

Contracting with Service Providers

Information for Parents



CONTRACTING WITH SERVICE PROVIDERS – INFORMATION FOR PARENTS

After you have received a diagnosis of ASD for your child, you will embark on a journey to find the best services and treatment plan for your child. While this may at first seem a daunting task, there are many advantages to making the key decisions on who will be working with your child. One of ACT's roles is to help families learn about this process and to support you in managing your child's program. Here our focus is on contracting with service providers, but ACT's staff and website can provide you with a wealth of related information on navigating the Registry for Autism Service Providers (RASP) and understanding qualifications.

ACT Information Officers are on hand to provide you personalized support. Other key resources are ACT's website and the Autism Manual for B.C.:

- Chapter 3: "Developing a Treatment Team for a Child with Autism Spectrum Disorder"
- Tips for parents on assessing professional qualifications

AUTISM FUNDING & THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE PARENT

The Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) provides you with guidelines regarding the autism funding you receive for your child. Although you do not hold funds directly in your own bank account, you have the overall authority to decide how funds are spent for your child within their requirements. You are responsible for choosing, interviewing, and hiring the appropriate service providers. Think of it as running a small business. The product is a good treatment program for your child.

THE IMPORTANCE OF A CONTRACT

In the experience of ACT's staff, the best way to develop a successful working relationship with a RASP service provider is to have a written contract in which the responsibilities of both the family and the professionals working with your child are detailed.

WHAT IS A CONTRACT?

A contract is a formal agreement between you and the professional that outlines the services and programs that you will receive from the provider. By signing the contract, you are accepting all of the terms and conditions. Contracts are legally binding, so it is important to read them carefully and understand before you sign!

Basic components of a good contract when contracting with an agency or behavior consultant:

- A clearly written description of the services being provided to your child
- Behavior Plan of Intervention (BPI)
 - Time required for assessment, observation and draft
 - Timelines for completing the BPI and how soon can families expect an intervention to begin after the assessment is completed?
- Start and end date of services (referenced to your child's funding period)
- Billing cycle (date that the invoice will be submitted to Autism Funding Unit or AFU)
- Service providers involved (names and titles and job descriptions)
- Supervision information (Category A and B consultants, program managers, and behavior interventionists)
- Hourly rate for each service provider or monthly maximum costs negotiated between the family and service provider (easier to manage budget)
- A statement that your consent is needed to increase negotiated monthly maximum hours
- Billable items (identify and describe initial billable items and ongoing billable items including time required to complete each). These may include:
 - Training of BIs (costs and process for hiring and training BIs)
 - Mileage/travel time
 - Email and telephone meetings/consultation
 - School visits
 - Training behavior interventionists/overlap training
 - Report writing/preparing the Behavior Plan of Intervention
 - Letters of justification
 - Exceeding booked appointment (e.g., doorway chatting)
 - Telephone calls to the AFU on behalf of the parents (not regarding invoices)
 - Reviewing documents from other professionals
 - Preparing program materials
 - Is there a minimum monthly cost – will this be broken out in the invoice so you know what is being charged for?
 - Team meetings (who attends, how often – are parents included, can they veto meetings?)
 - Prepping for meetings
- Cancellation of sessions/missed appointments (often families are charged for missed sessions/meetings; contracts can stipulate that providers will work on the child's program—development, review, updates—if sessions are cancelled)
- Confidentiality and release of information (specify who you are giving permission to speak to)
- Are invoices provided and signed by parents before sending to AFU? (see below)

- Ownership of program materials (are they provided to parent at the end of the agreement?)
- Ownership of print/video data for your child – will this be returned to you?
- Are services home- or center-based?
- Process for changes to treatment or services (are parents consulted in advance?)
- Termination agreement (how much notice is required?)

If you don't find all of the above details specified in your contract, ask the behavior consultant to add this information so there is clarity before the service begins. Remember that all terms of a contract may be negotiated.

We recommend that you ask to see a sample contract and Behavior Plan of Intervention (BPI) in advance. Take your time reading and reviewing a contract with a potential provider. Do not be pressured into signing before all of your questions have been answered. If English is not your first language, ask for someone to translate.

