

FAMILY SUPPORT SERVICES

What is a Family Support Center and how can my family get connected?

A Family Support Center provides families with a range of services and supports that include: information and referral, navigating state and local services, support groups, trainings, networking, mentoring, and social/recreational opportunities. Family support services are designed to provide information, assistance, and a wide range of supportive services to families with children and adults with disabilities living at home. These services should be flexible and respectful of cultural, social, financial, and spiritual differences. Family Support Centers also administer Flexible Funding to families.

- Families can access information and referral from Family and Autism Support Centers even if they are not yet eligible for services from DDS. They are available to assist with the DDS eligibility application process.
- The DDS Family Support Directory is available online at <https://www.mass.gov/lists/dds-family-support-services-information>
- This includes information about local Family Support Centers across the state, the Centers focusing on specific culturally and linguistically diverse populations, and regional Autism Support Centers.
- When found eligible for DDS services, families should receive a one page welcome flier from DDS that describes the services available at these Centers with contact information for their local Family Support and Autism Support Center. Families are encouraged to contact their local Center to obtain additional information and to get on their mailing list.

How can flexible funding be used and how is it allocated?

DDS provides Family Support Flexible Funding which is intended to support families in their caregiving roles and help address unmet needs, such as respite. This funding is authorized by the DDS Area Office and administered through the local Family Support Center. Staff at the Family Support Center assist families in identifying allowable uses for this funding based on their needs, complete the Expenditure Plan, and make this funding available through reimbursement for purchases, direct payment to a vendor, or through a stipend. Link for current Guidelines <https://www.mass.gov/lists/dds-family-support-services-information>

Note that these are updated periodically.

- Family support allocations are determined by the DDS Area Office based on the needs of the family. If your needs change, your allocation could change to reflect these needs based on available budget resources. In most circumstances the DDS Area Office and Family Support Center make these decisions jointly.
- Having conversations with your DDS Service Coordinator and the Family Support Center is valuable since your needs may change and other services and supports may be available.
- DDS also offers respite, adult companion, and other in-home and community support services through contracts with qualified provider agencies. Families can speak to their DDS Service Coordinator about these other support service options, and if they may better address the needs of their family member with a disability.

What supports are available for families with intensive needs?

DDS offers several specialized and comprehensive family support programs including the Medically Complex Program for children living at home with significant cognitive, physical and health care needs, and the Intensive Flexible Family Support Program (IFFS) for families facing increased stress and challenges caring for their child at home. These programs have specific eligibility criteria and referrals need to be made by the local DDS Service Coordinator. DDS also administers the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education/DDS (DESE/DDS) Program, and the Children's Autism Waiver Program. These two programs have specific eligibility requirements and application processes. Your DDS Area Office Service Coordinator can provide you with more information about these service options.