Texas Education Agency

When There Are Concerns: Understanding Early Childhood Supports and Services

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Emily Groomer

You may be wondering...

Should I be concerned about what I'm seeing?

Who can help my child?

SPEDTEX
Special Education Information Center

My child has been receiving ECI, but what happens when they turn 3?

How do I request an evaluation?

Objectives



Notice developmental concerns that may indicate a need for additional support.



Learn what support is available for your children in Texas and where to go for trusted resources.



Take action by connecting with your local school district or other available supports.

What concerns do families often notice?

If your child is between the ages of 3 through 5 and you're concerned about their development or learning, early intervention can make all the difference.

Examples of Concerns:

- Your child is not speaking as much as other children their age.
- Your child has difficulty understanding simple instructions.
- Your child has trouble interacting with other children or adults.
- Other people have difficulty understanding what your child says.



Norah recently turned 3. Her family has noticed that she uses fewer words than other children her age and sometimes becomes frustrated when others don't understand her. They wonder whether additional support may be available.

When You Have Concerns: A Parent's Guide to Special Education Referrals for Children Ages 3-5

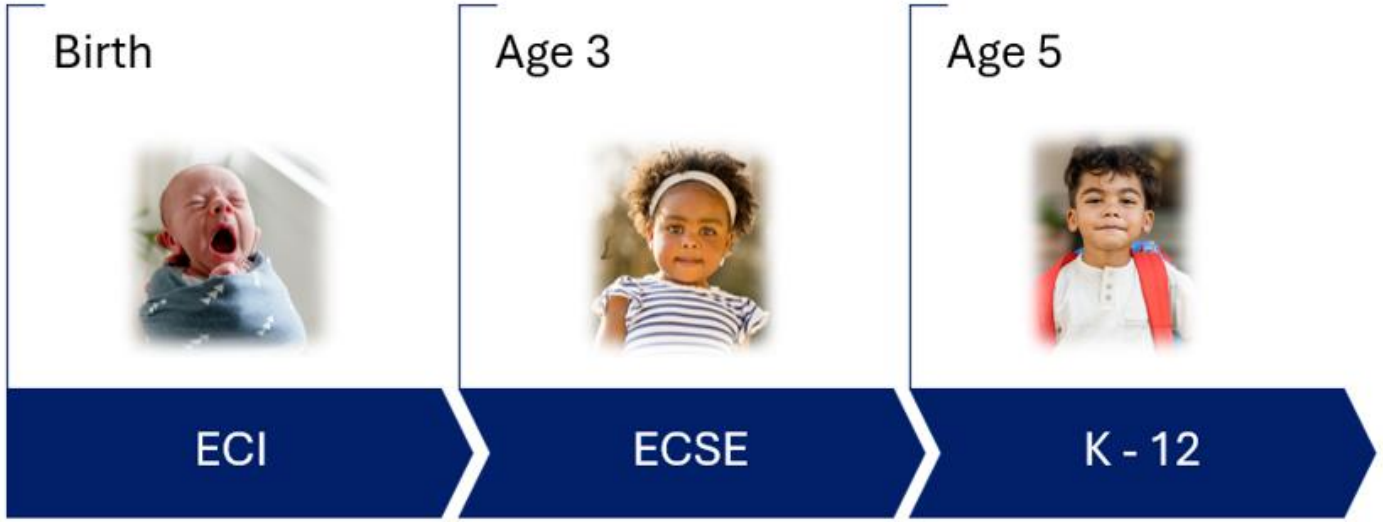
What supports exist?

Early Childhood Intervention

- ECI
- Administered by Texas Health and Human Services
- Age: Birth to 36 months
- Location of services: Where the child lives, learns, and plays

Early Childhood Special Education

- ECSE
- Provided by public school systems
- Age: 3 through 5 (not in kindergarten)
- Location of services: Usually in general education classrooms, special education classrooms or a combination of settings



A Parent's Guide to ECI and ECSE

What is special education?

When a child receives special education, it means that a public school provides custom services and instruction specific to the needs of that student. Special education is available because of a federal law called the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), which provides students with disabilities and their parents special legal rights to receive these individualized learning opportunities.

Special education is a service, not a place.

How can special education services help your child?



