

FINDING the

RIGHT HOUSING

Toolkit



from the Lifespan Toolbox

autism grown up
resource center

ABOUT THE LIFESPAN TOOLBOX

The Lifespan Toolbox consists of toolkits for each topic area important to the lifespan, particularly preparing for and navigating adulthood. This information is applicable for those who have a younger child, teens, and adults. In our experience, it's never too early to be thinking about adulthood.

We've collected research, lived experiences from self-advocates and others supporting them, our professional experience serving the community, and combined it into interactive web pages + PDFs to easily download and share.

The Lifespan Toolbox is a free resource center created by **Autism Grown Up**. Autism Grown Up is an online non-profit organization creating an resources to support Autistic people and people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (ID/DD) across the lifespan.

[Check out the Lifespan Toolbox here](#)

The Lifespan Toolbox is made free thanks to you! From your financial support as well as support in spreading the word and sharing about this toolkit and Autism Grown Up, helps us keep Lifespan Toolbox fresh and growing with more toolkits.

Donate:

[Donate here](#) to help us continue to maintain the Lifespan Toolbox (we keep these updated!) and grow our collection of toolkits.

Share:

Share this toolkit with families, professionals, self-advocates, and other people you know! Word of mouth is the fastest way to get resources like ours out there and helping people.

Permission is granted to reprint this Lifespan Toolkit if you acknowledge Autism Grown Up and the authors of this document.

For more information, please visit Autism Grown Up at www.autismgrownup.com

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HOW TO USE THIS TOOLKIT

→ **Interactive**

This toolkit is designed to be actionable: a tool you can put into place today! In doing so, the toolkit is organized as a digital workbook, or a regular physical workbook if you decide to print it out.

In accessing the PDF digitally, there are distinct text boxes where you can click and fill it in your information.



→ **Discussion Across Roles in the I/DD Community**

This toolkit is for all members of the I/DD community to get on the same page around a specific topic.

We will have designated sections for a specific role as needed and have purposefully included these within the toolkit so you can refer to these within your role. For example, a Self-Advocate section can help give ideas to Professionals, Clinicians, and family members on framing, language, strategies, and discussion.

Keep an eye out for the symbols below for helpful tips related to each role:



→ **Feedback & Questions**

If this guide helped you or you just have a suggestion, we would love to hear from you! You can email us at hello@autismgrowthup.com



INTRODUCTION

When it comes to the transition to adulthood, housing can simultaneously be very difficult to act on and easy to choose an option by default. Housing in general is an increasingly expensive and complicated process, and any additional support needs can further exacerbate the difficulty of finding a suitable space.

Many housing options have very real barriers to entry, whereas it can feel like the path of least resistance for adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) to stay with a caregiver. In some cases that may be the best option, but every self-advocate can benefit from a plan to attain housing that meets their needs.

Whether the goal is to seek out the residence that leads to the richest, most fulfilling life or to have a contingency plan in the event that a current living arrangement stops being tenable for some reason, it never hurts to make sure you know what is out there when it comes to your or your family member's housing needs and options!

The aim of this toolkit is to share some of the most common housing options available to adults with I/DD and some systems for weighing your own needs against the options that seem most attainable in your personal context.

We will also be covering some common needs self-advocates and their families, a self-assessment for laying out what you think is important among different housing options, an overview of different housing models, and some advice on getting started searching for options in your area.



Who is this toolkit for?

While we strongly encourage teachers and professionals to check out this toolkit and make it available to individuals and families who may benefit from learning more about housing options, the language of this guide will primarily be aimed at self-advocates, family members, and caregivers. Teachers and professionals who are not personally familiar with some of the information related to housing may also find it helpful to know what is out there and some helpful frameworks to guide informed decision making.

Regardless of how much information is out there for housing options, it has not been reaching the people who need it most. *As teachers and professionals, sharing this type of information with people who express a need, and encouraging people to share when they are facing a gap in information can make a meaningful difference in people's lives!*

If you are a self-advocate or are a member of an adult with I/DD's support network, you may not require any convincing of the importance of seeking out housing options that fit your needs. According to the [Autism Housing Network](#) (AHN), a reported 75% of adults with "intellectual or developmental disabilities" (I/DD) live with family members despite interest in a variety of residential options. In the same report, AHN shares a poll showing that over 60% of adults with I/DD dream of living in their own home or apartment.

While living with a family member is of course not inherently a bad thing, self-advocates who are interested in other living options should have the opportunity to explore what is available. It is possible to appreciate the work of a caregiver and be interested in more independent living options at the same time!

Even in situations where self-advocates would not choose any other living option over being with a particular caregiver, it is important to plan for housing continuity in the event that anything should ever prevent that living arrangement from continuing.

