

What to Expect: Teachers

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1. What are the academic requirements for a person to become a certified teacher?

In order to become a member of the Ontario College of Teachers, a person must have the minimum of a three year Bachelor's degree in a subject domain, such as Arts, Commerce or Science, and a Bachelor of Education. All teacher education programs include a substantial practice teaching component where practice and performance are rigorously evaluated.

2. Are there ASD credits for teachers?

Through the College of Teachers, an Additional Qualification (AQ) course is offered in Special Education-Communication-Autism. It is offered through various institutions, including Queen's University, the Ontario English Catholic Teacher's Association and the Ontario Teachers' Federation. In order to enroll in an AQ course, a teacher must be a member of the Ontario College of Teachers. Also, courses beyond the introductory level have specific requirements regarding the number of years of experience. As locations for this AQ course can vary from year to year, specific information can be acquired through an on-line search or by an inquiry to the Ontario College of Teachers.

Some universities in Ontario, such as McMaster University and the University of Windsor, offer courses in Autism Spectrum Disorders and offer students opportunities to conduct research; however, to date, they do not offer a specific qualification in the field of ASD.

Several colleges in Ontario offer a post-diploma program in Autism and Behavioural Science, designed to prepare graduates to work directly with children with ASD. The program is offered on campus and online. Teachers have found this program appealing because of its in-depth focus on both ASD and Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA). For more information, visit:
http://www.ontariocolleges.ca/searchresults/educationcommunitysocial-services-behavioural-science/_/n-110t

3. If a teacher works for a school board, are they allowed to do private work?

Yes, teachers are permitted to work privately as long as it is outside of school hours. As well, when working privately, a teacher is always accountable to the College of Teachers and not to their school board, as the College of Teachers is the provincial regulatory body.

4. If a teacher is not working for a school board, to whom are they accountable?

When a teacher graduates from their training institution, they can apply to become a member of the Ontario College of Teachers, which then evaluates their qualifications, gives them a College registration number and a Certificate of Qualification and Registration. A teacher must pay a fee each year to renew their membership. All school boards and school authorities in Ontario, as well as most private schools will only hire teachers who are members of the Ontario College of Teachers. If a teacher is a member of the College, he or she is accountable to the College. If a teacher is not a member of the College, they are not accountable to any professional body.

On the website of the Ontario College of Teachers (www.oct.ca), a citizen may search for anyone who has been certified to teach in Ontario's publicly funded schools. As listed on the website, information includes:

- a teacher's qualifications
- date of initial certification
- status with the College
- disciplinary history, if applicable.

5. Should I hire a teacher to work with my child at home?

The decision about whether or not to hire a teacher to work with your child in the home environment outside of school hours will depend upon the needs of your child and his or her instructional goals. This will be an individual decision based on your particular situation. If your child is struggling with a particular subject area, such as mathematics or literacy skill development, or if your child experiences frustration with executing and completing assignments, it would be worthwhile to discuss this with his or her classroom teacher and determine if

supplemental home instruction would be worthwhile. In many cases, it would be very beneficial.

If you wish to hire someone to work as an academic tutor in a home instruction setting, your needs may be best served by hiring a teacher. Teachers are trained to be self-directed and to know how to deliver educational content. When working with students who have an ASD, the teacher/instructor should have a solid foundation of knowledge about the learning style of students with ASD and relevant methodological approaches. However, if your goals are primarily non-academic, such as social interaction skills, you may be better served by hiring someone who is skilled in that particular area, such as an instructional assistant or therapist in the field of ASD.

Sometimes, a retired teacher may become an academic tutor. Usually, this person would have a great deal of teaching experience; however, it would be critical to find out how much specific experience they have with students who have an ASD. A retired teacher may have let their membership in the College lapse; however, if a person wishes to pursue a second career in tutoring, they usually maintain their membership in the College.

Sometimes, a teacher who has recently graduated from university and has not yet been hired by a school board may wish to work with a student who has an ASD in order to gain experience. Working with your child can make a significant contribution to this person's knowledge base; however, it would be important to make sure that this person comes with a good understanding of ASD, displays a willingness to learn and demonstrates that he or she is in an active process of learning (reading, professional development opportunities, courses).

6. Can I hire my child's teacher?

Yes, in some situations, you can hire your child's teacher; however, policies regarding this may differ from board to board. Before approaching your child's teacher, check with the school principal to find out whether or not this practice is permitted. In any case, hiring your child's teacher for home instruction may not be a wise decision for several reasons:

- Your child may have difficulty separating the role of the teacher between the home and the school environments. The familiar interaction pattern that may evolve in the home environment should not be transferred to the school environment. For instance, in the classroom, the student may expect more individual attention than the teacher is able to give.
- Your child and her/his teacher already see each other for several hours a day. Over exposure may lead to relationship burn out and classroom

management difficulties.

