Preparing for an NJCAT Assessment

A practical guide for individuals, families, guardians & support teams

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The NJCAT can affect an individual's DDD tier, annual budget, and whether an acuity factor is assigned for significant medical or behavioral support needs. The goal is not to make someone appear more or less independent than they are — it is to describe their real support needs accurately.

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What is the NJCAT?

The New Jersey Comprehensive Assessment Tool (NJCAT) is the standard assessment used by the New Jersey Division of Developmental Disabilities (DDD) to evaluate an individual's support needs in three main areas: self-care/daily living, behavior, and medical needs. The results are used to establish the individual's tier, which determines the annual DDD budget available for services.

- Self-care and daily living needs
- Behavioral support needs
- Medical support needs

Important: *The NJCAT is not just a questionnaire. The way support needs are captured can directly affect the resources available to support the individual.*

Understanding Tiers A-E

DDD uses five base tiers — A, B, C, D, and E — to reflect increasing levels of assessed support need. The tier affects the individual's annual budget and the reimbursement rate for certain DDD services.

Tier	General meaning
A	Lower assessed support needs
B	Increasing support needs
C	Moderate-to-significant support needs
D	Higher support needs
E	Highest of the five standard base tiers

Tier F is an exception tier used only in very rare cases. It is outside the standard A-E tier structure and requires exceptional Division-level review/approval rather than routine tier assignment.

What is an Acuity?

An acuity factor is added when an individual has high clinical support needs related to medical and/or behavioral concerns. When acuity is assigned, a lowercase “a” is added to the tier: Aa, Ba, Ca, Da, Ea — and, in rare exception cases, Fa.

Think of it this way: *The tier reflects the individual's overall level of support need. The acuity factor recognizes additional high-level medical or behavioral support needs.*

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The Initial NJCAT Meeting

The NJCAT is generally completed during the DDD eligibility process. A trained DDD facilitator schedules an in-person, virtual, or telephone meeting. The facilitator reads the questions aloud, clarifies questions when needed, and records the response agreed upon by the team.

- The individual and guardian, when applicable, participate.
- Other family members, providers, caregivers, or professionals who know the individual may also participate.
- The completed NJCAT is submitted electronically to Rutgers University's Developmental Disabilities Planning Institute (DDPI), where the score is calculated and the tier is established.

Choose One Primary Speaker Before the Meeting

Wildflower & Rose best-practice recommendation: Even though DDD permits multiple knowledgeable people to participate, the team should decide in advance who will serve as the primary speaker.

> The primary speaker should be the person who knows the individual's day-to-day support needs best and should be identified as the person providing the responses when the assessor asks who is answering for the individual.

- The primary speaker answers each question first.
- Other participants should avoid speaking over one another or giving competing answers.
- If another team member has specific expertise — for example, nursing, behavior, residential, or day-program supports — the primary speaker can ask that person to add relevant information.
- After additional input is provided, the primary speaker should clearly state the team's final response.

Why this matters: *A coordinated response helps the assessor hear a clear, complete picture without important information getting lost through interruptions, contradictory wording, or people answering from different settings.*

How to Answer the Questions

Do not answer based only on the person's best day. Families and caregivers often become so accustomed to providing support that they unintentionally describe the outcome instead of the assistance required to achieve it.

Example: "She dresses herself."

A more complete answer might be: "Her clothing is selected and laid out, she needs repeated verbal prompts to continue dressing, someone checks that items are oriented correctly, and she needs physical help with fasteners."

Use the Person's Most Challenging Realistic Level of Need

When a question is asking what assistance or supervision the person needs, do not average away the difficult days simply because they happen less often. If the person can require substantially greater support on their most challenging realistic days, explain that need clearly — even if those days occur only a few times a year.

However, always follow the exact wording of the question. If the NJCAT asks whether something occurred within a specific timeframe, answer for that timeframe. If it asks frequency, give the true frequency. The goal is accurate reporting, not exaggeration or minimization.

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Prepare Before the Assessment

Do not rely on memory alone. Before the meeting, review the individual's needs across home, program, community, medical, and behavioral settings.