Whether it's a natural disaster, unforeseen life events, or the caregiver's ability to carry out necessary supports, the circumstances that necessitate a change in housing can be unpredictable and sudden. AHN reports that 1.3 million people with I/DD have a caregiver over age 60, noting that many adults will outlive their caregivers. Whether you are seeking to meet more of your personal living needs or to have a contingency plan for the future, we hope you will find some helpful starting points and frameworks for decision making in this toolkit!





OVERVIEW

Common Needs for Self-Advocates & Families

As you are likely to be well aware if you are reading this toolkit, every self-advocate is different and will have their own [unique set of needs](#) when considering housing options and independent living. The purpose of listing some of the more common needs experienced by self-advocates and families is to offer some baseline ideas that can be shaped to fit a person's individual circumstances. If you see a "common need" that you do not find relevant, feel free to skip it! Likewise, if you feel something needs to be added to the list, you should absolutely do so.

Finally, as with any list where we talk about criteria and available options, it is important to note that different adults and families are understandably tied to a combination of their personal resources and geographical location. Sadly, not all self-advocates will be in a position to check every box on their list with the options available. In cases where you don't feel any of your current options are meeting the type of standard we or you think they should meet, you are well within your rights to weigh the pros and cons to the best of your ability. We hope in those instances that this toolkit can serve as a reminder of the standards you deserve so that if a better opportunity comes along you will be ready to act! With that in mind, let's dive in to some of the most common living space needs.



Comfortable Space

- This need might seem obvious, but it's also something that can be easy to overlook when a lot of other factors seem to be aligning. We are all capable of putting up with some degree of discomfort, but even seemingly small things can add up when you are enduring discomfort in your personal living space!
- Certainly, most self-advocates and families will consider comfort very early in the process, and we want to reinforce that you are right to stand up for this need and to see it as one of the most important factors in your decision-making process.
- Sometimes it can be hard to identify something as particularly comfortable but things do jump out to us as uncomfortable, be it physical discomfort or uncertainty about the safety of the environment.
- Even if you feel like you are nitpicking, it is better to be honest about the things that bother you so that if you do choose to put up with them you can at least have a plan for managing or resolving your discomfort.



Space to be their authentic selves

- It should go without saying that a living space can be a sanctuary where a person can recharge and prepare to meet the challenges of the day. Asking someone to live in a space where they have to devote energy to masking undermines the core purpose of finding a good living space.
- This can be an incredibly subjective assessment, based on your understanding of yourself and your impression of the space you are considering moving into. Some spaces might be wonderful if not for the presence of a few mean individuals or indifferent to the needs of neurodivergent people to the point that completing your day-to-day tasks.
- Other spaces might feel incredibly welcoming, or welcoming enough that you are willing to overlook a few shortcomings.
- What's most important are your criteria for feeling comfortable living and acting authentically and whether the living space in question meets those standards.



Space to grow

- When looking at long-term living spaces, it's important to remember that the lives we live today are often quite different from the lives we lived 10 years ago, and likely will also be quite different compared to 10 years from now.
- For self-advocates looking for housing options, it's worth considering what you want to accomplish in the time you'll be in a particular living space and whether that space can accommodate the ways you will grow and change.
- While we can all attest to how hard it is to predict the ways we will grow and change, one good litmus test is how you feel about your autonomy in that space right now.
- If you already feel like your goals and needs are brushing up against the limits of what a space allows or can offer, it's worth thinking about how long that space will remain a viable option.



Space to pursue interests and goals

- Interests and goals can change quite a bit from person to person but are invariably impacted quite a bit by where you live and what resources are available in that space. For career-focused people, proximity to workplace or particular job opportunities might be a major factor.
- Some people may have hobbies that they need to be able to do in their living space, while others may just need a reliable way to get to their usual hobby spaces.
- The important thing is that your living space does not create an undue burden on you every time you want to take a step on the career ladder or just participate in an interest you love!



Space to connect with others

- [“A space to connect with others”](#) can mean different things to different people.
- Some folks might feel they do best with a roommate they can talk to on a regular basis, while others might just be interested in making sure there’s a popular social space somewhere near their living space that they can go to when they feel like it.
- In what way do you like to connect with others? What does your living space need so you can make sure you have that kind of connection?



Supervision to whatever extent needed by the individual

- For some self-advocates, some degree of supervision is necessary to safety or quality of life. In these cases, it is worth considering whether the degree of intervention in a certain living space matches up with your needs.
- Supervision should serve to enhance a living environment, and any level of supervision beyond what is necessary can do more harm than good!
- Many self-advocates and families have a reasonable sense of whether and to what extent any supervision may be necessary.
- When exploring housing options, it is worth laying out what is needed with as much specificity as possible, as well as where you draw the line on what constitutes too much supervision.