- If your child is eligible for special education services, your child will have access to services and supports that are specially designed to meet your child's unique needs.
- Special education services provide individualized programming at NO cost to you and may include special education teachers and service providers such as occupational therapists, physical therapists, speech-language pathologists, and providers of dyslexia instruction.

While there are other federal laws that also offer certain protections for students with disabilities - such as Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 - IDEA has specific rights only available under that law. This document summarizes those rights.

Overview of Special Education for Parents

What are ECSE services?

- ECSE is the special education program for preschool-aged children.
- There are different types of programs and supports available. Which services and supports the child will receive is **based on the child's individualized needs**.
- The **goal** is to provide services in settings that allow children with disabilities to learn and participate with children without disabilities as much as possible.
- Services may be delivered in a **variety of settings**, including:



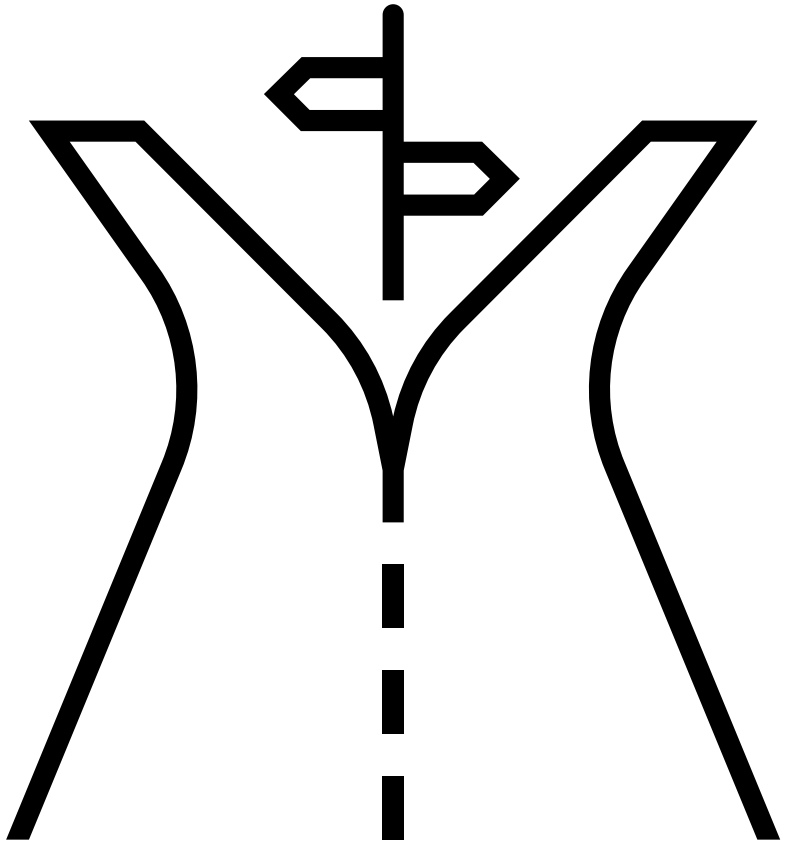
- General education classroom
- Special education classroom
- Speech therapy setting
- Community-based program
- Home setting
- Separate special education school

A Parent's Guide to ECI and ECSE

How do children qualify for ECSE services?

Transition from ECI

- Receiving ECI services
- Transition planning begins
- School district involvement
- Special education evaluation & eligibility determination



Concern Identified After Age 3

- Concern identified
- Family contacts school district
- Child Find process
- Special education evaluation & eligibility determination

If eligible, child begins receiving ECSE services.

What is Child Find?



Looking for more information, Norah's family visits SPEDTex to learn about their options. They discover resources about Child Find and the special education process, helping them decide on their next steps. Because Norah recently turned 3, they identify the school district as the point of contact.

- Child Find helps **identify** and **support** children with disabilities, ages 3 through 21, who may need special education services.
- Parents, caregivers, or professionals can request an evaluation if they have **concerns** about a child's development or learning.
- Once referred, the child is **evaluated** by the school district to see if they qualify for special education and related services.
- Child Find ensures children get the support they need **early** so they can succeed in school.

Child Find Frequently Asked Questions | SPEDTex

What happens during a special education evaluation?

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Parents have a right to request a special education evaluation at any time. Schools are required to refer a student for an evaluation when a disability is suspected that might require special education services. It's important to understand the steps of the **special education process**.
Special education services provide individualized programming at **NO cost** to you and may include special education teachers and service providers.

