



National Center for Learning Disabilities

The power to hope, to learn, and to succeed

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Fact Sheets

Being an Advocate for Your Pre-school Child



Being an advocate means knowing how to ensure that your child gets the help he or she needs to be successful. For children who experience learning difficulties, it's never too early to start looking for ways to help them succeed in learning. Even before formal schooling starts, there are things you can do to make sure your child gets help early, so that learning can be a fun and productive experience. Below are the first steps you should take if you suspect your child has difficulty learning:

- Observe your child and start a log of the behavior you think suggests learning delays or difficulties.
- Talk to your child about what you are observing. Try to learn more about the problems he or she appears to be having through play so that you can share specific examples with people who might be able to help. Be sure to enthusiastically praise your child's successes and good effort often.
- Meet with your child's pediatrician, bringing along your list of observations. Be open and honest about your concerns and don't be afraid to ask questions like "Why is my child having trouble?" or "Is this something that will go away by itself?" or "Is this within the normal range of development?" Ask if developmental screenings are available; or if another medical professional (i.e., a neurologist) or an early childhood specialist (i.e., speech/language pathologist, psychologist, special educator) should evaluate your child. If you are concerned about your child's progress, don't wait to pursue further evaluation.
- Ask the pediatrician or your local school district whom you should contact to arrange an evaluation for your child. An evaluation will provide you with the information you need to make important decisions, and will determine whether your child could be eligible for early intervention or preschool services. Evaluation findings are strictly confidential. It is up to you to decide with whom the information is shared.
- Early intervention services are services for infants and toddlers up to age two that are designed to identify and address a problem or delay as early as possible. Preschool services are specially designed programs offered by public schools and are available for eligible children with disabilities beginning at age three. Until age five, these services are voluntary-you can wait to decide whether you want to enroll your child in a program that

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- Once you request an evaluation, it is your right to have it completed within a set period of time, usually within 30 school days of your signing a written consent for your child to be evaluated. Don't be shy about calling or visiting the evaluation site to keep the process moving.
- Bring all information about your child that you think is relevant to meetings and evaluations. When speaking to doctors, therapists or school administrators be prepared to tell them your observations about your child's strengths and weaknesses, likes and dislikes, as well as what goals you are progressing towards with your child. Your input is vital in helping provide a full picture of your child to people who probably don't know him or her well.
- Keep a log of the names, organizations and phone numbers of all people you speak to and the information they give you. Also ask for a copy of all reports and correspondence about your child.

Public Law (P.L.) 105-17 of the federal Individual with Disabilities Education Act guarantees certain rights to young children (ages zero to five) with special needs. Among those are:

- Children ages zero through two with disabilities have the right to early intervention services. If a state chooses, it can also serve infants and toddlers at risk for developing disabilities.
- Children ages three to five with disabilities have the right to special education.
- Each child has the right to special services that are based on an evaluation and assessment of the child's particular needs at no cost to the child's family.
- Children with disabilities have the right to receive teaching and instruction designed to meet their specific needs. In the case of infants and toddlers these needs are documented in an Individualized Family Services Plan (IFSP) and focus on the development of the child; for children age three and older, service and support plans are stated in an Individualized Education Plan (IEP). These plans outline:
 - The developmental levels of the child (in the case of children ages zero to two)
 - The outcomes expected to be achieved for the child
 - The services that will be provided
 - When and where they will be provided
 - When the plan will be updated next.
 - An IFSP recognizes the family as a child's greatest developmental resource, so that each plan is structured around the strengths of the family to support the special needs of the child. A group of specialists, who can include doctors, therapists, child development specialists, social workers and others, is also part of the team and can help the family support the child. Services provided may include speech therapy, social work and others. IFSPs are reviewed at least every six

months.

- An IEP is a similar plan that moves away from the family and focuses on a child's education. The IEP team also includes teachers and school administrators who come in contact with child. IEPs are reviewed at least every year.

- Parents or guardians have the right to be included in making any decisions about their child 's educational needs and services. This includes appealing or consenting to any decisions made through the evaluation and assessment process.

Every child is entitled to a free and appropriate public education, and part of your role as a parent and caregiver is to make sure that the rights of your child are protected. Becoming familiar with the laws and services that exist to assist your child is the first step towards learning success.

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