- By having your child's teacher in your home on a regular basis, it may become difficult to separate the formality of the teacher-parent relationship from the familiar and friendly relationship usually established with someone who regularly works in the home.
- Payment for service can become an awkward element in the relationship.

7. Can I request to see a teacher's qualifications?

Yes, you must ask to see an official record of qualifications for any person you are considering to work with your child. This would include documentation for training in any specialized program, such as PECS or ABA. You can ask to see the applicant's Certificate of Qualification and Registration from the Ontario College of Teachers. If they do not have one, you can ask for substantiation of teacher training, e.g. graduation certificate or diploma. You must make your own decision about whether or not to consider this person as a potential instructor for your child. You can suggest that the candidate actively pursue having their qualifications evaluated, particularly in the case where the applicant is a teacher from another country.

8. What are some questions I should ask a candidate in order to gain an understanding of their experience and knowledge of ASD?

- What is autism? What are the identifying features of ASD?
- What is your previous experience with persons who have Autism Spectrum Disorders?
- What was the last book or article you read about ASD? What can you tell me about it?
- When did you last participate in ASD-specific training? What did you learn?
- What subject areas do you most enjoy teaching?
- Why do you want to work with my child?
- My child's area of difficulty is _____. What experience do you have in teaching that subject?
- What would you want to know about my child before starting to work with him/her?
- What would you see as a starting point for home instruction?

- What sources would you want to consult for information about the content of a home instruction program? (parents, teachers at school, Individual Education Plan, student interest)
- How would you structure a home instruction session?
- What are your feelings about the use of positive reinforcement?
- What would you do if my child had a meltdown during an instructional session or engaged in offtask responses? (if appropriate)
- How would you evaluate progress? What kind of data would you collect and how?
- Can you supply references?

9. What steps are involved in starting a home instruction program?

A) Preparing the environment:

- Use a calendar to indicate the days and times when home instruction will take place. To the extent possible, establish a regular time for sessions.
- Choose an appropriate location in your home, one where your child is comfortable and will not be distracted by the television or other people working on a computer. A work table or desk should be available, as well as a place to store materials. It would be the expectation that the door of the room is open during instructional sessions.
- In determining a time for home instruction sessions, make sure that your child has had time to rest and engage in a recreational activity before starting “work” again. Provide a snack and/or opportunity to engage in a preferred activity after the instructional session.
- If you hire more than one instructor, clearly indicate on the calendar which instructor is coming and what subject they will be working on, e.g. Mathematics or Literacy Skills. Each instructor should work on specific subject areas so that the student does not become confused by different approaches, speech patterns or language of instruction.

B) Preparing your child:

- When you make the decision to hire a home instructor, let your child know well in advance of the first session. Explain the purpose of the home instruction and the plan – how many times per week, what will be studied and what your expectations are regarding his or her participation.

- If the instructional periods interfere with watching a favourite TV program or other activity, assure your child that you will be able to record the program and that he can watch it when the session is finished or that he will be able to participate in the activity at another time. Assure your child that he or she will not miss anything.
- Frame this instructional plan in positive terms explaining that this will help him or her to better understand the things that are difficult, as well as help to keep up with homework and assignments.

C) Preparing the home teacher/instructor:

- In order to understand your child's areas of difficulty and the kinds of remediation or assistance that are necessary, you will need to share information about your child's areas of strength and areas of difficulty. Allowing the home instruction teacher to read previous school reports may be very helpful, as well as any psycho-educational assessments that are available.
- Provide the home instruction teacher with a copy of the child's Individual Education Plan so that he or she can ensure that the educational plan can be reinforced.
- You may wish to discuss the issue of confidentiality with regard to your child's documents and have the teacher sign a confidentiality agreement. You can discuss this with a lawyer; however, in the teaching profession, it is commonly understood that personal information of this nature is confidential. Additionally, you may need to clarify with your child's teacher and the home instruction teacher that they have permission to communicate and, generally, this would need to be put in writing.
- It will also be useful to explain to the teacher your child's unique expression of ASD with particular regard to their communication, sensory sensitivities, stamina, signs of fatigue or irritability, i.e. how to discern when enough is enough, and what kinds of praise or reinforcement are most effective.
- As you get to know the teacher, you may wish to share any articles, books or DVD's about ASD that you have found particularly useful and interesting.
- Ensure that you have a conversation with the teacher/instructor about whether or not you will leave your child in their care or whether you will be in the home during all sessions. It is highly advisable that you be present in the home at all times as your absence can be very unsettling for your

child and puts the instructor in the position of being both a babysitter and teacher.