Steps to Begin Special Education:

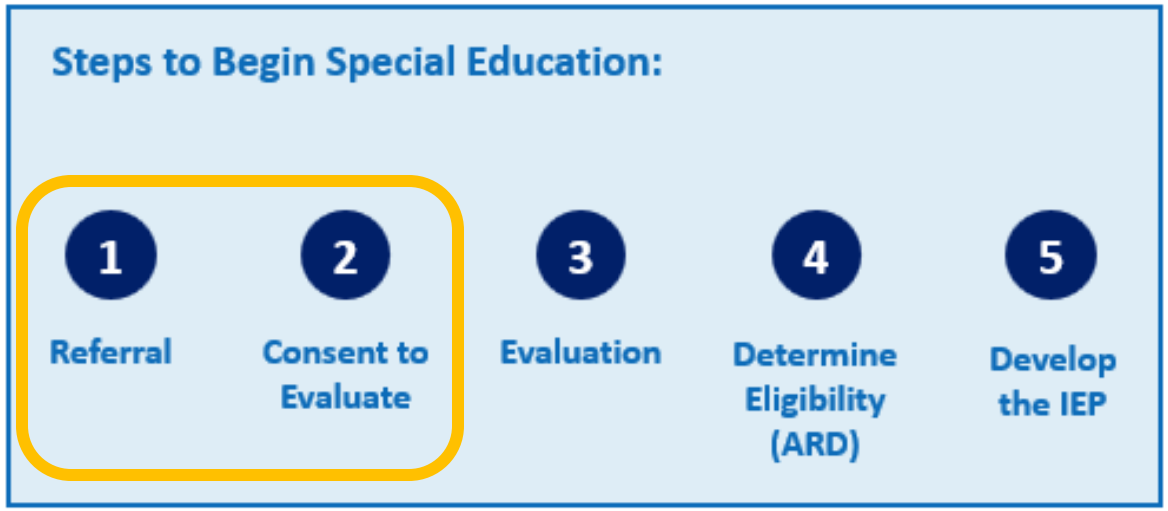
1. Referral
2. Consent to Evaluate
3. Evaluation
4. Determine Eligibility (ARD)
5. Develop the IEP

Receiving Special Education Services:

→ Implement the IEP

Overview of Special Education for Parents

How do I request a special education evaluation?





Key Takeaways:

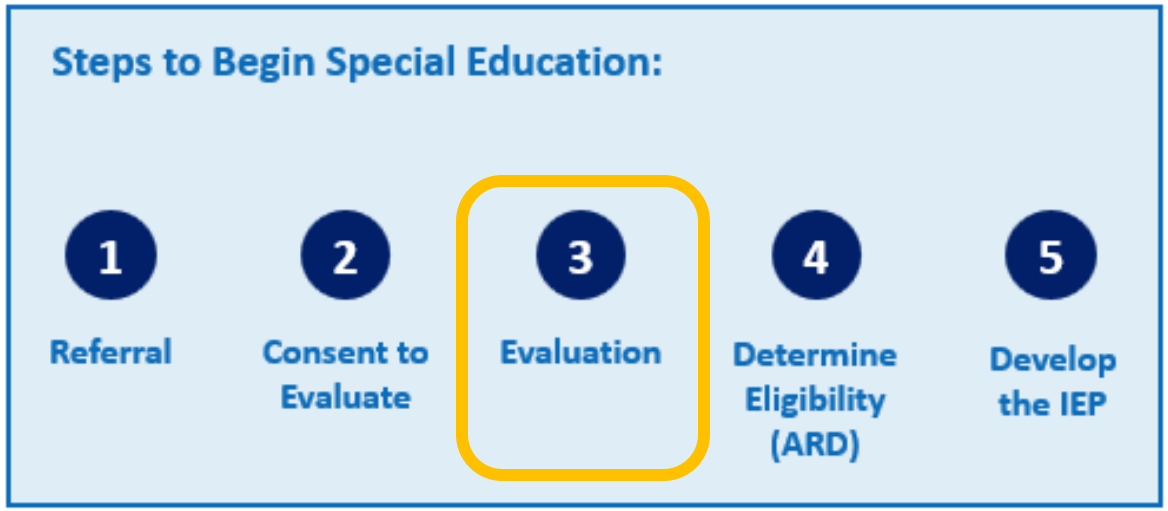
If you have concerns about your child's growth or learning, **contact the special education director** at your local school district and ask, “How do I request a special education evaluation?”

