



What is the Department of Developmental Services and who do they serve (DDS)?

The Department of Developmental Services (DDS) is a state agency that supports people with intellectual disabilities, Autism Spectrum Disorder, Prader-Willi syndrome and Smith-Magenis syndrome.

DDS also supports children and youth under age 18 who have a condition that results in "substantial functional limitations." Examples are Williams Syndrome, Down syndrome, cerebral palsy, spina bifida, fetal alcohol syndrome and fragile X syndrome.

Learn more here:

- **Your Guide to the DDS Eligibility Process:**
ddsmass.github.io/eligibility-guide/

DDS can offer a wide range of support from birth through adult life. Some examples are:

- A caseworker
- Autism support centers
- Intensive case manager (IFFS)
- Intensive behavior assessment (FIRST)
- Access to adult day and residential programs (as appropriate)
- Support for community participation
- Life coach
- Respite
- Funding for afterschool programs and camps

The level of DDS support is determined on a case-by-case basis. High levels of support are usually only offered to children and youth with extensive needs.

- **For more information on DDS in Massachusetts, visit:**
mass.gov/orgs/department-of-developmental-services

DDS through your child's life

DDS has four basic stages:

- **Birth-4:** Eligibility is based mostly on level of developmental delay. You should also have early intervention services at this age range.
- **5-18:** Eligibility is a bit more limited. You'll be assigned a caseworker and have access to a variety of support services and the autism support centers.
- **18-22:** You need to re-apply to be eligible for adult services. During this time, they evaluate what level of support you'll need as an adult and you'll be assigned a transition caseworker.
- **22 on:** If determined eligible, you'll get the necessary level of support to function as independently as possible through adult life.

A person who is eligible for DDS as a child may not necessarily be eligible for DDS as an adult and you'll need to re-apply. Your local school district should start this process. It's often called a 688 referral.

Please talk with your child's school about when they plan to submit this referral.

How do I apply for DDS support?

Visit the DDS website to find the right DDS eligibility application. Be sure to fill out the right application for your child's age and return the "Notice of Privacy Practices Acknowledgement" form. Then return the application form to your Regional DDS Office.

- Download a DDS application here:
mass.gov/lists/dds-eligibility-forms
- DDS offices are listed by region at the end of your application form. You can also visit:
mass.gov/forms/contact-dds-online

DDS will tell you by mail within 60 days about its decision. There may be a delay in being assigned a caseworker. Once you get one, we recommend reaching out to your coordinator as soon as possible to get started with accessing support.

If you need help with the application, contact DDS.

- Find your local DDS area office:
areaofficelocator.dds.state.ma.us/Home/LookupByCity

What do I need to submit with the application?

- Copy of your child's birth certificate
- Copy of your child's Social Security card
- Copy of health insurance card(s), including MassHealth/Medicaid
- Proof that you live in Massachusetts (examples: MA driver's license, MA ID card, utility bill showing your address)
- Clinical reports that document your child's diagnosis
- A completed DDS application

If your child has any of these documents, make copies and send them with the application:

Early Intervention/developmental assessments, IEP or 504 plan, Adaptive Skills assessments, ASD or ID diagnostic report, IQ report, genetic testing results

What are some tips for navigating the DDS application process?

- Be sure to complete your entire application packet. If your application isn't complete, you'll get a letter requesting what is missing or stating that your child isn't eligible for DDS services.
- Ask questions! DDS caseworkers expect that you'll have questions. It's OK to ask the same question more than once throughout the application process, and even after you get services!
- Get to know your service coordinator. They'll help you access all of the services available to your child and your family.
- Keep your service coordinator updated about changes happening with your child and your family. Financial changes, diagnosis changes, etc. can impact access to support services.
- Service coordinators caseloads can be high. If you don't hear from your coordinator or have trouble reaching your coordinator, there are supervisors and area directors that you can request to speak to.