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First Steps in Arizona

A checklist for families after a diagnosis, or when you think something is going on. Pick the section that fits, and take it one step at a time.

Baby or toddler (birth to 3)

- [ ] **Write down what you notice.** Milestones, words, play, sleep. Short phone videos help evaluators. The CDC has free milestone checklists (cdc.gov/act-early).
- [ ] **Refer your child to AzEIP** (Arizona Early Intervention Program): (888) 592-0140. No doctor's referral or diagnosis is needed, and the evaluation is free.
- [ ] **Ask your pediatrician** for a developmental screening and a referral to someone who can evaluate for autism. Get on waitlists now.
- [ ] **Ask about DDD.** For children under 3, DDD eligibility is decided after AzEIP eligibility, with your consent. Ask your AzEIP service coordinator.
- [ ] **Plan for age 3.** A transition meeting is held by about age 2½, and the plan must be in place at least 90 days before the third birthday.

Child or teen in school (3 to 21)

- [ ] **Gather what you've seen** in one folder: examples, report cards, teacher emails, outside reports.
- [ ] **Ask for an evaluation in writing.** Request a full and individual evaluation in all areas of suspected disability. Keep a dated copy.
- [ ] **Watch for the answer: 15 school days.** The school must start the evaluation or give you Prior Written Notice saying no and why.
- [ ] **Sign consent: the 60-day clock starts.** The school has 60 calendar days to finish, and breaks count.
- [ ] **Go to the eligibility (MET) meeting.** Ask for the reports a few days before. If eligible, the first IEP is written within 30 days. If not, ask about a 504 plan.
- [ ] **Disagree?** Ask for an Independent Educational Evaluation (IEE). Free help: Encircle Families, (800) 237-3007.
- [ ] **Get a medical diagnosis too.** School eligibility isn't a medical diagnosis. For DDD, autism must be diagnosed by a psychiatrist, licensed psychologist, child neurologist, developmental pediatrician or a pediatrician with specialized autism training.
- [ ] **Apply to DDD:** 1-844-770-9500, option 4, or DDDAPPLY@azdes.gov. Send proof of diagnosis, IEP and MET report, proof of Arizona residency and insurance cards.
- [ ] **Look into SSI and AHCCCS.** At 18, only the young adult's own income counts for SSI.
- [ ] **Plan for life after high school.** The IEP must include a transition plan by the end of 9th grade or age 16, whichever comes first.

Adult (18 and older)

- [ ] **Write your story.** Childhood signs, school struggles and what's hard now. Ask family for memories and find old records.
- [ ] **Find an evaluator who sees adults**, and ask to be evaluated for both autism and ADHD. On AHCCCS, behavioral health assessments need no referral: call member services.
- [ ] **Check if DDD fits.** The disability must have started before 18 and cause significant limits in at least 3 areas of daily life.
- [ ] **Get support for work:** Vocational Rehabilitation (Arizona DES), 1-800-563-1221. The Job Accommodation Network (askjan.org) gives free advice.
- [ ] **Look into SSI or SSDI.** If disability began before 22, you may qualify on a parent's work record (Disabled Adult Child benefit).

Keep these numbers handy

Encircle Families (free parent help)	(800) 237-3007
Disability Rights Arizona (free legal help)	(602) 274-6287
AzEIP (birth to 3)	(888) 592-0140
DDD applications	1-844-770-9500, option 4
Emergency	911
Mental health crisis	Call or text 988
Arizona Statewide Crisis Line	1-844-534-4673

Plain-language guides, a glossary of 240+ terms and Arizona resources: **askalle.com**

Words you'll hear

AHCCCS	Arizona's Medicaid program. People say it like "access."
ALTCS	The Arizona Long Term Care System, AHCCCS's program for people who need long-term care. It can pay for many DDD services. People say it like "all-tex."
AzEIP	The Arizona Early Intervention Program: services for babies and toddlers, birth to age 3, with delays or conditions like Down syndrome.
DDD	Arizona's Division of Developmental Disabilities. It serves people with autism, cerebral palsy, epilepsy, intellectual disability or Down syndrome.
IEP (Individualized Education Program)	A written plan with a student's special education goals, services and supports.
504 plan	A school plan under Section 504 that gives a student accommodations, like extra time or a quiet space, so they have equal access to learning.
MET (Multidisciplinary Evaluation Team)	In Arizona, the team that reviews evaluations and decides if a student qualifies for special education. Parents are members.
Prior Written Notice (PWN)	A written explanation the school must give when it proposes or refuses to start or change a student's evaluation, placement or services.
IEE (Independent Educational Evaluation)	An evaluation by someone outside the school. If you disagree with the school's evaluation, you can ask for one at public expense.
IFSP (Individualized Family Service Plan)	The plan for a baby or toddler in early intervention (AzEIP), written with the family. It's the early intervention version of an IEP, for birth to age 3.
Transition plan	Part of the IEP, required in Arizona by the end of 9th grade or age 16, whichever comes first, with goals for work, school and independent living after high school.
SSI (Supplemental Security Income)	Monthly payments for children and adults with disabilities who have limited income and resources. In 2026 the federal maximum is $994 a month, and countable resources must be $2,000 or less for one person.

More than 240 terms explained: **askalle.com/learn/words**