It's a good idea to make your request **in writing.**

Norah’s family visits the school district’s website and locates the special education office. They submit a written request for a special education evaluation. The school district responds and explains the evaluation process, including the need for parental consent before the evaluation can begin.

When You Have Concerns: A Parent’s Guide to Special Education Referrals for Children Ages 3-5

What happens during a special education evaluation?





Key Takeaway:

Your local school district will **collaborate** with you to address your concerns and ensure your child's educational needs are met. The goal is **to determine if your child needs special education and related services** to support their progress in preschool.

Norah participates in play-based activities while the evaluation team gathers information about her strengths and needs. Her family shares what they see at home to help the team understand Norah's development.

When You Have Concerns: A Parent's Guide to Special Education Referrals for Children Ages 3-5

What happens if my child is eligible?

Steps to Begin Special Education:

1. Referral
2. Consent to Evaluate
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Key Takeaway:

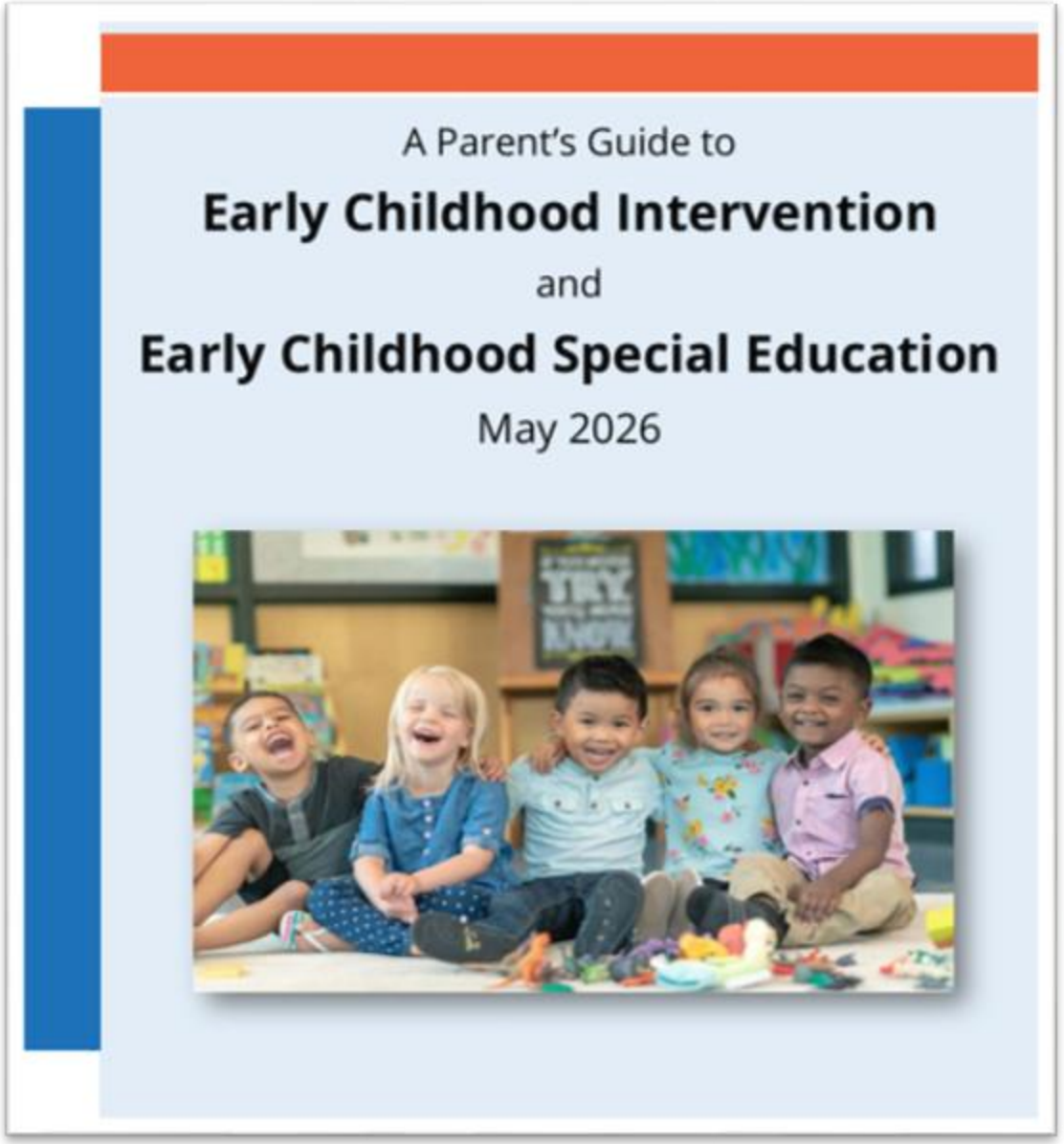
You have the **right to participate** in the development of the IEP and agree or disagree to your child getting special education services.



