

Special Education Assessment for Preschool-Aged Children: Referral and Getting Started

When a caregiver in a preschooler's life notices signs of a disability or developmental delay, they may suggest an assessment through the public education system. A diagnosis, or confirmation of a delay or disability, can lead to the child receiving educational services and supports.



Starting the assessment process

There are many avenues that can lead to an assessment, such as:

- A parent or caregiver has expressed concerns about your child's development.
- Your child has received a diagnosis (e.g., autism) from a medical provider.
- Your child has already been receiving services through early intervention.

What should I know about the assessment process?

- Assessment is used to determine a child's developmental strengths and areas of need. Play activities, observations, and caregiver interviews are used to gather information.
- A formal assessment for special education requires your written permission.
- Your local education agency (LEA), such as a school district, will conduct the assessment.
- You should receive an assessment plan that outlines the type of assessments the LEA wants to do, the areas of development they want to assess, and who will conduct them.
- The LEA will likely request assessments in multiple domains. It is common to assess all developmental areas to get a global picture of a child.
- You may request additional assessments not included on the proposed assessment plan. For example, if the LEA wants to assess cognition and physical development but you also have concerns about your child's communication skills, you may ask for a communication assessment.
- You may also decline a portion of the assessment, but it is best to discuss why the assessment is being requested first.
- Within 60 days, the LEA will complete the assessment, share the results with you, and develop a plan for special education if your child qualifies.

How can I advocate for my child during the referral process?

- **Listen to others' concerns.** It may be difficult to hear others' concerns about your child. It's possible you have not seen any of these concerns. It may be helpful for you to schedule a time to observe your child in their early childhood setting.
- **Understand your rights.** You should receive a document titled *Procedural Safeguards Notice* from your LEA. This document explains your rights.
- **Ask questions.** The assessment plan may be hard to understand. It's okay to ask someone to go over the document with you. You should understand what you are signing.
- **Share your concerns.** The parent and school relationship is a partnership. The LEA can address your concerns.

For related Web resources, see "Special Education Assessment for Preschool-Aged Children: Referral and Getting Started" at <https://illinoisearlylearning.org/tipsheets/>

Any opinions, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this tip sheet are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Illinois State Board of Education.



13 Children's Research Center
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
51 Gerty Dr. • Champaign, IL 61820-7469
Telephone: 217-333-1386
Toll-free: 877-275-3227
E-mail: iel@illinois.edu
<https://illinoisearlylearning.org>



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