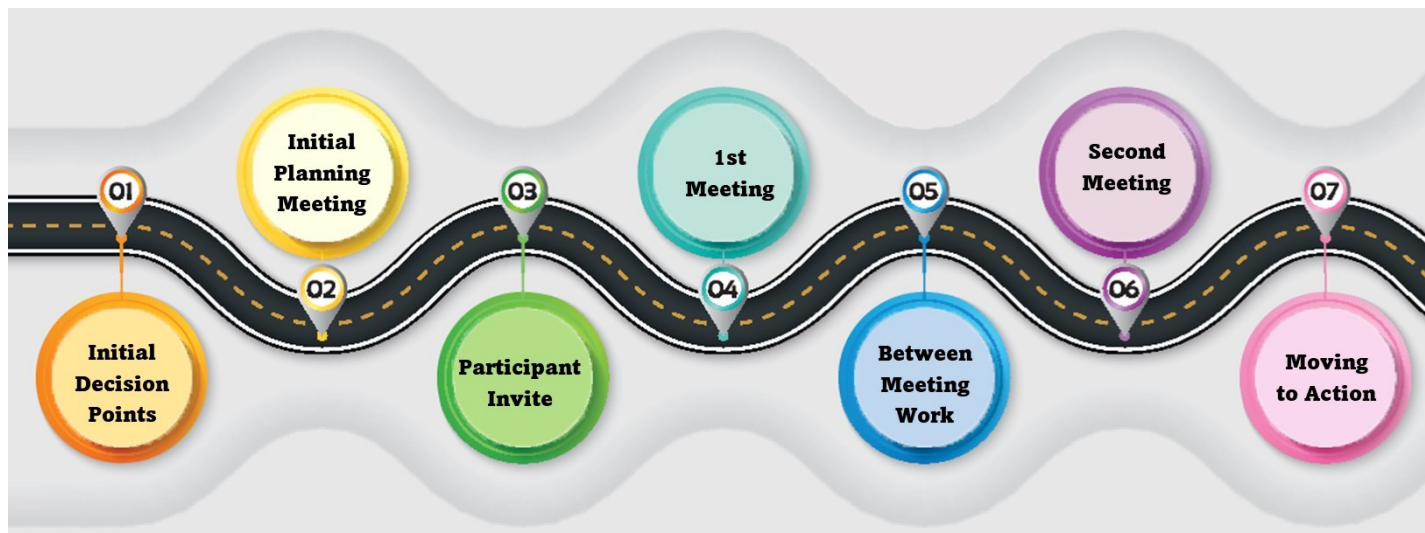


Autism & the Dependency System

County Roadmap



What is the County Roadmap?

The Autism & the Dependency System County Roadmap is a step-by-step process that counties can use to understand, identify, assess, and enhance services for persons with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). While focused on abused & neglected children and their families, this Roadmap can be adapted for a broader population.

How should the Roadmap be used?

The Roadmap is a guide for discussion, learning, and planning. The Roadmap is best used in a multi-disciplinary team planning process that includes a variety of perspectives. The Roadmap was designed following the process used by the State Roundtable's Autism and the Dependency Courts Taskforce.

Who should be included in the Local Autism Taskforce?

Because ASD covers such a large span of possible challenges and strengths, counties are encouraged to be inclusive in their Multi-disciplinary Team membership. Additionally, because the Roadmap's focus is on improving the experience of individuals in the child welfare and child dependency system, the team's leadership should come from the highest possible person in both the Court and Child Welfare systems. To the extent possible, team members should be decision-makers in the county. When possible, these leaders and multi-disciplinary team members should hold this issue as one of their priorities and volunteer for this work.

