

LIGHTHOUSE FREE PARENT GUIDE

Your First 30 Days After Diagnosis

You just heard the words. Here's what comes next —
one gentle week at a time.



Guiding families from diagnosis to thriving

First — Take a Breath

If you're reading this in the days after your child's diagnosis, we want you to know something before anything else: your child is the same wonderful child they were before the appointment. The diagnosis didn't change them — it gave you a map to understand them better.

You don't have to do everything at once. This guide breaks the first month into four gentle weeks. Some weeks you'll do more, some less. That's okay. The only wrong move is believing you have to figure this out alone.

One more thing, parent to parent: it's okay to grieve, to feel relief, to feel both in the same hour. Every feeling you have is allowed here.

WEEK 1

Breathe & Understand

Processing the news and the paperwork

■ Let yourself feel everything — without judgment.

Shock, grief, relief, hope, guilt — all normal, often all at once. None of them make you a bad parent.

■ Read the diagnosis report slowly, and highlight what you don't understand.

Terms like "ASD Level 1/2/3," "DSM-5 criteria," and assessment names are learnable. You'll speak this language soon.

■ Stay off the Google rabbit holes — stick to two or three trusted sources.

2am searches tend to find the scariest results, not the truest ones. Autism Speaks, CDC, and your provider's materials are enough for now.

■ Tell close family on YOUR timeline, in your own words.

You are not obligated to announce anything to anyone until you're ready.

WEEK 2

Get On the Lists

Yes, even before you feel ready

■ Call your insurance company and ask the exact questions in the box below.

Write down the name of who you spoke to and the date — you will thank yourself later.

■ Get on ABA therapy waitlists immediately — apply to 2-3 centers at once.

Waitlists can run weeks to months. Being on a list costs nothing and holds your place while you decide.

■ Ask your pediatrician for speech and occupational therapy referrals.

Many children benefit from multiple therapies — evaluations can run in parallel.

■ Request complete records from the provider who did the diagnosis.

Every therapy center, school, and specialist will ask for them. Keep digital and paper copies.

■ The Insurance Call — Ask Exactly This:

- Is ABA therapy covered under my plan? Is prior authorization required?
- What are my deductible, copay, and out-of-pocket maximums for behavioral therapy?
- Are speech and occupational therapy covered separately? How many visits per year?
- Are there in-network ABA providers near me? Can you send me the list?
- Is there an age limit or annual cap on therapy coverage?

WEEK 3

Build Your System

Getting organized for the road ahead

■ **Start a dedicated binder or digital folder for everything.***Diagnosis report, insurance letters, evaluation results, therapy notes — one home for all of it.*■ **If your child is 3 or older, contact your public school district about an IEP evaluation.***Free services may be available through the school system even before kindergarten — ask about “Child Find.”*■ **Enroll in a free parent training course.***Look for programs like the VCU Parent Playbook or Autism Internet Modules — designed exactly for parents at this stage.*■ **Consider whether a developmental pediatrician or integrative practitioner belongs on your team.***Some families explore nutritional testing and whole-child support alongside therapy. Optional, but worth knowing about.*

WEEK 4

Care for the Caregiver

You matter in this story too

■ **Find your people — one parent group, online or local.***The 2am questions hit different when someone who's lived it answers. You are not alone in this.*■ **Lean on your faith or support system, whatever that looks like for you.***This journey is carried better in community than in isolation.*■ **Watch yourself for burnout signs: sleeplessness, isolation, running on empty.***You cannot pour from an empty cup. Caring for yourself IS caring for your child.*■ **Celebrate your child this week — intentionally.***Dance in the kitchen. Take the trip to the park. The diagnosis is one chapter; your child is the whole beautiful book.**“Thirty days from now, you will know more, feel steadier, and have a plan in motion.**A year from now, you will be the parent someone else turns to.**The road is walkable — and it is lit.”*

— With love, from parents who've been there ■

This guide is free. Share it with any family who needs it.