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Texas Department of State
Health Services



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- We value your feedback and encourage you to share any concerns related to language, images, or concepts that may be offensive or stigmatizing.
- Your input will help us refine and improve our presentations, ensuring they remain inclusive and respectful to participants.



Texas Department of State
Health Services



When There Are Concerns: Supporting Young Children and Their Families

October 9, 2026
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Objectives



Explain support that is available for young children with disabilities.



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



Connect families with trusted information and resources through SPEDTex.



Guide families toward appropriate next steps for children ages 3-5.

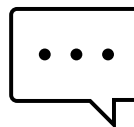
Who serves young children with disabilities?

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



Do any of the children in your care receive ECI services?

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.

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



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



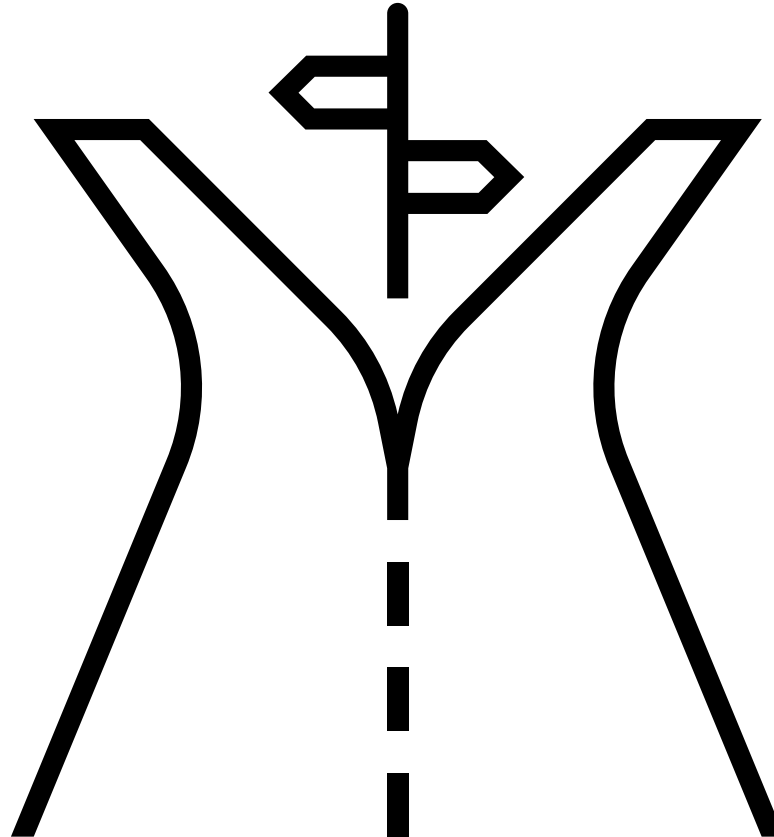
Family contacts school
district



Child Find process



Special education
evaluation & eligibility
determination



If eligible, child begins receiving ECSE services.

What is Child Find?



- 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.

How can child care providers support Child Find?

Notice



Monitor children's development and share objective observations with families

Connect



Share trusted information and resources

Guide



Support families as they learn about available options



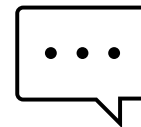
What should I NOTICE?



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.

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



What concerns do you hear most often from families?

Families often ask...

What happens when
my child turns 3?

Who can help my child?



What should I do
next?

How do I request an
evaluation?

How can I CONNECT families who are transitioning from ECI?

A Parent's Guide to
Early Childhood Intervention
and
Early Childhood Special Education
May 2026



A Parent's Guide to ECI and ECSE

Use when families ask:

- Who helps my child?
- What's the difference between ECI and ECSE?
- What happens when my child turns 3?

Supports understanding of:

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

How can I CONNECT families when they have concerns?



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

Use when families ask:

- What should I do if I am worried about my child's development?
- How do I request an evaluation?
- Who should I contact for help?

Supports understanding of:

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

How can I CONNECT families who want to understand special education?



Overview of Special Education for Parents



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.

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:



Receiving Special Education Services:



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

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

Use when families ask:

- What is special education?
- How can special education services help my child?
- What is the special education process?

Supports understanding of:

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

How can I GUIDE families toward the next steps?



You should...

- Notice concerns and strengths
- Share observations
- Connect families to information and resources
- Encourage families to seek additional information

You should not...

- Diagnose
- Predict eligibility
- Tell a family their child has a disability
- Guarantee ECSE services

When in doubt, describe what you notice and connect families to reliable information.



Let's Practice Reframing

Instead of “I think your child has autism.”



I've noticed that Noah often plays by himself during free play and uses fewer words than many classmates.



TEA has a guide that explains options available to families when they have questions or concerns about a child's development.



Would you like me to share that resource?

Let's Practice Reframing

Instead of “The school district will provide speech therapy for your child.”



I've noticed that several adults have difficulty understanding Maya, and she sometimes becomes frustrated when trying to communicate.



This guide explains how families can ask their school district to evaluate your child's strengths and needs and see if support may be helpful.



Would you like me to share that resource?



Questions?



- [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](#)



Thank you!

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