Quality of life

- One might understandably notice a fair bit of overlap between quality of life and comfort, and that’s with good reason! Comfort is a major component of quality of life. When we talk about it in this toolkit, quality of life will broadly refer to the environment that a living space is in, from amenities to what it is like spending your day to day interacting with everything the area has to offer.
- Most environments have all sorts of different features that positively or negatively impact quality of life, and many of those things can be highly subjective! For example, many people love to live in places with a healthy nightlife and lots of live music because they don’t want to travel far to participate in those things. For other folks that would be one of the hardest places to live because there’s too much ambient noise too late at night.
- It’s completely normal to weigh lots of different factors when deciding on whether a place offers a sufficient quality of life.
- One exercise that can help is listing out all of the positives and negatives and ranking them based on how much they matter to you.



Trained professionals who can address the individual's specific needs

- For self-advocates who require the support of a trained professional, it may require an additional layer of effort to either ensure your current arrangement works in a new living space or that you are able to secure a new arrangement.
- Avoid nasty surprises late in the process by checking in with any professionals you currently work with regarding any living spaces you are seriously considering!



Varied levels of support (no support, drop-in, low, moderate, significant)

- In a perfect world we would just be able to describe the support needs of any given individual and find the perfect match for those needs. In practice, it often helps to have a framework for what different degrees of offered support might constitute.
- [AHN](#) offers some helpful baselines to describe these different levels of support and what you might be able to expect when a location or service describes themselves as reaching a certain level of support.
- Some self-advocates have no support needs that require outside help and should not be subjected to such services if they are not wanted.
- Adults in need of **drop-in support** may benefit from a direct support professional (DSP) visiting every few days or upon request, but for the most part live independently and without direct support.
- Adults meeting the **low support** threshold typically require day to day assistance with a few tasks but otherwise can live independently.
- Adults meeting the **moderate support** threshold typically require periodic assistance throughout the day but are independent for considerable stretches throughout the day.
- Adults in need of **strong support** can have a variety of different needs, and AHN notes some of the potential forms that strong support can take:
 - *24/7 support* entails full time access to a DSP who may work with multiple people at the same time.
 - *Daily medical support* entails the assistance of a medically trained professional to assist people who have specific medical needs.
 - *High behavioral support* entails day to day assistance in preventing and managing high risk behavior such as self-injury or aggression.
 - *One on one support* entails a need for the full, individualized support of "at least one Direct Support Professional at all times."



When considering all of the different factors that can go into a housing decision it can be easy to get stuck on where to get started.

The purpose of this self-assessment is to have a framework for spurring your thought process pertaining to your housing preferences for reference when you are assessing potential living spaces.

1. What goals do I want to achieve in the next living space? In what order do I want to prioritize these goals?

Guidance:

- Do I want to live independently and/or become more independent?
- Do I want to find a job and/or advance in my career?
- Do I want to maintain much of my old lifestyle and/or establish a new routine?
- Do I want the opportunity to meet new people or maintain connections with people I know?
- Do I want to find a space where I feel comfortable being myself?
- Do I want to expand my role as a member of my community?
- Do you have any further goals I want to add to the list?

2. How can the next living space help achieve these goals?

Guidance:

- Think about some of the goals you listed under the previous bullet points. How can the living space you are considering contribute to your reaching your goals. Will it present any obstacles?
- Will choosing a particular living space prioritize some of your goals over others?

3. What are some of the bare minimums I need from my living space?

Guidance:

- What is the minimum access to essential amenities such as food and essential services that I require?
- Are there any supports I know I will need no matter where I choose to live?
- Are there any special amenities I require that may not come standard with the majority of living spaces?
- Is there any type of behavior from potential roommates that I find 100% unacceptable?
- What are some bare minimums I require of the physical space?
- Does anything else about a potential living space qualify as a "dealbreaker"?

4. What are some things that would be nice to have in my living space?

Guidance:

- Do you have a commute that would be made easier by living in a convenient location?
- Is there a particular type of environment I would want to live in (for example: close to nightlife, a quiet neighborhood, a more rural area, etc.)?
- Are there any particular hobbies I'd like to be able to participate in within reasonable proximity of your new living space?

5. How do my resources align with my needs?

Guidance:

- What kinds of housing options align most closely with my needs and preferences?*
- Do they represent attainable options for me? If not, is it possible to work through those obstacles as a long-term goal?*
- Are there any way to secure outside help to achieve this particular living option?*
- If my current resources require me to prioritize my needs, where am I able to compromise?*



Overview of Housing Options

Just as it's important to have a strong sense of your own needs and preferences to make the most informed housing decision, it is also important to have a strong sense of what housing models are out there as a baseline for your decision making.

We will start with a brief description of each model then dig a little deeper into situations where they might be the right choice as well as some pros and cons.

