

Questions to Help Choose a Doctor or Primary Care Provider for Your Child with Disabilities or Special Healthcare Needs

When choosing a doctor or healthcare provider for your child with a disability or special healthcare needs, it's important to consider the following factors to ensure the best care for your child:

Experience and Approach to Care

- Does the doctor have experience working with children with disabilities or special healthcare needs?
- Does the doctor work with you to create a care plan that is tailored to your child's unique needs?
- Does the doctor enjoy working with children who have special needs?
- How does the doctor approach understanding your child's specific disability or medical condition?
- Does the doctor take the time to understand and support your family's values, culture, and priorities when making healthcare decisions?

Availability, Flexibility, and Hours

- Does the doctor have time in their practice to see children with disabilities or special healthcare needs who may require more frequent visits?
- Is the clinic flexible enough to offer longer appointments if needed?
- Will the doctor take the time to carefully review your child's health history, diagnosis, and any ongoing concerns?
- Does the clinic provide after-hours or weekend care if your child has urgent medical needs?
- How does the doctor handle emergencies, especially those related to your child's specific needs or conditions?

Communication and Access

- How does the doctor build trust with parents and caregivers? Are they open to listening to your concerns and feedback?
- Does the doctor offer regular check-ins or follow-up appointments to keep track of your child's progress?
- Can you get an appointment or speak with the doctor quickly if your child needs to be seen on short notice?
- How are emergencies handled? Will other members of the healthcare team be familiar with your child if the doctor isn't available?
- How are urgent messages handled? Is there a reliable system for reaching the doctor or clinic staff quickly?
- Can you communicate with the doctor by phone, email, or text securely, and what is the typical response time?

Accessibility and Office Environment

- Is the clinic accessible and accommodating for children with mobility challenges or other special needs (e.g., wheelchair access, sensory-friendly spaces)?
- Is the office environment comfortable and welcoming for children with sensory sensitivities (e.g., lighting, noise level, and waiting area accommodations)?

Coordination with Other Providers

- Does the doctor and clinic staff communicate with your child's specialists, therapists, and other providers to coordinate care?
- Can you and the doctor create clear care protocols for managing your child's needs during illness, hospital stays, or other special circumstances?
- How will the doctor communicate your child's needs to other providers if they are unavailable (e.g., on vacation or out of the office)?
- How does the doctor feel about you seeking a second opinion? Are they open to working with other specialists if necessary?

Support for Parents and Caregivers

- Does the doctor offer resources or support for parents and caregivers such as information on community services, financial assistance, or other family resources?
- How does the doctor encourage you to be an active partner in your child's care and decision-making process?

Behavioral and Developmental Support

- Does the doctor have experience managing behavioral or developmental challenges in children with special needs? How do they approach these issues?
- Does the doctor have a network of professionals (e.g., developmental pediatricians, psychologists, social workers) to consult when needed?

Insurance and Cost Considerations

- Does the doctor accept your insurance, and are there any out-of-pocket costs you should be aware of for your child's care?
- How does the doctor handle billing for special services, such as longer appointments or care coordination that may be needed for a child with special healthcare needs?

Transition to Adulthood

- Does the doctor have experience supporting the transition from pediatric to adult care for children with special needs? How do they approach this important shift in care?
- Will the doctor help manage the transition to adult healthcare providers when the time comes? Can the doctor provide referrals to adult healthcare providers who specialize in your child's specific condition or needs?