

A PARENT'S GUIDE

Accessing Programs For Infants, Toddlers, and Preschoolers With Disabilities

Resources updated, October 2003

Update, August, 1994

We have written this *Parent's Guide* to help families learn how to get help for their young children with **special needs** (ages birth through 5 years). We have posed the most commonly asked questions about **early intervention services** for children ages birth through 2 years old and **special education** and **related services** for children ages 3 through 5 years old.

The rules or guidelines for **special education** in the United States and its territories are outlined in a federal law known as the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)*, formerly known as *the Education of the Handicapped Act (EHA)*. Each state or territory develops its own **policies** for carrying out this Act. (You can read more about this law beginning on page 12.)

You'll need to find out what the **early intervention** or **special education policies** are in your state and area. A *NICHCY State Resource Sheet* for your state is available from NICHCY and lists agencies and contact people in your state. This list should help you get started.

The phrases "children with **special needs**" or "**special needs** children" are used throughout this document to refer to children who have **disabilities** or who are **at risk** of developing **disabilities**.

Words in **bold** are defined in the Parent's Dictionary that begins on page 14. A word appears in bold only the first and second time it is used; for ease of reading, the word will then appear in regular print.

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PART I:

Questions and Answers About Early Intervention Services For Infants and Toddlers Who Have a Developmental Delay or Who Are At Risk of a Developmental Delay (Ages Birth Through 2 Years Old)

Note: Words that appear in **bold** are words that are commonly used in **special education**. Many may be new to you. We have used these terms to help you become familiar with them. You can find their definitions in the Parent's Dictionary that begins on page 14.

We have used the term "parents" to mean anyone who is in charge of the care and well-being of a child. These can be guardians, single parents, grandparents, surrogate parents, foster parents, or other family members.

The federal law known as **Public Law (P.L.) 105-17** guarantees certain rights to young children (ages birth to 5) with **special needs**. This law is the most recent **amendment** to the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)*. (To learn more about this law, see pages 12 and 13.)

Q: *What should I do if I think my child has special needs?*

A: First, you'll need to find out if your infant or toddler is **eligible** for **early intervention services**. There are many people who can help you with this. We will explain how to get the help you need in the pages that follow.

Q: *What are early intervention services?*

A: These are **services** for infants and toddlers that are designed to identify and treat a problem or delay as early as possible. **Early intervention services** are offered through a **public or private agency** and are provided in different settings, such as the child's home, a clinic, a neighborhood daycare center, hospital, or the local health department.

Early intervention services can range from prescribing glasses for a two-year-old to developing a complete **physical therapy** program for an infant with cerebral palsy.

Q: *Who do I contact first for help?*

A: Each state decides which of its agencies will be the **lead agency** in charge of early intervention services for infants and toddlers with **special needs**. In your state, the first contact person may be an **early interventionist** (an early childhood specialist working with infants and toddlers), someone with the **lead agency**, or someone in your state's **Child Find** office.

To find out who can help you in your area, contact the person listed on NICHCY's *State Resource Sheet* for your state under "Programs for Infants and Toddlers with Disabilities." If you don't have a *State Resource Sheet*, call NICHCY at 1.800.695.0285. Explain that you want to find out about early intervention services for your child and ask for a name in your area.

Important. Write down the names and phone numbers of everyone you talk to. (You can use the Sample Record-Keeping Worksheet at the bottom of page 20 as a guide.) Having this information available may be helpful to you later on.

Q: *What do I say when I talk to my local contact person?*

A: Explain that you think your child may need early intervention services and you would like to arrange for an **evaluation** and **assessment**. Write down any information you are given.

Q: *What is an evaluation and assessment?*

A: **Evaluation** refers to the procedures used to determine if a child is **eligible** for early intervention services. **Assessment** refers to the ongoing process of gathering and using information about how a child is developing and determining what kind of help he or she might need.

In regards to your child, this information may come from some or all of the following:

- Doctors' reports;
- Results from **developmental tests** given to your child;
- Your child's medical history;
- Observations and feedback from all members of the **multidisciplinary team**, including parents; and
- Any other important observations, records, and/or reports about your child.

Q: *Who does the evaluation and assessment?*

A: It depends on your state's **policies** or rules. Ask your local contact person about this. Usually, a team of professionals, which may include a **psychologist**, an **early interventionist**, and an **occupational** or **physical therapist**, will evaluate a child.

Q: *Who pays for the evaluation and assessment?*

A: Under IDEA, **evaluations** and **assessments** are provided at no cost to families. Check with your contact person for local guidelines.

Q: *Will I have to pay for any services if my child is found eligible?*

A: Usually, services are provided at no cost to the family. You may have to pay for some services, depending on your state's **policies**. Check with the contact person in your area or state. Some services may be covered by your health insurance, by Medicaid, or by Indian Health Services.

In some areas, you may be charged a "sliding-scale" fee that is based on what you earn. Every effort is made to provide services to all infants and toddlers who need help, regardless of family income.

Q: *What is a service coordinator (case manager)?*

A: When a child's needs are assessed and the child is found eligible for services, a **service coordinator** will be assigned to the family. This person should have a background in early childhood development and methods for helping young children who may have developmental delays. The **service coordinator** must know the policies for early intervention programs and services in your state. This person can help you locate other services in your community, such as recreation, child care, or family support groups. The service coordinator will work with your family as long as your baby is receiving early intervention services and, after your child is 2 years old, the service coordinator will help your family move on to programs for children ages 3 through 5.