Housing Models

	Solo, Independent Living	Living by yourself with no special support.
	Independent Living with a Roommate	Living with no special support and with a roommate who has no special obligation to you beyond being a roommate.
	Independent Living with Roommates	Living with no special support and multiple roommates who have no special obligation to you beyond being roommates.
	Living with a Family Member	Living with or without special support with a family member. A family member could function like a roommate but often takes some caregiver responsibility.
	Supervised Apartment	Living primarily independently with supports available with or without a roommate. Sometimes serves as a helpful way to transition to independent living.
	Supervised Group Home	Living in a group setting with continuous rotating support available. This form of housing is typically aimed at potential residents with high day to day support needs.
	Planned Community	A planned residential areas that often includes multiple housing units and additional amenities. Different planned communities may focus on offering specific types of amenities.
	Assisted Living	Individual or group residences in which support staff are consistently available to provide assistance whenever needed.
	Intermediate Care Facility (ICF)	Refers to a range of residential facilities that are state certified to meet Medicaid requirements. Individuals eligible for an ICF benefit under Medicaid is entitled to services at one of these facilities.
	Alternative Family Living (AFL)	AFL settings typically offer a high support, family like setting. Hosts are reviewed by the state and are required to maintain the living space in question as their primary residence.



Solo, Independent Living

Living alone and independently is a goal for many self-advocates, and those who do not have any support needs may be able to choose from a much wider range of housing options. At the same time, self-advocates who do not have special support needs may be less likely to receive other forms of assistance that can make it easier to obtain housing.

People living independently may still have preferences and “deal breakers” that make some living situations incompatible or less desirable. If you feel ready to live alone this option should always be on your list!

(+) PRO	(-) CON
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Freedom and independence Ability to consider a wider range of compatible options Assurance of control over day to day living decisions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adults who anticipate needing assistance in some way need to ensure this is possible through their own support network This option may not be attainable through benefits Lack of roommate could necessitate working with support network to plan for emergencies



Independent Living with a Roommate

While many self-advocates want to live independently, for many that does not necessarily mean living alone! Roommates can support each other in all sorts of ways without having any obligation or duty to do so. It’s much more about sharing the workload of running a living space than providing any special assistance!

A roommate is not a replacement for a caregiver, however, and it can be a source of friction when you and your roommate do not agree on a particular issue.

(+) PRO	(-) CON
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Includes many of the benefits of independent solo living Can share in some of the work involved with independent living with another person Can live with a person who shares similar interests, preferences, or priorities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Roommates can sometimes be a source of conflict Roommates are not obligated to help you with anything



Independent Living with Roommates

Multiple roommates help further spread out the workload associated with independent living but things can also become increasingly complicated the more roommates you have! A group of roommates who get along can get a lot done and have a great time, but a group of roommates who don't get along can have a tough time living together.

Finding a balance between sharing responsibilities and respecting boundaries is key to making this type of living arrangement work!

(+) PRO	(-) CON
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Includes many of the benefits of independent solo living Allows for more sharing of responsibilities, helping the group take care of things more efficiently Can live with a group that shares similar interests, preferences, or priorities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Requires more sharing of resources, which may or may not be compatible with your personal needs A larger number of roommates creates more opportunity for conflict



Living with a Family Member

It's not at all uncommon for self-advocates to live with family members at all sorts of levels of support. Some adults might be completely independent otherwise and would opt for independent housing as soon as it is available to them. Others might prefer or rely on support from a caregiver. The common thread is that family members tend to represent a different kind of relationship than a roommate, particularly if they operate in some caregiving capacity.

For many families, this becomes the default option because the barriers to other options are too high. Unfortunately, even families who are happy with this kind of living arrangement need to prepare for the possibility that a primary caregiver might not be available for an adult's entire life.

(+) PRO	(-) CON
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consistent availability of support from person who has a direct connection to you Minimizes cost of living in many cases Residents can find ways to maintain independence Extremely helpful backstop when other options are not available and/or accessible 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Living with close family members may feel particularly restrictive to some people Relying on a voluntary caregiver is inherently not a permanent solution and requires a contingency plan Because this can be a "default" option for many families, there is a chance they have not considered the possibility that a more beneficial option is out there



Supervised Apartment

Many self-advocates are interested in living independently, but may be interested in building up more life skills before taking that big step.

[Supervised apartments](#) can serve as a great middle ground for building up that skillset, or as a great longer-term option for residents who like living primarily independently but also having consistent access to support staff when needed. Because supervised apartments are a more narrowly catered service, the range of selection is inherently limited compared to more open housing options.