It is highly recommended that all the following perspectives be included in local teams:

- ⇒ Court Leadership: Judge (with authority to make system/policy changes)
- ⇒ Child Welfare Leadership: CYS Director
- ⇒ Legal Professionals: Guardians ad Litem, Parent Advocates, Solicitors, Hearing Officers, Court Administrators, Bailiffs/Sheriff Deputy (court security staff), Tip Staff
- ⇒ Child Welfare Professionals: Caseworkers, Supervisors, Managers

Team members suggestions might include, but are not limited to, the following:

Leadership, knowledge experts & persons with lived autism experience:

- ⇒ Child Welfare Independent Living staff
- ⇒ Autism Services
- ⇒ Mental Health
- ⇒ Intellectual Disabilities
- ⇒ Education (Special Ed, Alternative Schools)
- ⇒ Persons with ASD
- ⇒ Parents of children with ASD
- ⇒ Police (Pennsylvania State Police, Municipal Police)
- ⇒ Juvenile Probation

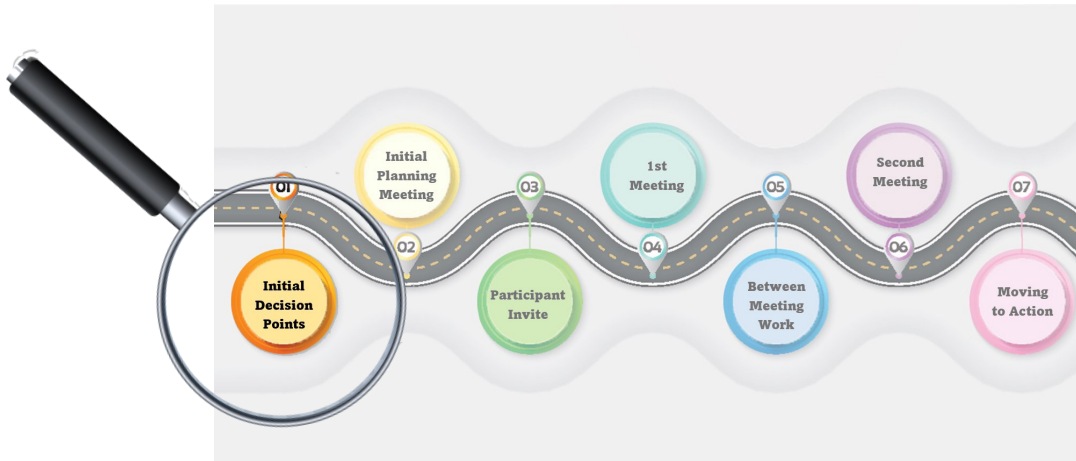
Other possible perspectives: The list below identifies views that would be helpful in the work. These individuals can be but do not have to be members of the multi-disciplinary team, but their perspectives should be shared with the team.

- ⇒ Commissioners/County Executive
- ⇒ Substance Use Experts
- ⇒ Pediatricians/Medical Societies
- ⇒ Domestic Relations
- ⇒ Court Administration
- ⇒ Transportation Representatives



Step-By-Step

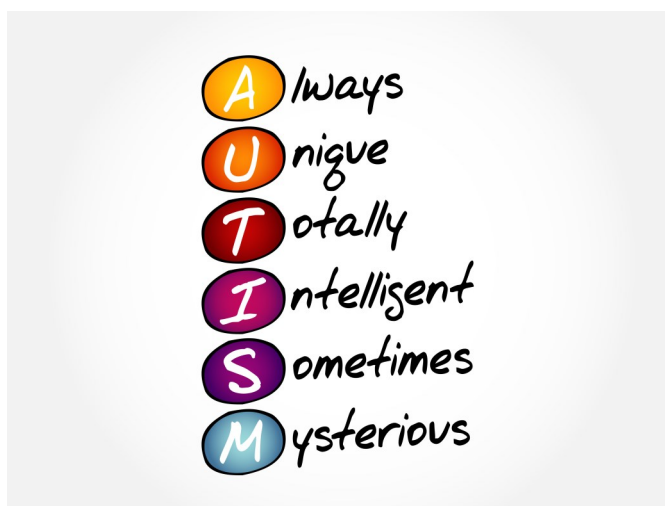
Step #1 – Initial Decision Points



These initial decisions will likely be made by the Judge and Child Welfare Administrator

- Do we know what Autism is?
- Do we know how many children or parents involved in the child welfare and/or dependency system are diagnosed with ASD?
- We know this is a statewide issue, but is it a priority for our county?

Once the decision is made to prioritize this issue in the county, proceed to step #2.



