

FINDING THE RIGHT DOCTOR

Your child’s primary care doctor is an important partner in caring for your child with special health care needs and/or disabilities. Your child’s doctor will work with your family to provide on-going medical care, help you develop short term and long term goals for your child and assist you in finding the services and supports your child may need to reach his or her maximum potential. The right doctor will help you create a Medical Home for your child and your family.

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 national initiative that promotes partnerships between families caring for children and youth with special health care needs and the doctors and medical staff they trust. Families and doctors work together and figure out and get the medical and non-medical services and supports that your child needs.

A Medical Home: What should I expect from a doctor?

- Your doctor and clinic staff should know and remember you.
- Your doctor should work as a partner with you and learn from your child and from your family.
- Your doctor should respect your ideas, customs and beliefs.
- Your doctor should help you coordinate care and information among all the different professionals and services.



Interview Questions to Assist You in Choosing A Doctor

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 appointment times for your child’s needs?

Will the doctor sit down with you to review your child’s history and diagnosis thoroughly?

Will you have access to the doctor when your child is ill?

How are emergencies handled?

How are urgent messages handled?

Can you communicate with a doctor by voice mail or e-mail?

What is the typical response time frame?

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 feel about communicating with your child’s other doctors (including specialists)?

How long will this doctor continue working with your child?

Will the doctor help your child transition to adult care providers at the appropriate time?

(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)