PAYING YOUR SERVICE PROVIDER USING AUTISM FUNDING

Once you have entered into a contract with a service provider, you will need to complete a Request to Pay form with the Autism Funding Unit that authorizes payment for services received by the professional. We recommend:

- Adding a requirement that the service provider gets your signature on the monthly invoices before they are sent to the AFU. This will mean that you need to be very responsive to requests for your sign-off, as good service providers need to be paid in a timely fashion or you may lose their services!
- Never signing blank invoices or "Request to Pay" forms.

Keep in mind that the AFU requires that the work is done before payment is made. ACT advises against parents allowing service providers to bill the child's account in advance. MCFD has a helpful presentation to guide you through the funding/payment process. This is available for viewing on the ACT website: Invoice Payment Method.

TIMESHEETS AND INVOICES

We recommend you keep a calendar of service provider visits with dates and the number of hours of service. Service providers should also maintain a log that lists the services provided. A sample timesheet is included.

Once you have signed a contract and the service provider has carried out the work in a timely and professional manner, you will be invoiced for services rendered. It is important that you make every effort to review the invoice, sign it and send it to the Autism Funding Unit, also in a timely manner. A sample invoice is included, and we've added a brief description of the services or billable items normally included on an invoice.

FINDING THE RIGHT PROFESSIONAL

Finding the right professional to work with your child may be a series of firsts for your family—first exposure to the complex world of autism intervention plans, first time hiring service professionals and becoming an employer, and signing your first contract. Chapter 3 of *Living & Working with Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder in British Columbia – A Manual for Parents & Community Professionals* outlines what you can expect from a behavior consultant, their qualifications, and the difference between Category A (independent) and B (supervised) consultants. Services can vary significantly between providers. We recommend you shop around and check out the competition. Many behavior consultants complete profiles on the RASP. These will provide you with valuable information on their background and practice. Read several profiles and ask questions about their qualifications, experience and their approach to autism treatment. Ask for references.

WHAT ABOUT CONTRACTING WITH PROFESSIONALS OTHER THAN BEHAVIOR CONSULTANTS?

We have outlined recommendations for contracting with behavior consultants mainly because this professional group does not have a provincially based professional body (e.g., a College) that oversees services and qualifications. However, the terms and conditions of a contract with a professional on the RASP will have many common elements beyond the services provided, and it is recommended that you are equally diligent when finding and hiring speech language pathologists, occupational therapists and physical therapists.

Billable Item Descriptions

Billable Items for Behavior Interventionists (BI)	Description
Training	Attendance in workshops or meeting/orientation set up by the BC
Intervention	Direct work with the child – may be at home or at other settings like daycares, community programs, social skills groups, etc.
Program development	Updating data sheets, preparing binder/programs, overlap with BC
Team meeting	Meeting with parent, consultant and other team members

Billable Items for Program Managers	Description
BI training or overlap	Time spent training or supervising BIs
Program development	Updating data sheets, preparing binder/programs, overlap with BC
Team meeting	Meeting with parent, consultant and other team members
Program manager training	Attendance in workshops or meeting/orientation set up by the BC

Billable Items for Behavior Consultants (BC) (Behavior consultants should be on the RASP)	Description
Preparation of behavior plan of intervention	Assessment and development of BPI
BI training or overlap	Supervision of behavior interventionists
Team meeting	Time spent with parents, BIs and other team members
Report writing	Preparation and completion of reports for initial assessment, transition reports, annual reports, or at parent's request (e.g., for school purposes)
Letters of justification	Written at parent's request (e.g., therapeutic _____)
Program development	Initial and ongoing development of programs and lessons
Program review	Regular maintenance of programs – review of targets, acquisition rates, etc. Tied in with program development
Direct consulting	Providing feedback to parents or BIs at request – can be done in person, by telephone or email
Assessment	Direct work with child to assess skill level for program development
Parent training	Workshop or meeting with parents for training about the program or specific strategies
Video review	Review of intervention or pre-recorded situation – this is discussed previously with the parent
Travel time	Time spent to travel to client
School or outside-home visit	Done at request – BC meets with school team or observes child in the school or other outside-home environments such as daycares, community programs, etc.
Supervision of Category B consultant	Only applicable for Category A consultants who supervise Category B consultants – parent should incur this cost only if the meeting between the BCs is about the specific client's program
Purchase of program materials	Materials like ABLLS-R; Language Cards, Verb Cards, etc. – will be billed by the BC; it is important for the BC to specify how much each item costs