Step #2 – Initial Planning Meeting



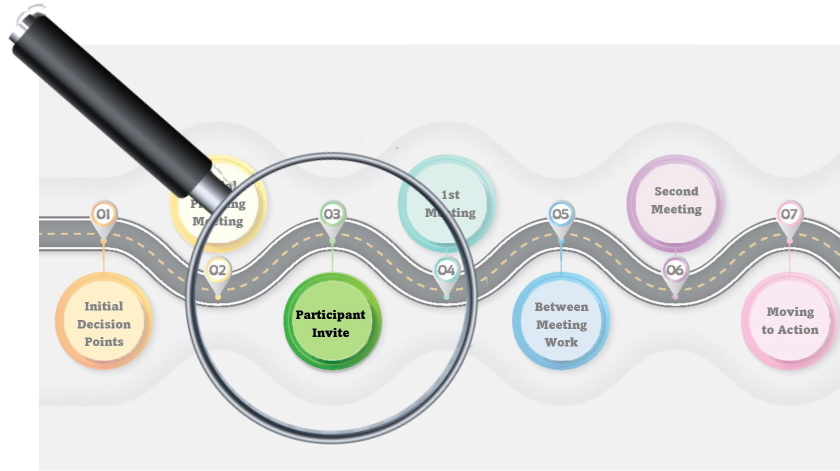
This initial planning meeting is for the Team Leaders, and a select number of persons identified help initiate the process. At a minimum, this group should include the judge, child welfare administrator, an autism expert, and staff person(s) identified to facilitate the work.

Initial decision points for this group:

- Do we know what Autism is?
- What available autism data do we have specific to children and families in our county, our child welfare agency, our dependency courts, and our schools?
- Will this group be a sub-group of our Local Children's Roundtable?
- Using the list on page two of this guide, do we want to identify specific individuals for this work, or do we want to do an open invitation and see who expresses interest? (see example email)
- What is our vision and mission Statement?
- What are our initial goals/outcomes that support our vision and mission?
- When do we want to hold our first meeting?
- How often should we meet?
- How long should each meeting be?
- Do we want to hold virtual or in-person meetings?
- If virtual, who will set up the meetings?
- If in-person, who will host the meeting space?
- Will our work focus on child welfare and dependency court or be more expansive?

Once the group has at least initial answers to the above items, move on to Step #3.

Step #3 – Invitation to Participate



- Invite participants to a meeting (see example email/letter). This invitation is best coming from the judge and child welfare administrator if possible.
- Create an agenda for the first meeting. Please keep it simple. (see example 1st meeting agenda)
- Decide who will lead the meeting or specific agenda discussion items.



Step #4 – First Meeting



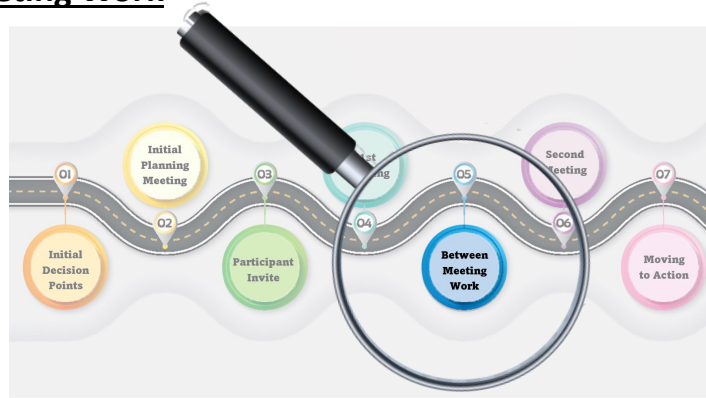
- Hold the meeting.
- Explain the focus of the group: vision, mission, and initial goals. (see examples)
- Explain why team members were selected: their interest, their influence, their knowledge, their ability to get things done, etc.
- Explain the expectations of team members. Two of the most significant include being open to learning and different perspectives; and mandatory attendance of members. Your work will build from one meeting to the next. Missing meetings will slow your progress.
- First, seek to understand. There is a tendency to jump to solutions before being clear on the issue. Resist doing that. First, seek to understand.
- Gain a sense of team members' Autism understanding (encourage the safe space concept/rule in the meeting. No question is off-limits. We are all learning together.) Many will not fully understand Autism or Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), and that's okay.

