

Finding the Right Professional

Finding the right professional team is critical to the success of your Special Needs Plan. “Success” of a Special Needs Plan should be defined as having clarity regarding the path you need to take in order to provide a loving, supportive, and safe caregiving environment for your child during his or her entire lifetime. This means you will need guidance on:

How to navigate the government benefit landscape to maximize your child’s benefits:

Learning to navigate the system to get the most of it, as well as understanding how your own (as parents) choices regarding Social Security Retirement benefits can change your child’s benefits, will be very important.

How to design a Special Needs Trust:

There are lots of questions you may need help answering: Who should be the trustee? Should I have a Trust Protector? How many Successor Trustees should I have? Should I use a company as the Trustee?

How taxes work inside a Special Needs Trust:

The understanding of tax strategy is critical in funding the special needs trust so that the trust assets are not taxed at the highest tax rates versus being taxed at much lower tax rates. Tax strategy is also important in determining the accounts parents are saving in for their own future that will eventually be transferred into the special needs trust. Again, parents would be horrified to realize their hard work turned into more income for the government instead of providing for the support needs of their child

How to determine the amount of funding your child will need over his or her lifetime:

Determining this amount and calculating a specific number will help you understand the percentage of assets that need to be transferred to the special needs trust versus the percentage of assets that are left to other children (or grandchildren).



This section was prepared by Ryan Platt, Chartered Special Needs Consultant, and the Founder of A Special Needs Plan, Inc.

A Special Needs Plan helps families, nationwide, in the creation, implementation and management of an integrated plan that ensures today and secures the future for all members of the family; parents, child with Special Needs, and other children. Ryan is currently working on two more initiatives to help families with education on the topic of Special Needs Planning with HowToSecureTheFuture.com and with support with A Care Plan For Life.

How to educate extended family members:

It will be very important to teach your family members about adjustments they need to make so they do not incorrectly provide resources to your child with Autism and inadvertently cause him or her to lose life-supporting government benefits

How to communicate with those people that will be the next caregiver (Guardian) for your child:

You will want to keep the next caregiver/guardian of your child as informed as possible in regards to letting them know how to care for your child on a day to day basis. For instance, doctor information, prescriptions, pharmacy that fills prescriptions, behavioral and sensory issues, your child’s favorite activities and things, daily routine, your hopes and dreams for them, and more.

It takes a great deal of study, dedication and time to become a Specialist in all these areas; however, it is imperative to your child's future that you find professionals who can help you satisfy this definition of "success" when it comes to having a Special Needs Plan. As families, your search for an expert in Special Needs Planning is analogous to your search for a specialist in the medical field. If a Neurologist is necessary, not just any Neurologist will do, but a Neurologist with the specific education, temperament, continual training, daily focus, and passion is necessary.

So many families search for quite some time before they find the right medical team. It is this same persistence and focus needed to find the right Special Needs Planning professionals. Unfortunately, these professionals are few and far between and many times will not be local to your family, but the search is needed to secure your child's future support.

Questions to Ask

We have assembled a list of questions for families to ask professionals so that they can uncover if the professionals they are working with (attorneys, financial advisors, accountants, trust officers, etc.) are truly specialists, as this is vital in securing the proper and accurate Special Needs Plan.

1. I know this is a highly specialized area that requires knowledge of government benefits, the legal system, tax code, distribution planning, and transfer of assets from one generation to the next. Do you have expertise in these areas? How would I know that?
2. What professional training have you had in the area of special needs planning? What courses have you taken? Can you show me your most recent course manual? Can you share with me the books you have read on special needs planning?
3. Do you attend continuing education conferences on the topic of special needs planning? If so, how often? If not, how do you stay on top of the changes in the legal system, tax code, government benefits and their impact for special needs families?
4. When you're considering the distribution phase of our money and the transfer phase of our money, how do you ensure our money gets to our child after we are dead? What do you do to limit the erosion of these assets to taxation?
5. What is the maximum asset limit in order to qualify for Medicaid?
6. What is the difference between SSI and SSDI?
7. Can you explain the advantages, as well as the drawbacks, to an ABLE Account?
8. Can you clearly define the planning process you use to help me secure the future of my loved one with special needs? (The professional should be able to describe to you very easily the steps they use in serving families.)
9. Can you provide me 3 families that you have helped in the area of special needs planning, so that I may call them to discuss their experience?
10. Can you provide me the names of 2-3 professionals you work with in the area of special needs planning?
11. Who do you turn to when you have questions in the special needs area?
12. Are you involved in the special needs community? If so, how? (This question will show you if the professional has his/her finger on the pulse of the special needs community by their involvement with organizations, societies or conferences. It will also show empathy and support for the community as a whole.)

Making the Right Choice

When interviewing them, stay focused on their mannerisms. If the professional you are interviewing is able to answer these 12 questions with authority and you receive positive feedback from the families and professionals you contact, then you have found yourself a highly qualified special needs planner. You should move quickly to hire them. If they are not able to answer these elementary Special Needs Planning questions, keep searching!

With their help, you will begin a journey that will lead to security for you, your loved one, and your entire family. The planning process you go through will provide you answers to many questions, including, "What happens to my child when I am no longer able to care for them or when I die?" Having the answer to this question should release a burden from your shoulders, and should provide peace of mind.

For more information, please feel free to visit ASpecialNeedsPlan.com.

We have been nervous about the future since what seems like the day my daughter was born! A huge help was finding a great lawyer who could explain clearly to us how to set up a special needs trust for her, how it could be funded and what that money could be used for. He has made us feel much more at ease about what lies ahead!

