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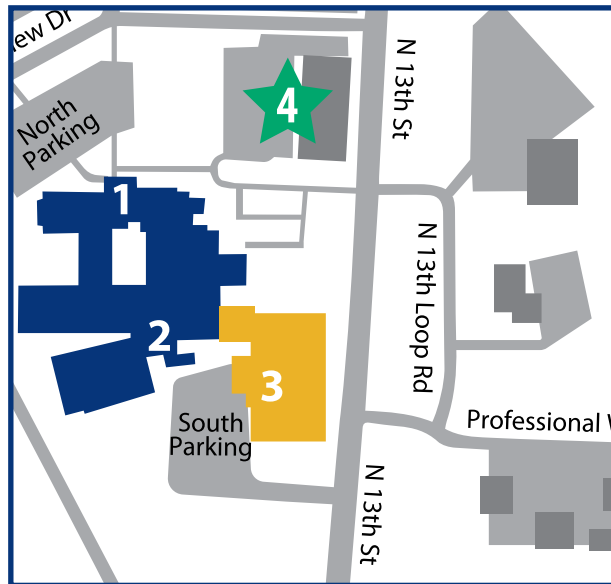
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Accessing SMART services at Mason Health



What is SMART?

The Mason County School Medical Autism Review Team (SMART) was launched in 2020 by **Mason Health** providers and local partners, including the **Shelton School District**, **Mason County Public Health**, and **South Sound Parent to Parent**, to help families find answers sooner.

At the time, families waiting for an autism diagnosis found themselves waiting for years on lists reaching into the thousands at health care facilities in Seattle and Tacoma.

Through the SMART approach, teachers, parents, other providers, therapists, or a family resource coordinator, such as those working with South Sound Parent to Parent's Birth to Three program, can refer a child to Mason Clinic-Pediatrics for an autism evaluation.

Now, local families can receive a diagnosis in a few months, allowing them to access resources sooner and achieve healthier outcomes for their children.

"It was taking years for families to get their child evaluated for autism," said Mason County Public Health Nurse **Elizabeth Custis**, RN. "They were losing out on this precious window of opportunity when the children are young to get the therapies and supports and resources that they need."

The SMART team

Mason Clinic-Pediatrics is now recognized as a Center of Excellence (COE) by the Washington State Health Care Authority for its autism assessment, and all its pediatricians have undergone COE training. Dr. **Iris Malit**, MD, Dr. **Ezekiel Melquist**, MD, and Dr. **Rose Ann Rayos**, MD, see and evaluate patients for autism. SMART Care Coordinator **Cassie Cartwright** facilitates appointments and scheduling for families.

Other SMART members include Mason Health Speech Language Pathologists **Erin Henley** and **Monica Vinson**, as well as Occupational Therapist **Tawnie Easton**, all of whom have completed training in the Autism Diagnosis Observation Schedule (ADOS).

Mason County Public Health, Shelton School District special education and early learning educators, and community partners from South Sound Parent to Parent are also instrumental members of SMART that may provide additional evaluations and information.



Duval, 3, takes part in floor time therapy with Easton and Henley.

How to access SMART

Mason Clinic-Pediatrics screens every patient for autism at 18 and 24 months.

Through the SMART process, anyone (teacher, therapists, parent) can refer families to Mason Clinic-Pediatrics for a deeper evaluation. A referral from a primary care provider is not required.

Once a referral is made, the following steps take place:

- The referral is sent to SMART Care Coordinator Cassie Cartwright to schedule an appointment.
- The SMART Care Coordinator will review the intake packet and forms with the family and shares what they can expect from an appointment.
- Children 5 and under are scheduled with Dr. Malit and Dr. Melquist, while 6 and older are scheduled with Dr. Rayos for 60 to 90-minute appointments.
- Patients are then referred to occupational therapy and speech language therapy for further evaluation, either at Mason Health or with South Sound Parent to Parent.
- Providers review all evaluation(s) to determine if criteria are met for a diagnosis.
- The SMART Care Coordinator schedules a final appointment with the family and collects information for resources and referrals.
- Families receive a diagnosis and referrals for treatment and therapies at a follow-up appointment.

The Care Coordinator stays connected with families if they have any additional questions.



Duval, 3, takes part in floor time therapy with Dr. Rose Ann Rayos, Easton and Henley.



Duval, 3, crawls through a "caterpillar" toy before his speech therapy appointment

Patient Testimonial

When **April Lightbody** began to consider the possibility that her third child, **Elliott Duval**, 3, might have autism, she believed she could be waiting years for a diagnosis because her older son had been on the wait list at Seattle Children's Autism Center for years.

She connected with the Mason County SMART in November 2021. A diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder came in January 2022, less than two months after the process started.

The diagnosis allowed Elliott to start services right away — within a month, he was able to start regular speech therapy at Mason General Hospital, obtain a referral for Applied Behavioral Analysis (ABA) therapy and start preschool. He is now able to form words and by April 2022 had started to say "Mama."

"It's like music to my ears," Lightbody said. "I can't wait to see what other words he may say thanks to the help of speech therapy. It's so nice to have answers ... Going to Seattle is not easy for us. We live in downtown Shelton and I love that we can just go up to the hospital to his appointments."

To schedule a SMART appointment, call Mason Clinic-Pediatrics at 360-426-2653 and ask for a SMART referral with Cassie Cartwright.

On the cover: **Elliott Duval**, 3, center, stands in front from left, Mason Health Director of Rehabilitation Services **Cheryl Woods**; Speech Language Pathologists **Monica Vinson** and **Erin Henley**; SMART Care Coordinator **Cassie Cartwright**, MA-C; Occupational Therapist **Tawnie Easton**; **Iris Malit**, MD; and **Rose Ann Rayos**, MD, members of the Mason County School Medical Autism Review Team, inside Mason Clinic-Pediatrics. Individuals were photographed separately. Photo by **Cooper Studios**.