(+) PRO	(-) CON
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promotes independence in the form of building skills and for some adults eventually moving on to independent living Offers a safety net of professional assistance when needed Often includes a degree of communal living 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> More specialized care can represent added cost Housing options where independent living is the norm are less likely to fall under a category that is eligible for support in the form of benefits More specialized living situations inherently limit your number of options compared to all available housing



Supervised Group Home

While it sounds somewhat similar to a supervised apartment, a supervised group home typically entails more intensive day to day support in a group living setting.

While it is not always easy to predict what services will fall under the purview of Medicaid benefits, supervised group homes are an example of the style of housing option aligning with the type of assistance Medicaid is trying to provide.

Supervised group homes can have a wide range of missions and may not cater solely to self-advocates as residents.

(+) PRO	(-) CON
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Extensive professional support available at all times Communal living Can serve as a stable long-term living arrangement Depending on the option may be compatible with some benefits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> May be overly restrictive for many adults Not all supervised group homes cater primarily to self-advocates Not guaranteed to be geared toward developing more independent living skills



Planned Community

Planned communities typically involve multiple residential units built around a central community. That community can provide a variety of conveniences and amenities and can be unified around a particular theme. While not all planned communities are primarily related to I/DD, you can find [some examples](#) in the AHN guide.

Planned communities can be built in such a way where many important residential needs are easily and conveniently met but residents are not necessarily receiving direct supports. One potential drawback of a planned community is that the planned convenience may limit your sense of variety and freedom to a degree.

(+) PRO	(-) CON
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Built for both independence and convenience Can be planned around a wide variety of specific needs Planned amenities can make independent living considerably easier Opportunities for shared social spaces Can include solo or group living settings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Depending on access outside of community, some options may be limited by what community presents Planned communities near you may not cover your exact needs



Assisted Living

Assisted living represents a housing option with an eye toward independent living but also a continuous availability of assistance whenever needed.

Adults with I/DD who wish to live independently but have some needs that may require immediate support at times may find that an assisted living situation is best for them!

(+) PRO	(-) CON
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Offers considerable support while emphasizing independent living Typically comes in the context of a communal space Assisted living facilities may promote broader social activity as well 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> May represent considerably more expense than outright independent living Assisted living facilities may not be focused on the needs of adults with I/DD in particular May not have the same learning and transitional opportunities as with supervised apartments



Intermediate Care Facility (ICF)

ICFs may sound incredibly specific but attempt to fill a very clear goal: helping states fulfill their obligations to their citizens under Medicaid. States have control over what facilities receive ICF designations, but subsequently adults with I/DD [eligible for ICF benefits](#) may be able to access these options when others are unattainable.

These facilities are typically geared toward addressing major support needs, and those who need to access such a facility through Medicaid may not have the benefit of considerable choice.

(+) PRO	(-) CON
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Able to accommodate individuals with high support needs • All ICFs are certified by their state • Available as an option for people eligible to receive benefits under Medicaid and cannot access other housing options 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to choose may be limited, particularly if accessing service through Medicaid • Standards for certifying ICFs vary from state to state • Some facilities may be more geared toward meeting Medicaid obligations than offering the highest level of individualized support



Alternative Family Living (AFL)

AFL is the housing option that most closely resembles a family structure. The goal with AFL is to transition into a new family structure in which regular support is available.

For adults with I/DD who felt most comfortable in a family setting but are not able to continue with it for one reason or another, AFL can be a helpful solution. Because AFL hosts must use their AFL home as a primary residence, this housing option has personal familial connections on a level that is not replicated by assisted living or intermediate care.

(+) PRO	(-) CON
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Combines familial caregiving with more official accountability • Blends both the support and encouragement toward independence of a family setting • Some individuals may simply feel more comfortable in a less formalized setting • Can be funded by Medicaid in some settings • Strong alternative for adults who prefer family living but cannot access it for whatever reason 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does not replace family living • Is typically a paid service unlike family living • Some support needs may require more professional care



Housing Unit Type

Between questions of personal independence, professional support, and availability of support networks, it can be easy to lose sight of the importance of the physical space itself. [AHN](#) covers a variety of different housing unit types covering a range of available space, privacy, amenities, and relative cost. In this section, we will go over those unit types with an eye toward which goals a given unit type is most compatible with.



Guide from Autism Housing Network (AHN)

If you've followed us this far you may have noticed we reference a particular Autism Housing Network guide quite a bit. We do so because it's one of the best resources out there for general information on this particular topic!

The only problem is that there is so much information in the guide that it can be a little intimidating to approach. It's tough to just read through what in many ways is a big reference guide. Don't hesitate to use the table of contents or keyword searches to speed up your search for information that is relevant to you!