- Bathing, dressing, toileting, grooming and hygiene
- Eating, food preparation, choking or aspiration risk
- Mobility, transfers, stairs and fall risk
- Communication and ability to express pain, illness or distress
- Safety awareness, elopement, wandering and community supervision
- Aggression, self-injury, property destruction or behavioral escalation
- Seizures, respiratory concerns, diabetes, medication needs or other medical monitoring
- Overnight supervision or checks
- What happens when routines change or the individual becomes dysregulated
- Recent emergency-room visits, psychiatric crises or hospitalizations

Helpful records to review: *current ISP, behavior plans/data, nursing documentation, seizure logs, incident reports, hospital discharge records, psychiatric evaluations, therapy notes, and any documentation showing changes in level of support.*

Why Timing Matters

Many assessment questions look at what has happened during a defined recent period. Because of that, the timing of a reassessment after a significant change can matter.

- Psychiatric or behavioral crisis hospitalization
- Medical hospitalization
- New or worsening seizure activity
- Major change in mobility or self-care
- New behavioral or safety concerns
- Significant increase in supervision or staffing needs

If the individual's needs have meaningfully changed, consider discussing reassessment promptly with the Support Coordinator. Waiting too long can mean that a significant event no longer falls within the timeframe referenced by a particular NJCAT question.

This does not guarantee a higher tier or acuity. *A reassessment may result in a higher tier, a lower tier, or no change. Timely reassessment simply helps ensure that current support needs are captured while relevant events and documentation are still recent.*

How Often Should the NJCAT Be Reassessed?

DDD guidance states that NJCAT results are typically valid for five years. As a practical best practice, families should make sure the assessment is reviewed at least within that cycle — and sooner whenever there is a meaningful change in medical, behavioral, functional, safety, or supervision needs.

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Requesting an NJCAT Reassessment

An individual, legal guardian, or Support Coordinator may request reassessment when changes may have affected the individual's need for support. DDD requires a Support Coordinator and current completed Person-Centered Planning Tool (PCPT) and NJ Individualized Service Plan (NJISP).

1. Ask the Support Coordinator for a copy of the current NJCAT.
2. Review the existing NJCAT and identify responses that no longer reflect the individual's current support needs.
3. Gather supporting documentation that explains the change in need.
4. **Complete the Request for NJ CAT Reassessment form.**
5. **Submit the request, updated/marked NJCAT, and supporting documentation to DDD.**

CLICK HERE: Official Request for NJ CAT Reassessment Form

DDD reassessment email: DDD.DDPIAssessmentRequests@dhs.nj.gov

A Simple NJCAT Meeting Strategy

Before	Review the questions, records, recent changes and high-support situations. Choose the primary speaker/informant.
During	Listen to the exact wording. Answer the question asked. Describe the actual support required and do not minimize intermittent but significant needs.
Team input	Let the primary speaker lead. Other participants add information when specifically invited or when an important fact has been missed.
Final answer	After discussion, the primary speaker clearly states the final response the team wants recorded.
After	Request a copy of the completed NJCAT and review the tier letter when received. If the assessment does not reflect current needs, discuss the reassessment process with the Support Coordinator.

Remember

Be truthful. Be specific. Do not minimize. Provide context.

Describe the support the individual actually needs — including support that has become so routine that the family or team may no longer think of it as assistance.

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Official Resources & Sources

NJ DDD - NJ Comprehensive Assessment Tool (NJCAT)

NJ DDD - Request for NJ CAT Reassessment Form

NJ DDD - Best Practice Guide, Version 2.0 (April 2026)

NJ DDD - Supports Program Policies & Procedures Manual

Educational disclaimer

This guide is an educational resource created by Wildflower & Rose LLC and is not an official publication of the New Jersey Division of Developmental Disabilities. DDD policies, forms, procedures, and assessment practices may change. Families and providers should verify current requirements with DDD and the individual's Support Coordinator. The meeting-organization recommendation to use one primary speaker is a Wildflower & Rose best practice intended to improve clarity; DDD's official process allows multiple knowledgeable participants and records the response agreed upon by the group.

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