Norah's family meets with the ARD committee to review the evaluation findings. They have opportunities to ask questions, share their input, and participate in decisions about eligibility and support for Norah. Because Norah is eligible for special education services, the team develops an IEP with goals and supports based on her individual strengths and needs.

Overview of Special Education for Parents

If you are wondering:
What is the difference between ECI and ECSE?



A Parent's Guide to Early Childhood Intervention and Early Childhood Special Education

Supports understanding of:

- ECI
- ECSE
- Special education evaluation
- Eligibility
- Transition planning

If you are wondering:
How do I request an evaluation?



When You Have Concerns: A Parent's Guide to Special Education Referrals for Children Ages 3-5

Concerned About Your Child's Learning?

If your child is between the ages of 3 through 5 and you're concerned about their development or learning, early intervention can make all the difference.

Examples of Concerns:

- Your child is not speaking as much as other children their age.
- Your child has difficulty understanding simple instructions.
- Your child has trouble interacting with other children or adults.
- Other people have difficulty understanding what your child says.

The Child Find process is a required part of a federal law called the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) that ensures all children with disabilities, from birth through age 21, are identified, located, and evaluated to determine their need for special education and related services.

This process is important for identifying and supporting children ages 3 through 5 who may have developmental delays or disabilities, ensuring they get the early intervention they need to thrive.

If you have concerns about your child's growth or learning, **contact the special education director at your local school district** for more information regarding the Child Find process. You can ask – **"How do I request a special education evaluation?"**

Need Help Locating Your Local School District?

The Texas School District Locator (SDL) provides basic information for Texas schools, districts, and education service centers (ESCs) in map format. Click the link or scan this QR code and enter your address in the "Find address or place" box.

What if my child is under 3 years old?