UNIT TYPE OVERVIEW



SMALL UNIT TYPES

- Apartment
- Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU)
- Tiny Home
- Single Room Occupancy (SRO)



LARGE UNIT TYPES

- Condominium
- Townhome
- Manufactured Home
- Single-Family Home
- Adaptable Home



COMMUNAL SPACE UNIT TYPES

- Dormitory
- Facility-Based Setting

Small Unit Types

Small unit types are likely to be on the more affordable end of the cost range in exchange for a more limited space. One silver lining of not having as much personal space is that these types of housing units confer a degree of personal privacy and independence even when oriented around a communal living space.

The right type of small housing unit for you may depend on what is available and will certainly depend on your personal needs and preferences. Although some people can feel constricted by having less living space, some may also find it to be a worthwhile tradeoff to be able to live with some personal privacy.



Apartment

Apartments are typically rented, can be lived in solo or with roommates, and often exist within a community or residential area that may offer some events for socializing. Apartments typically include amenities like kitchens and personal bathrooms and showers. Apartments have the flexibility to work with fully independent living or higher support environments.



Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU)

ADUs are dwellings built on the same lot as a single family housing unit. While this housing unit type is rather specific and may be hard to plan a broad support system around, it is also a great way for a person to live both independently and in close proximity to family or other caregivers. While renting an ADU does not necessarily have to be expensive, this option may not be readily available to everyone and may not be cheap if it needs to be aligned with a number of personal needs and preferences.



Tiny Home

Tiny homes are housing units that are “under 400 square feet” according to [AHN](#). While they can be smaller than even some apartments, they can also be quite affordable compared to other housing options particularly for people focused on owning a housing unit. Tiny homes can also, however, be much more independence oriented than other housing units. While tiny homes are catching on with many people, it is still unusual to see a large community of them, and even more so for that community to be oriented around special supports.



Single Room Occupancy (SRO)

SRO housing typically exists within the context of a communal living space. Unlike apartments, amenities like kitchens and bathrooms aren’t guaranteed to be privately available to each resident. While this lack of amenities can make independent living more challenging, SRO housing can be great for living spaces that include communal amenities or are more focused on providing support. In cases where amenities like stoves and refrigerators are not necessary to the person living there, SRO housing can also have a much more affordable baseline cost.

Large Unit Types

The obvious upside of larger housing units is an increase in living space, and this often comes at a cost. People who prefer larger living spaces should not, however, simply resign themselves to feeling uncomfortable in a smaller space! Mitigating the cost of a larger space might require living independently with roommates, finding a communal space, or working with a particular residential program.

For those facing budget constraints, the tradeoff for a larger living space can often be less privacy. While larger units can be rented, the decision to commit to one can be major and may represent a more inherently long-term option for many people.



Condominium

Condominiums can represent a step up from apartments in size and are often purchased by homeowners rather than rented out. There are typically multiple condominiums within single residential buildings or areas. Condominiums can fit into the context of a more planned or supported living arrangement.



Townhome

A townhome, in a nutshell, is a house that is attached to multiple other houses. It combines many of the upsides of living in a single-family home while still operating in a more inherently communal space due to the proximity of neighbors. Townhomes of course tend to be more expensive than apartments or condominiums, but remain affordable compared to standalone single-family homes. Townhomes tend to be large enough for multiple residents while still allowing for a degree of privacy.



Manufactured Home

Per [AHN](#), the way manufactured homes tend to work can be a little tricky. Rather than a traditional foundation they are built on metal chassis. The homes themselves tend to be owned, but residents also tend to rent the lot on which they are placed. From a space standpoint, manufactured homes tend to be closer to apartments or condominiums than townhomes or single-family homes. While these living arrangements can be more affordable than houses, ownership of a

manufactured home simply is not the same long-term investment as ownership of a single-family home, townhouse, or condominium. When considering a manufactured home as an option, it is worth carefully weighing the [pros and cons](#).



Single-Family Home

Single-family homes are the official term for the houses we most often see in residential neighborhoods. Single-family homes tend to come with all the basic amenities you would expect from a living space and can comfortably accommodate multiple people. Families or caregivers who are supporting adults with I/DD may find a home setting to be the best place to do that. The cost of the living space itself tends to be on the higher end among all of the housing options listed here, whether rented or purchased. The upside is the potential for a cohesive communal living experience that still encourages and promotes independence.



Adaptable Home

Adaptable homes are defined by having movable walls that allow residents to change the home's layout and logistics. While such an option may not be common, it provides tremendous flexibility in finding the right mix of meeting a given person's independence and support needs.

Communal Space Unit Types

Communal spaces can represent affordable ways to answer the question of finding housing and meeting your support needs, but may feel more limiting when it comes to instilling independence.



Dormitory

Dormitories are intentionally communal settings, often featuring the Single Room Occupancy units mentioned above. SROs typically do not have their own special amenities, with residents instead using communal bathrooms, kitchens, or common areas.

