

## Finding the Right Doctor for Your Child with Special Needs

If you have changed insurance plans, have moved or for other reasons need to find a new primary care doctor for your child with special needs, this fact sheet will give you ideas and questions to ask to make sure the doctor is right for your child and family.

The right doctor will partner with you to create and maintain coordinated care within a medical home. To learn more go to [familyvoicesofwisconsin.com/care-coordination/](http://familyvoicesofwisconsin.com/care-coordination/)

### What Steps Should I Take When Choosing a Primary Care Doctor?

- Think about what you want from your health care provider and write it down.
- Make a list of the doctors you want to check out. Talking to family, friends or co-workers, especially if they have children with special needs, may help you create a list of names.
- Call the clinic and request a brief visit with the doctor. Most clinics will set up an appointment so that you can interview the doctor in person.
- Come to this visit prepared. You may or may not want to bring your child along to this appointment. (see “Interview Questions to Assist You in Choosing A Doctor”)
- After your visits compare what you learned and decide who fits your family best.
- Once you have chosen the best doctor, set up an initial appointment and provide information about your child to the doctor and their staff.

### What is a Medical Home?

A medical home is a trusting partnership between you, your child, and your pediatric primary health care team. A medical home means that your health care team:

- Knows your child's health history
- Listens to your concerns and needs (as well as your child's)
- Treats your child with compassion
- Has an understanding of their strength
- Develops a care plan with you and your child when needed
- Respects and honors your culture and traditions

Your health care team can help you and your child access and coordinate specialty care, other health care and educational services, in and out of home care, family support, and other public/private community services that are important to the overall well-being of you and your child. (Based on AAP's [healthychildren.org](http://healthychildren.org) site - 2016)

### What is Care Coordination?

Care coordination is the process that links children and their families with needed health care services, along with other supports and services. A child and family's needs, goals, and choices are included in a care plan that is shared with all team members.



## Interview Questions to Assist You in Choosing a Doctor

Below are suggested questions you can ask during a visit with a new doctor or other health care provider.

- Does the doctor have experience working with children with special needs?
- Will the doctor work with you to develop plans of care?
- Does the doctor enjoy working with children who have special needs?
- Does the doctor have time in his or her practice for a child with special needs?
- Is there flexibility in the clinic practice to allow longer appointments?
- Will the doctor sit down with you to review your child's history and diagnosis thoroughly?
- Will you be able to see that doctor when your child needs to be seen on short notice?
- How are emergencies handled?
- How are urgent messages handled?
- Can you communicate with the doctor by voice mail, e-mail or text messaging and what is the typical response time?
- How will the doctor communicate your child's diagnosis and special needs with partners when your doctor is not on call or is on vacation?
- Can you and the doctor write down protocols for procedures required when your child is ill, which will be available for the doctor's partners in case of emergency room visits?
- How will the doctor feel about you obtaining a second opinion?
- How will the doctor communicate with your child's other medical and non-medical providers (including specialists or non-network providers)?
- Will the doctor help your child transition to adult care providers at the appropriate time?

### If you have questions or need help finding services contact the following organizations:

- **Regional Centers for Children and Youth with Special Health Care Needs** is a network of 5 centers dedicated to supporting families who have children with special needs at [dhs.wisconsin.gov/cyshcn/regionalcenters.htm](https://dhs.wisconsin.gov/cyshcn/regionalcenters.htm)
- **Wisconsin First Step**, a statewide information and referral hotline, can assist families with finding mental health providers and other supports at **1-800-642-STEP (7837)** or [www.mch-hotlines.org/wisconsin-first-step](http://www.mch-hotlines.org/wisconsin-first-step)

Adapted with permission from "Working with Doctors: A Parent's Guide to Navigating the Health System" by Carolyn Allshouse, The Pacer Center, Minneapolis, MN, 2001)