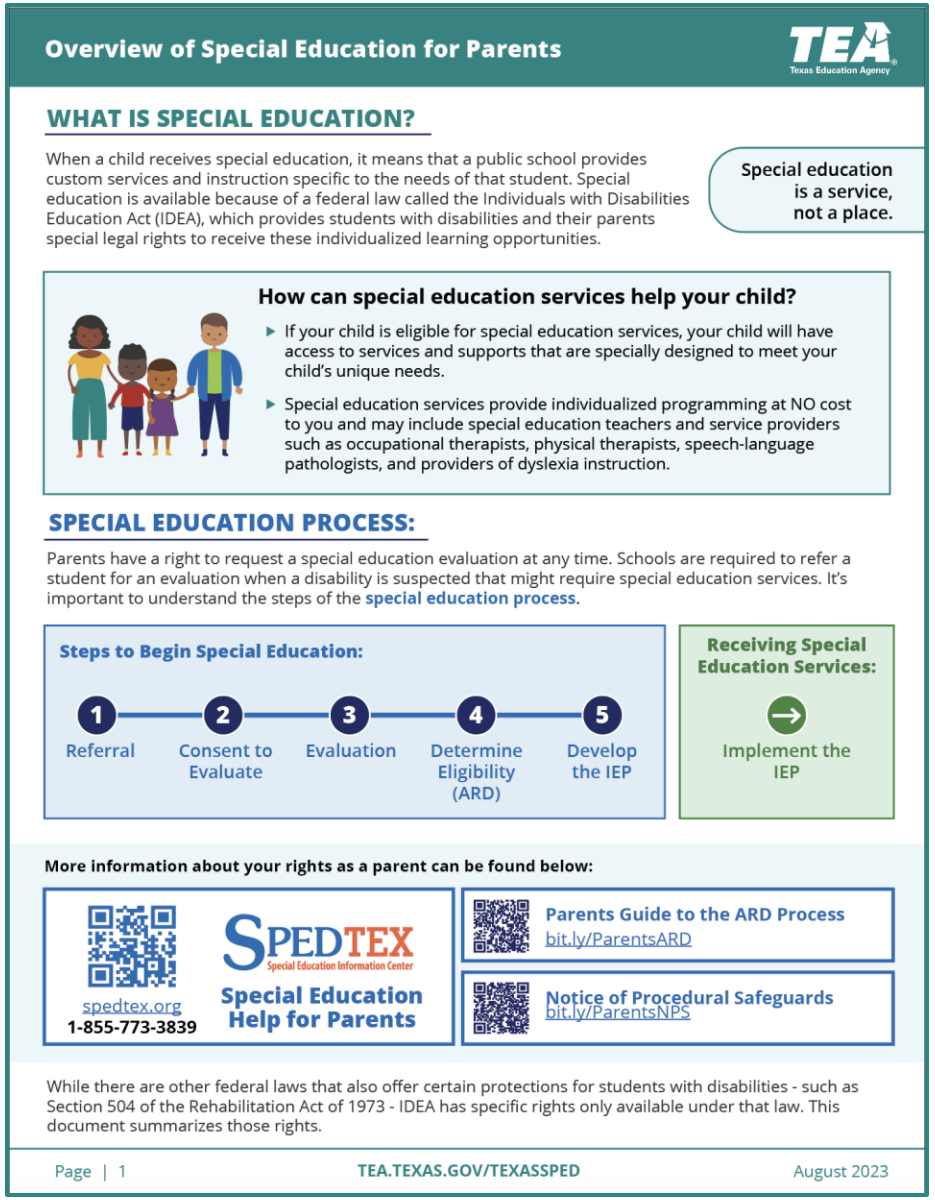
For children 3 years old and under, Early Childhood Intervention (ECI) is a statewide program administered by the Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) for families with children from birth to 36 months with developmental delays, disabilities, or certain medical diagnoses that may impact development. ECI services support families as they learn how to help their children grow and learn. Visit HHSC's ECI website for referrals and support.

When You Have Concerns: A Parent's Guide to Special Education Referrals for Children Ages 3-5

Supports understanding of:

- Child Find
- School district point of contact
- Special education evaluation
- Next steps

If you are wondering:
What is the special education process?



Overview of Special Education for Parents

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WHAT IS SPECIAL EDUCATION?

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SPECIAL EDUCATION PROCESS:

Parents have a right to request a special education evaluation at any time. Schools are required to refer a student for an evaluation when a disability is suspected that might require special education services. It's important to understand the steps of the special education process.

Steps to Begin Special Education:

1 Referral — 2 Consent to Evaluate — 3 Evaluation — 4 Determine Eligibility (ARD) — 5 Develop the IEP

Receiving Special Education Services:

→ Implement the IEP

More information about your rights as a parent can be found below:

spedtex.org
1-855-773-3839
SPEDTEX Special Education Information Center
Special Education Help for Parents

Parents Guide to the ARD Process
bit.ly/ParentsARD

Notice of Procedural Safeguards
bit.ly/ParentsNPS

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Overview of Special Education for Parents

Supports understanding of:

- Parent rights
- Special education evaluation
- Individualized education program (IEP)

From concerns to action



They **noticed** concerns about her communication and wanted to learn more.

They **learned** about available supports through SPEDTex.

They **took action** by contacting their local school district, requesting an evaluation, and participating in the special education process.

Most importantly- Norah's family was involved every step of the way.

What is the next step?

Child under age 3?	Visit HHSC/ECI website for more information
Child age 3 – 5?	Contact your local school district
Already receiving services?	Talk with your current team
Not sure where to start?	Contact SPEDTex

Resources



- SPEDTex | Helping Families Navigate Special Education in Texas
- Overview of Special Education for Parents
- A Parent's Guide to ECI and ECSE
- Child Find Frequently Asked Questions
- When You Have Concerns: A Parent's Guide to Special Education Referrals for Children Ages 3-5

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Thank you!