Despite the inherent lack of privacy in a space with so many communal resources, SROs themselves still confer a degree of personal independence and autonomy.

While some dormitories may be oriented around community living, the vast majority are in colleges and are not primarily focused on providing support.



Facility-Based Setting

Facility-based settings may include dormitories or apartments but are primarily focused on ensuring residents have access to particular specialized care.

Some facility-based settings may encourage as much independence as possible while others may focus on frequent interventions.

It is important to consider your own comfort level with the types of interventions a given facility may offer before making a final decision on any particular facility setting.



Searching for Housing Options

When searching for housing options, one of the most important things you can do is to have a clear understanding of your personal criteria from the beginning. Our questionnaire earlier in this toolkit is designed to get the ball rolling on that thought process, but if you are ready to start looking for actual housing units and facilities you can start [here](#).

Both the large [AHN](#) guide and the [Residential Options Guide](#) from the Autism Society of North Carolina dig a little bit into the different types of living arrangements. If we had to summarize them quickly they cover the spectrum of living options available between complete independence and a fully supervised environment. *Residential Options* also includes some factors to consider when making a decision on which living arrangements fit best.

The following questions are meant to highlight the decision of what support level is the best fit and whether the option you are exploring is able to meet your necessary criteria. For a more detailed list of criteria for independent and group living, we strongly encourage checking out the *Residential Options* pdf, which is short enough to be worth reading through!

Questions to prepare for independent living:

- **Do I need any assistance related to personal care?**
 - Are there any steps in my routine that I need help remembering?
 - Are there any steps I am unable to complete on my own?
- **Am I able to reach a level of hygiene and health that I am happy with?**
 - Am I able to maintain a complete hygiene routine?
 - Are there any components of my personal hygiene that require outside assistance?
- **Am I able to handle my own planning and scheduling?**
 - Am I able to follow my own routines?
 - Am I able to adjust my schedule and still meet my obligations when something unexpected happens?
 - Am I able to meet deadlines?
- **Am I comfortable with the way my social skills match up with this environment?**
 - Do I feel like I'll be able to be myself?
 - Will I have the opportunity to use my social skills?
- **Am I comfortable carrying out my own household chores?**
 - If so, am I able to stick to a schedule of completion?
 - If not, is there a way to get help with chores that does not compromise independence?
- **Do I feel comfortable managing my own money?**
 - Do I currently manage my own money?
 - Do I want to manage my own money eventually?
 - Am I comfortable with making sure I remember to pay bills each month?

Questions to prepare for group living:

- **What facilities are currently out there?**
 - Depending on where you live the answer to this question can change quite rapidly over time.
- **Can I see the facilities in person?**
 - What can I learn about ahead of my visit?
 - Are there any red flags I need to ask about?
 - Do I still feel comfortable with a facility after my initial research?
- **Will I be able to talk with staff who interact with residents regularly?**
 - Does the staff talk about residents in a positive way?
 - Are staff members willing to share some of their personal success stories with residents?
 - Does the staff's training align with my personal needs?
- **What effort does this facility make to promote independence?**
 - Does this facility's level of independence match with my level of preferred independence?
- **When independence is not possible, what does this facility do to promote autonomy among its residents?**
 - Do staff members listen to resident preferences and complaints?
 - Are staff regularly available to meet resident needs?
 - Do residents have the flexibility to make different choices from time to time?
- **Do the rules feel fair and appropriate for protecting residential independence and autonomy?**
- **What stood out to you during your visit?**
 - Did you notice any evidence of autism-specific or I/DD-specific supports?
 - Did the facility offer some degree of schedule structure?
 - How much does the on the ground staff communicate with management?
 - Does it pass the gut check?



Finding Funding for Housing Options

One of the most challenging parts of anyone's journey to find suitable housing is the cost component. While some may have the luxury of paying out of pocket if necessary, housing is not cheap and finding a helpful funding option can make a huge difference. [AHN](#) again offers a list of some of the most common types of funding you can find.

Medicaid Home and Community Based Services Waiver (HCBS)

One of the most flexible funding options you can get if you are able to access it, HCBS can finance long term services and supports in non-institutional settings, offering a degree of freedom to the adult and family members that is not available under other public assistance routes. The drawback of HCBS is the challenge of actually receiving it. HCBS requirements and resources vary from [state to state](#), and some HCBS waiver applicants may wait years before qualifying for these services. While it is not exactly a short-term solution, it is worth it for any adult with I/DD who may qualify to seriously consider getting on the list as early as possible.

Medicaid Intermediate Care Facilities for Individuals with Intellectual Disability (ICF/ID)

As we covered earlier in the toolkit, ICFs are designated by the state and help fulfill state obligations to their Medicaid requirements. Unfortunately, because ICFs must be designated by the state this program does not offer the same flexibility of choice as HCBS. While your state is obligated to address the needs of people who qualify for this benefit, there is no guarantee that the facilities on offer are in the ballpark of meeting your personal needs.

