_2024.pdf

Texas Parent to Parent
https://www.txp2p.org/

Partners Resource Network, PATH Project
https://prntexas.org/texas-ptis/path-project/

Texas HHS, directory of local IDD authorities (LIDDA)
https://resources.hhs.texas.gov/directories/lidda

Texas HHS, Explanation of IDD Services and Supports, revised August 2025 (PDF)
https://www.hhs.texas.gov/sites/default/files/documents/doing-business-with-hhs/providers/long-term-care/lidda/iddserviceseng.pdf

TMHP, autism services benefits effective February 1, 2022
https://www.tmhp.com/news/2021-07-30-hhsc-release-autism-services-benefits-effective-february-1-2022

TMPPM, Children's Services Handbook, September 2026, section 2.3 Autism Services (PDF)
https://www.tmhp.com/sites/default/files/file-library/resources/provider-manuals/tmppm/pdf-chapters/2026/2026-09-september/2_04_childrens_services.pdf

Sources (continued)

Texas HHS, STAR Kids
https://www.hhs.texas.gov/services/health/medicaid-chip/medicaid-chip-members/star-kids

Texas HHS Handbooks, STAR Kids plans and member services numbers by service area
https://fhb.hhs.texas.gov/handbooks/star-kids-program-support-unit-operational-procedures-handbook/appendix-xxvi-star-kids-plan-codes

Texas HHS, Medicaid and CHIP programs for children and families
https://www.hhs.texas.gov/services/health/medicaid-chip/medicaid-chip-programs-services/programs-children-adults-disabilities/programs-children-families

Your Texas Benefits, apply for Medicaid and CHIP
https://www.yourtexasbenefits.com/Learn/Home

Texas Insurance Code, section 1355.015, autism spectrum disorder coverage
https://statutes.capitol.texas.gov/Docs/IN/htm/IN.1355.htm

Texas Department of Insurance, health care coverage guide
https://www.tdi.texas.gov/pubs/consumer/cb005.html

Texas HHS, Community First Choice questions and answers (PDF)
https://www.hhs.texas.gov/sites/default/files/documents/services/health/medicaid-chip/programs/community-first-choice/cfc-faqs.pdf

Texas HHS, interest list reduction
https://www.hhs.texas.gov/about/records-statistics/interest-list-reduction

Texas HHS, Community Living Assistance and Support Services (CLASS)
https://www.hhs.texas.gov/providers/long-term-care-providers/community-living-assistance-support-services-class

Texas HHS, Medically Dependent Children Program (MDCP)
https://www.hhs.texas.gov/providers/long-term-care-providers/medically-dependent-children-program-mdcp

Texas HHS, YES Waiver
https://www.hhs.texas.gov/services/mental-health-substance-use/childrens-mental-health/yes-waiver

Sources (continued)

Texas HHS, directory of local mental health and behavioral health authorities
https://resources.hhs.texas.gov/directories/lmha

Texas Children's, Meyer Center programs and services
https://www.texaschildrens.org/departments/developmental-pediatrics-and-autism/programs-and-services

Texas Children's, preparing for a developmental pediatrics visit
https://www.texaschildrens.org/departments/developmental-pediatrics-and-autism/preparing-for-visit

Texas Children's, referral rules for Developmental Pediatrics
https://www.texaschildrens.org/health-professionals/refer-patient/developmental-pediatrics

UTHealth Houston, Children's Learning Institute, Dan L Duncan Children's Neurodevelopmental Clinic
https://childrenslearninginstitute.org/dan-l-duncan-childrens-neurodevelopmental-clinic/

Texas Administrative Code, 26 TAC section 350.833, ECI autism screening
https://www.law.cornell.edu/regulations/texas/26-Tex-Admin-Code-SS-350-833

Foundation for Autism Care, Education and Services (FACES)
https://facesautism.org/

Hope For Three, Family Assistance and Resource Support
https://hopeforthree.org/family-assistance/

Social Security Administration, SSI for children, 2026 edition
https://www.ssa.gov/ssi/text-child-ussi.htm

Social Security Administration, contact by phone
https://www.ssa.gov/agency/contact/phone.html

SPEDTex, Parent-Directed Special Education Services (PDSES)
https://spedtex.org/resources/pdses

Sources (continued)

Children's Museum Houston, sensory friendly and autism resources
https://www.cmhouston.org/visiting/sensory-friendly-and-autism-resources

Houston Zoo, accessibility
https://www.houstonzoo.org/plan-your-visit/accessibility/

Houston Public Library, Sensory Festival, March 21, 2026
https://calendar.houstonlibrary.org/event/16107922

Easter Seals Greater Houston, Family Day Out
https://eastersealshouston.org/family-day-out/

Easter Seals Greater Houston, respite services
https://eastersealshouston.org/respite-services/

988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline
https://988lifeline.org/

The Harris Center, crisis services
https://www.theharriscenter.org/services/crisis-services

NAMI Greater Houston, contact and NAMI HelpLine
https://namigreaterhouston.org/contact-us/

Alpaca Health, insurance
https://www.alpacahealth.io/insurance

Alpaca Health, ABA therapy in Texas
https://www.alpacahealth.io/states/texas

Alpaca Health, ABA therapy in Houston
https://www.alpacahealth.io/cities/houston

This kit is general information and is not medical or legal advice. Talk to a qualified professional about your child's situation.

Start ABA therapy in Houston with Alpaca Health

Alpaca Health accepts Texas Medicaid and private insurance plans. It matches Houston families with an independent Board Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA), and it handles the insurance paperwork, from checking your child's coverage to sending claims after each session.



When you are ready

Start with Alpaca Health →

https://secure.alpacahealth.io/signup

Scan to open

Read the Texas Medicaid ABA guide https://www.alpacahealth.io/insurance/texas-medicaid