

CHOOSING THE RIGHT PROVIDER FOR ADULTS WITH INTELLECTUAL AND DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES:

10 QUESTIONS FAMILIES SHOULD ASK

BY DEENA KING

If you are a parent or caregiver, you can understand and relate to the angst, perhaps fear, that comes with entrusting anyone else with the care of your child or loved one.

Many of us recall putting our kindergartner on a school bus for the very first time and into the hands of someone we had never met or possibly met, but didn't know well. For parents and guardians of adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD), entrusting strangers to provide daily support, and often complete care, can be daunting.

At New Concepts for Living, a Paramus, New Jersey-based nonprofit that provides comprehensive day programs and residences for adults with I/DD, our team guides families through the overwhelming process of finding the right provider for their loved one to ensure they receive proper, personalized and dignified care.

In light of recent reports* of abuse and neglect in New Jersey group homes, families need to be reassured that not all agencies are the same and that their loved ones can receive the quality care, services, and support they deserve in a safe, enriching environment.

* <https://www.northjersey.com/story/news/watchdog/2025/05/03/nj-group-home-investigation-hidden-at-home/85369861007/>.

MAKING CONNECTIONS:

With the right provider, adults with I/DD can improve their independence, reach their fullest potential and thrive.



DUE DILIGENCE : WHAT TO ASK WHEN EXPLORING SERVICES AND PROGRAMS

Here are 10 questions every parent or guardian should ask when exploring programs and services for people with special needs:



1. IS THE AGENCY LICENSED BY THE STATE OR APPROPRIATE GOVERNMENT AGENCY?

In New Jersey, for example, provider agencies licensed by the Division of Developmental Disabilities (DDD) are subject to state oversight, inspections, and guidelines. While some unlicensed providers may deliver quality services, they are not regulated. Families should request evidence of licensure and also ask for parent or guardian testimonials to confirm quality.



2. ARE CAMERAS AVAILABLE IN HOMES AND PROGRAMS?

24-hour monitoring can be a sensitive subject, with some agencies and federal regulators labeling it a potential "human rights violation." However, many families find that cameras provide peace of mind. They can be used for staff accountability, training, and most importantly, the prevention of abuse or neglect.



3. WHAT IS THE STAFF-TO-CLIENT RATIO?

Staffing levels directly affect safety and quality of care. While the state often provides guidelines, families should ask how providers determine staffing, based on individual needs and required supports. Providers should prioritize better ratios as a preventive measure, to ensure proper supervision and assistance.



4. WHAT IS THE STAFF TURNOVER RATE?

Caring for individuals with I/DD is challenging. Turnover can result from burnout, low pay, poor training, or weak management. High turnover disrupts consistency of care and trust. Ask how agencies hire, train, and retain qualified staff.



5. HOW MANY RESIDENTS LIVE IN EACH HOME?

Most licensed residences accommodate four to six individuals, typically with single bedrooms. Families should consider whether the home is co-ed or single-sex, and if the arrangement fits their loved one's needs and preferences.



6. ARE BEHAVIORISTS AND NURSES AVAILABLE?

For individuals with medical or behavioral needs, on-site or on-call professionals are vital. Families should confirm the availability of nurses and behavioral specialists, to ensure comprehensive care.



7. HOW ARE STAFF VETTED AND TRAINED?

Thorough background checks, structured orientation, and ongoing training

are non-negotiable. Families should ask what kind of training is provided in areas such as: medication management, CPR, vehicle operation, and crisis intervention.



8. HOW OFTEN ARE COMMUNITY OUTINGS ENCOURAGED?

Adults with I/DD deserve access to the same community experiences as anyone else like: restaurants, museums, movies, and social events. Community inclusion should be a priority, not an afterthought, to ensure higher quality of life in a thriving environment.



9. WHAT ROLE DOES THE SUPPORT COORDINATOR PLAY?

Every individual with I/DD is assigned a Support Coordinator, who advocates for services and ensures proper use of state budgets. Families should confirm that the Support Coordinator is proactive, communicative, and engaged.



10. WILL MY LOVED ONE BE AMONG PEERS?

Compatibility matters. Individuals should be placed with others who share similar functional abilities, communication styles, and social needs. While chronological age is less important, shared strengths and challenges foster comfort and belonging.

FINDING PEACE OF MIND

Entrusting the care of a vulnerable loved one to others can be challenging. But with the right provider, adults with I/DD can improve their independence, reach their fullest potential and thrive. For families, peace of mind comes from knowing that their child, sibling, or relative is safe, supported, and living a fulfilling life. •

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:



Deena King is the Intake Manager at New Concepts for Living (NCFL), where she helps families navigate the process of selecting residential and day program placements for adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities. She brings both professional expertise and personal compassion to her work, ensuring families feel informed and supported every step of the way. Visit <https://ncfl.net>