Medicare

Eligible Medicare beneficiaries may be able to pay for some housing programs under the umbrella of their existing Medicare benefits.

Housing Choice Voucher Program

Also known as [Section 8 vouchers](#), one stated purpose is to assist people with disabilities in affording reasonable housing in the private market. In practice, if you are able to secure Section 8 vouchers you will still face an uphill battle to actually be able to use them, let alone use them with your top preferred option. Despite some of the challenges associated with Section 8 vouchers, they can significantly mitigate the cost of living when applied successfully.

Single Family Housing Program

Per AHN, in some rural areas the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) offers fixed rate loans for families or individuals for the [purpose of building or owning a home](#). Although this is a rather narrow program, it could prove quite valuable to those who could qualify, and it does not depend on a particular diagnosis to be applicable.

Private Pay

While it is not always an ideal option, many unfortunately do not find themselves in a position to easily benefit from existing government programs and have had to make do. For those in a position to seek out private payment options or those looking to make it work, [AHN's](#) guide provides some examples of financing through private pay like a home loan or a mortgage.

Next Steps

Once we have done the work of laying out all the factors that could contribute to a decision next comes the hardest part: making the final decision!

We do all this work to make sure we are making the most informed decision, but it's still scary to make a choice that could impact you for years and years to come.

Here we will have a chance to review some of what you wrote and hopefully help you feel confident about taking that next step forward.



SUPPORT

For many, it can be incredibly useful to be able to connect with others in the community as you navigate finding housing that's a good match for you/the adult with I/DD in your life. Here are some ideas and places you can reach out to for continued support.

Share with Your Support Network

Share this toolkit with your support network! They can get on the same page as you and learn how to better support you and your needs.



Support Groups

Reach out to communities locally to you and/or online. Even more local community groups are getting online to connect more frequently. A lot of local autism and disability support groups have created Facebook groups that you can join, chat online, and meet in person too. ***They have the greater insight into where to go - and where not to go to in your community.***






Join the AGU Online Community

This is just the start of the conversation, and we invite you to continue this within our Facebook group. We have a dedicated space where you can post your questions, grab and try ideas, and chat with others in the autism community all over the world.





[CLICK HERE TO JOIN THE AGU COMMUNITY](#)


FOR MORE INFORMATION

Here are some more resources for you to explore on this topic area. Note that not all information presented on these sites is neurodiversity-affirming.

	<p>Fueling Housing and Community Options for Adults with Autism and Other Neurodiversities Resnik, D. D., & Kameka Galloway, D. (Eds.). (2020). <i>A Place in the World: Fueling Housing and Community Options for Adults with Autism and Other Neurodiversities</i>. Phoenix, AZ: First Place AZ; Madison House Autism Foundation; the Arizona Board of Regents for and on behalf of Arizona State University and its Morrison Institute for Public Policy at the Watts College of Public Service and Community Solutions. READ MORE →</p>
	<p>Understanding Independent Living with Autism: The Role of the Housing Environment in the Experiences of Two Autistic Men Nguyen Lan, P. (2021). Understanding independent living with autism: The role of the housing environment in the experiences of two autistic men. <i>European Journal of Creative Practices in Cities and Landscapes</i>, 30 READ MORE →</p>
	<p>Independent Living in Adults with Autism Spectrum Disorder: Stakeholders' Perspectives and Experiences Ghanouni, P., Quirke, S., Blok, J., & Casey, A. (2021). Independent living in adults with autism spectrum disorder: Stakeholders' perspectives and experiences. <i>Research in Developmental Disabilities</i>, 119 READ MORE →</p>
	<p>Intermediate Care Facilities for Individuals with Intellectual Disability Medicaid.gov READ MORE →</p>
	<p>AFL and Group Homes A Caring Heart Case Management, Inc. READ MORE →</p>

KEY

 BLOG	 RESOURCE PAGE	 PODCAST	 RESEARCH	 ARTICLE	 SOCIAL MEDIA POST	 BOOK
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	<p>Housing Options for Adults with Autism American Autism Association READ MORE →</p>
	<p>Advantages and Disadvantages of Mobile Home Parks Mobile Home Living READ MORE →</p>
	<p>Housing Directory Autism Housing Network READ MORE →</p>
	<p>Residential Options Autism Society of North Carolina READ MORE →</p>
	<p>State Waivers List Medicaid.gov READ MORE →</p>
	<p>Housing Choice Vouchers Fact Sheet U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development READ MORE →</p>
	<p>Single Family Housing Programs U.S. Department of Agriculture READ MORE →</p>

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