



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.

SPEDTEX Special Education Information Center

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Referral Process

Parents have a right to request a special education evaluation for their child who is at least 3 years of age at any time. Schools are required to refer a student for an evaluation when a disability is suspected that might require special education services. When a child receives special education, it means that a public school provides services and instruction specific to the needs of that student. Special education is available because of IDEA, which provides students with disabilities and their parents special legal rights to receive these individualized learning opportunities. The Overview of Special Education for Parents form is a summary of rights, required to be given to parents after a referral has been made. For more information about your rights, review the Notice of Procedural Safeguards and the Parent's Guide to the Admission Review and Dismissal (ARD) Process.

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, and speech-language pathologists.

If you have concerns about your child's development, you may request a special education evaluation, called a full and individual initial evaluation (FIIE), at the school your child is zoned to attend or through the district's special education office. Parents, family members, medical professionals, and teachers (including those from Head Start, private preschool, or childcare programs) can also make this request.

It's a good idea to make your request in writing to the school district's director of special education services or a district administrative employee, like a campus principal.

Once you submit a written request, the school district must respond within 15 school days. They will provide you with a document called a prior written notice, which is a legal requirement under the IDEA. It ensures that parents are informed about any changes or decisions regarding their child's special education services. You will also receive a copy of the Notice of Procedural Safeguards, and the opportunity to give written consent for the evaluation. If the school district refuses to evaluate your child, they must provide you with prior written notice describing the reasons for the denial and a copy of the Notice of Procedural Safeguards.

Your local school district will collaborate with you to address your concerns and ensure your child's educational needs are met. This may involve gathering information from you, service providers, and teachers, as well as reviewing previous developmental screenings, conducting new screenings, or completing evaluations. The goal is to determine if your child needs special education and related services to support their progress in preschool. **Child Find services, including the evaluation, are free to families.**

Special Education Resources | SPEDTex

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Special Education Help for Parents

Key Takeaways for Parents Who Have Concerns

1. **Find your local school district.**
2. **Contact your local school district's special education director or campus principal to request a special education evaluation. (It's recommended to make this request in writing.)**
3. **Collaborate with your local school district staff and provide information about your child.**



Resources

Several resources can help parents navigate this process, as listed below.

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The Overview of Special Education for Parents	Notice of Procedural Safeguards	Parent's Guide to the Admission, Review, and Dismissal (ARD) Process

Texas Education Agency

Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE)	Special Education	Section 504

Parent Training and Information Center (PTI)

The Center for Parent Information & Resources (CPIR) is the central hub of valuable information and products specifically designed for the network of Parent Centers serving families of children with disabilities.

There are nearly 100 Parent Training and Information Centers (PTIs) and Community Parent Resource Centers (CPRCs) in the US and Territories. Click the link or scan this QR code to find your parent center.

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