

# Questions & Helpful Tips to ask Service Providers (HCS Focus)

## Need Long-term Care Services?

Visit [Your Texas Benefits](http://www.yourtexasbenefits.com) at: [www.yourtexasbenefits.com](http://www.yourtexasbenefits.com)  
or call 1-855-937-2372 for long-term care services in your area.

### Educate yourself about Home and Community Services and Supports (HCS).

Every provider is required to offer all HCS services. How they provide the service or their “service delivery method” may differ.

- Ask how they differ from other providers.
- Which, if any, of the HCS services do they contract to other providers?
- What do they see as their strengths?
- What do they think they need to improve upon?
- Research providers, their competitors and any complaints or deficiencies, at the Texas Health and Human Services website: <https://apps.hhs.texas.gov/lcsearch/>

### Find out about the provider’s organization.

- What is their Mission Statement or philosophy?
- Why did they decide to serve individuals with Intellectual Disability and/or Developmental Disabilities (I/DD)?
- How long have they been serving people with (I/DD)?
- How many clients does their HCS Program serve in this county at the present time, and what is their capacity?

### Who the provider hires is crucial to you and your family member.

- Ask about staff:
  - selection process
  - training
  - screening (drug screen, criminal background check, abuse/neglect)?
- Ask about how you will be involved in staff selection.
- What type and/or length of experience does their staff have serving individuals with (I/DD); ?
- Could they provide records of training their staff has received, specific to various disabilities and/or conditions?
- Ask about the level of training, experience, and credentialing, for staff providing services to clients.
- Does the agency provide mentoring for new staff?
- Does the agency have a written crisis plan that they will share?
- Does the agency train staff in Prevention and Management of Aggressive Behavior (PMAB) or Non-Violent Crisis Intervention? Or ABA?
- Do they have bi-lingual staff who speak other languages? If not, will you have an interpreter available?
- What are the direct care staff to client ratios?

### Determine what is most important to you.

- What are your personal goals and how will the provider help you achieve them?
- Is the provider willing to develop individualized and creative methods to meet your needs?
- Don’t just look at the service definitions; ask the provider how the HCS services can help you meet your goals.
- What process does the provider use to find out what is important to you?
- State your preferences of services (i.e. supported employment, residential, nursing, etc.)

### What specific questions should I ask if I’m interested in residential services?

- What are your policies regarding visitors?
- What are your policies regarding privacy?
- What type of leisure / recreational activities will be available?
- Does my family member choose their daily routine?

- What type of transportation does your company provide?
- How many vehicles do you have? Is there a vehicle for each home?
- How do you accommodate non-ambulatory individuals?
- How do you accommodate non-verbal individuals? Is staff trained in sign language, use of picture schedules, picture books, augmentative communication devices?
- What provision will your company make for my family member to attend the religious services of their choice?
- What are your emergency back-up procedures, when there is crisis or the home is short staffed?
- Is the staff available to support my family member in additional activities in the community? (i.e. Girl Scouts, religious activities, sports teams, etc.)
- How and where will my family member be cared for when he or she is ill?
- Do you have medical staff on site or on call, for medical issues? Is medical staff willing to practice/rehearse with my family member what to expect, before going to the doctor or hospital?
- Describe how staff trains clients in daily living skills. Please share with me documentation or how this is reflected.
- Will the home be located in close proximity to the school / day program / or place of employment?
- How does your agency build community awareness about people with disabilities moving into their neighborhood? How does your agency resolve concerns?
- Do you lease or own your residential homes? Do you have short term or long term leases?
- Can the client choose their roommates?
- Can they participate in activities of their choice?
- Do all clients have to attend the same activity or can one or two attend?
- Who stays at the home with those who do not want to participate?
- How does the agency allow for that client's choice?
- How will the provider support you with maintaining personal relationships?

### **Your relationship with your provider will be important when receiving services.**

- How receptive do you think the provider will be if there are problems or concerns?
- Was the provider respectful to you during the interview – did the provider use terms that you did not understand, did the provider maintain eye contact and listen to you or did they do all the talking?
- Ask about the complaint process.
- Ask how they work to improve services.
- What overall feeling did you have during the interview – did you feel comfortable?

### **How much control will you have over your services and supports?**

- How and in what areas does the provider allow for choice?
- Will you have choice of your staff?
- Will you be able to easily change staff if you wish?
- What knowledge does the provider have about self-determination or person directed services?
- What choices will my family member have concerning day programming, vocational training, supported employment, etc.?
- Describe ways in which you involve the client/guardian/family in the development of the client's program.
- How do you incorporate the family's wishes for their family member, when they differ from the agency's?
- How does your agency develop Behavioral Support Plans?
  - Are plans approved by a Behavior Therapy Committee, Human Rights Committee or by a psychiatrist?
  - If plans are reviewed by a Human Rights Committee, is the Human Rights Committee made up of outside members, professionals, parents and consumers?

### **Look to other people who have gone through the selection process or to people who can support you in the process.**

- Ask the provider for names of people who receive their services that you may contact.
- Contact advocacy organizations for assistance in choosing providers.
 

The Arc of Fort Bend	<a href="http://www.arcoffortbend.org">www.arcoffortbend.org</a>	281-494-5959
The Arc of Texas	<a href="http://www.thearcoftexas.org">www.thearcoftexas.org</a>	800-252-9729

**Take and keep notes about the information you receive or ask someone to help you take notes.**

- You might be talking with several different providers and it will help to get organized.
- You might want to talk to several staff from one provider and compare responses.
- Go over your notes and compare to the list of things that are most important to you.

**Be persistent and ask questions that are important to you – no question is unimportant.**

- Call back if you need clarification or if you forget to ask something.
- Ask the provider to explain if you don't understand.
- Learn the language so you can ask the right questions.

**Most importantly, always remember that...**

**YOU are the employer and the providers are there to serve YOU**

**Reporting a Concern or Making a Complaint:**

You may report a concern or make a formal complaint about an HCS agency to your Local Intellectual and Developmental Disability Authority (LIDDA). In Fort Bend County, the LIDDA is Texana Center Authority Division: 281-239-1363

If you do not feel the LIDDA satisfactorily resolved your concern you may call or write HHSC.

**Call:** 1-800-458-9858 M – F, 7am to 7pm (Option 2 to report a complaint, Option 4 to report a complaint about an HCS provider).

**Write:** Fax: 512-438-2724 or 512-438-2722

Mail: Texas Department of Health and Human Services  
Consumer Rights and Services — Complaint Intake Unit  
Mail Code E249  
P.O. Box 149030  
Austin, TX 78714-9030

Please make sure to include:

- your name, address and daytime phone number;
- your relationship to the person on whose behalf you are making a complaint;
- the names of person(s) involved;
- name and address of the HCS program provider; and
- briefly describe your complaint.

Note: All abuse and neglect allegations should be reported to the abuse hotline at 1-800-252-5400.

All HCS cases will be handled through Adult Protective Services.