- Encourage open discussion regarding how persons with ASD experience agencies and courts (or other entities, depending on the scope of your team's work).
- Share the ideas generated in Step 2 (2). Make any changes needed with the larger group's input.
- Encourage the concept of this being a shared learning/growing experience. Gather ideas for future education of team members.
- Assign a task for team members – Ask each team member to identify autism services available in the county or used by children/families even if the service is in another county. Ask team members to provide this information to an identified staff person before the next meeting.
- This assignment has two purposes. It gets team members vested in the work immediately with a request that isn't overly time-consuming or burdensome. It provides valuable information regarding what services, supports, and gaps may exist.

Provide the next meeting date, time, and location.



Step #5 – Between Meeting Work



Begin the development of a County Specific Resource Catalogue

- The assigned staff person creates a list of services identified by team members to be shared at the next meeting.

Add additional members, if needed, based on meeting #1 discussions

Identify education topics and speakers - Keep this short, no more than 15 minutes of your meeting time. This limited presentation time is essential. You want to enhance your team's knowledge, but you do not want your meetings to become education sessions solely. This group is about understanding and implementing strategies to help children and parents with ASD. Example meeting educational topics might include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Autism 101 – What is it?
- Autism and our Schools
- How is Autism Diagnosed?
- What happens when children turn 18 or 21?
- What do parents of children with Autism have to tell us?

Create the next meeting agenda

Send meeting reminder and agenda (do this about one week before the next meeting)

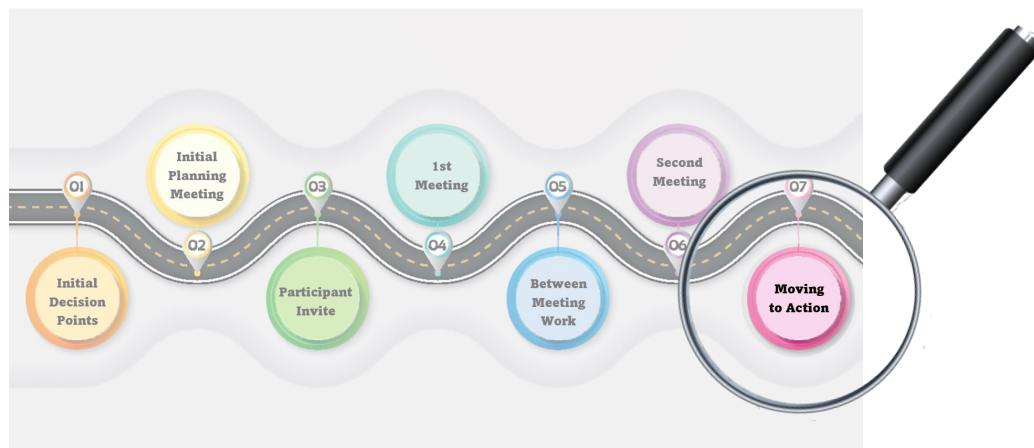
Step #6 – Second Meeting



The agenda for your second and subsequent meetings will likely come naturally from your first meeting. The process, topics, and priorities should be based on the information you gather locally. Caution: Do not move on to solutions or strategies until the team fully understands the challenges. (see example second meeting agenda)



Step #7 – Moving to Action



Once you have a good idea regarding services, supports, gaps, and challenges for individuals with ASD in your county systems, it's time to determine what you can do to enhance the experience of individuals with ASD.

Your team must move to action beyond simply learning or discussing the issues.

Goals and action that are doable, measurable, and successful motivates team members.

Depending on the size of your team, select one or two (no more than that) actions that can be easily accomplished and will have a significantly positive impact on individuals with ASD and their experience with the child welfare agency and court.

Examples of Action might include:

- Education for child welfare and dependency system professionals
- Education for community members
- A forum to hear from persons with ASD
- Conducting an Environmental Analysis of your child welfare agency and court
- Developing a comfort dog program
- Developing a peer support program
- Implementing a process to collect data

Monitor and measure the impact of the actions you implement.