D) The teacher-child relationship:

The first meeting for your child and the home instruction teacher should be social in nature – a “getting to know you” session. This can take place in an area of your home that is comfortable for your child, e.g. in the kitchen, having a snack or treat at the table.

The teacher can ask your child about interests, favourite activities, family, pets, what they like to do at school – the kinds of questions one would ask any child. If your child has limited verbal skills, you and the teacher can have a conversation and involve the child to the extent of his or her ability.

Encourage your child to show the teacher his or her room, favourite toys, books or movies.

The teacher can suggest that they read a story together or engage in another preferred activity.

The teacher should tell your child something about him or herself – pets, children, hobbies, etc.

The teacher can also talk about the kinds of work that they will do together and then set a start date so that your child knows when and what to expect. The teacher can also provide your child with a picture of him or herself enabling your child to become increasingly familiar and “used to” this new person in her/ his life.

From time to time, the teacher should feel free to bring something new or interesting for your child to look at, read or do. This will keep the relationship interesting and give your child more reason to look forward to instructional sessions.

If you or the school uses reinforcers with your child, share this information with the home instruction teacher – what reinforcers or incentives are effective?

E) The home-school relationship:

- Seek input from your child’s teacher at school regarding his or her area or areas of difficulty and where supplemental instruction would be beneficial.
- Whenever possible, the classroom teacher and home instruction teacher should communicate, even briefly, about specific skills to be taught,* the language of instruction used at school, timelines for when a specific skill will be necessary or evaluated in the school environment and when

assignments are due. This communication might take place through communication with you or written communication to the home instruction teacher, such as a note in the backpack. You can decide on whatever method works best in your situation.

- The classroom teacher may also be able to inform the home instruction teacher about particularly effective strategies, as well as upcoming areas of study for which your child can be primed/prepared.
- If home instruction is successful, at some point you may wish for the home instruction teacher to accompany you to IEP meetings or other meetings where your child's program and progress will be discussed.

*For instance, the solving of math equations or problems may require specific formats and steps. It would be essential for the home instruction teacher to have this information so that he or she does not teach steps or solutions that differ from what is expected in the classroom.

Additional Suggestions:

- Your child may have a specific interest which can be studied in the home instruction setting as an Independent Study Unit. Time can be set aside during each session for work and research in this area. This can be very useful as, often, there is not time for this kind of individualization at school. Your child may find study in a preferred topic to be very stimulating and it may serve to develop a wide range of skills.
- For many students, the development of computer skills, such as keyboarding, may not be possible at school. This could be an important skill for development in the home setting, particularly for students who have difficulty with printing or writing. Access to a keyboard would be necessary. As well, a segment of the home instruction session could be devoted to keyboard skill development, noting it on the work schedule as a regular feature of instruction. For some students, learning to use Microsoft Word and PowerPoint™ may significantly enhance their composition and presentation skills.
- Parents may also want to consider the use of educational software for the reinforcement of skills in the home setting and your child can be guided in its use by the home instruction teacher. Your child's classroom teacher or resource teacher may be able to recommend a particular program or one can seek advice from an educational software distributor. Guidelines for the effective use of educational software can be found on Autism Ontario's website.

10. What fees are appropriate for a home instruction teacher?

There is no regulated or set fee for home instruction teachers. You can inquire about local rates for tutoring, understanding that these rates reflect the grade levels and subjects that are taught, the more complex the subject, the higher the rate. You can also check with local agencies, such as Autism Ontario or the Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario to see what information they have to offer about what other parents generally pay home instruction teachers. The financial arrangement is usually worked out on an individual basis. When a candidate suggests a fee, you can ask how the amount was derived. Usually it will be based on their level of education and experience, as well as by an understanding of fees charged by persons in similar positions.

Interviewee: Leslie Broun, M.Ed.

For more than twenty years, Leslie Broun worked for the Peel District School Board as a teacher in a self-contained classroom, an itinerant resource teacher and a consultant for students who have an Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) or other developmental disabilities. In 2007, she was a member of the cross-ministerial ASD Reference Group that helped formulate new policy for students with ASD in the province of Ontario. For six years she served on Autism Ontario's Board of Directors and in 2008 received the Gerry Bloomfield Award for Outstanding Professional Service.

Leslie has worked for both the Ministry of Education and the Geneva Centre for Autism and has been a teaching instructor and presenter at workshops and conferences across Canada and internationally. She co-authored Literacy Skill Development for Students with Special Learning Needs with Patricia Oelwein. Her primary professional focus has been the development of effective learning strategies and materials for teaching academic skills to students with special needs.

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