Q: *What is an IFSP?*

A: The family and the service coordinator work with other professionals, as appropriate, to develop an **Individualized Family Service Plan**, or **IFSP**. The guiding principle of the **IFSP** is that the family is a child's greatest resource, that a baby's needs are closely tied to the needs of their family. The best way to support children and meet their needs is to support and build upon the individual strengths of their family. So the **IFSP** is a whole family plan with the parents as the most important part of the **IFSP** team. Involvement of other team members will depend on what the baby needs. These other team members could come from several agencies, and may include medical people, therapists, child development specialists, social workers, and others.

The **IFSP** will describe the following: the child's developmental levels; family information (with parents' concurrence); the major outcomes expected to be achieved for the child and family; the services the child will be receiving; when and where he or she will receive these services; and the steps to be taken to support his or her transition to another program. The **IFSP** will also identify the service coordinator. The **IFSP** may also identify services the family may be interested in, such as financial information or information about raising a child with a disability.

Each state has developed specific guidelines for the **IFSP**. Your service coordinator can explain what the **IFSP** guidelines are in your state.

Q: *Are there any parent groups in my area that can give me more information about early intervention services?*

A: There are several types of parent groups, including:

- Support groups (such as Parent-to-Parent) for families of children with **disabilities**;
- **Parent training and information (PTI) programs** funded by the federal government and operating in each state; and

- Groups concerned with a specific **disability**, such as United Cerebral Palsy Association, Inc. (UCPA) or the Arc (formerly the Association for Retarded Citizens of the United States).

We have listed some of these groups on the NICHCY *State Resource Sheet*.

Parent groups can offer information, support, and/or training to families of children with disabilities to help parents take a more active role in helping their children. Through such groups, families meet other families with similar needs to discuss resources, day-to-day problems, and personal insights.

Your service coordinator or someone at your local school may be able to tell you about nearby groups. For more details on parent groups, contact NICHCY (1.800.695.0285) and ask for our "Parent's Guide to Accessing Parent Programs."

Q: *I still have a lot of questions. How can I find out more about special education laws and about early intervention services?*

A: See pages 12 and 13 for more information on one of the most important **special education** laws. Also, see the "References" section beginning on page 18 for selected additional information on the development of infants and toddlers with disabilities, on early intervention programs and services, and on raising and caring for a young child with special needs.

As time goes by and your child begins to receive services, you will probably have more questions. For example, you might want to know:

- How do I check on the services my child is getting?
- What do I do if I am not satisfied with my child's assessment, program, or progress?
- What happens to my child once he/she is too old for the program?
- What about **private therapists** and private schools?

For answers to these and other questions, talk to your service coordinator, contact a parent support and/or training group in your area, or contact NICHCY.

We hope these materials are useful. If you need more help or information from NICHCY, please call us (toll free) at 1.800.695.0285 (Voice/TTY), or write to us at this address:

NICHCY
P. O. Box 1492
Washington, D.C. 20013-1492
E-mail: nichcy@aed.org

Visit our Web site: www.nichcy.org

PART II:

Questions and Answers About Special Education Programs and Services for Preschoolers With Disabilities (Ages 3 Through 5 Years Old)

Note: Words that appear in **bold** are words that are commonly used in **special education**. Many may be new to you. We have used these terms to help you become familiar with them. You can look up their definitions in the Parent's Dictionary that begins on page 14.

The phrases "special education," "special education programs," "special education services," and "special education programs and services" are used interchangeably in this section.

Below are answers to questions people often ask about **special education programs and services** for preschool children (ages 3 through 5 years old) who have **disabilities**.

A federal law known as **Public Law (P.L.) 105-17** guarantees certain rights to young children (ages birth to 5) with **special needs**. This law is the most recent **amendment** to **Public Law (P.L.) 94-142, The Education For All Handicapped Children's Act of 1975**, most commonly referred to as the *Education of the Handicapped Act (EHA)*. The EHA has been renamed and is now called the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)*.

Q: *What should I do if I think my preschool child needs special education?*

A: If you think your preschooler needs **special education**, you will first want to find out if he or she is **eligible** for a **special education program**. There are people who can help you with this. Read on, and we will explain how to contact them.

Q: *What are special education programs?*

A: **Special education programs** are specially designed programs in public schools offered at no cost to families of children with **disabilities**.

Today, under IDEA, all schools must offer **special education** and **related services** to **eligible** 3-5 year olds with disabilities.

Q: *Who do I contact first for help?*

A: The best place to start is your local public elementary school. (In most cases, this would be the school that other children who live near you attend.) Call and ask to speak to the principal or to someone in charge of special education at the school.

If this doesn't work, look on the *NICHCY State Resource Sheet* under "State Department of Education." Call the Early Childhood Specialist for children ages 3-5 years and ask for the name and phone number of the person in your area in charge of these programs. Explain that you want to find out about special education services for your child. Ask what you need to do to arrange for an **evaluation**.

Write down the names and phone numbers of everyone you talk to. (You can use the Sample Record-Keeping Worksheet at the bottom of page 20 as a guide.) Having this information available may be helpful to you later on.

Q: *What is an evaluation?*

A: **Evaluation** means the procedures used to determine whether a child has a disability and the nature and extent of the special education and related services the child needs. In regards to your child, this information may come from:

- Doctors' reports;
- Results from **developmental tests** given to your child;
- Your child's medical history;
- Observations and feedback from all members of the **evaluation** team, including parents; and
- Any other important observations, records, and/or reports about your child.

Q: *Who conducts my child's evaluation?*

A: Your child's **evaluation** will be conducted by a **multidisciplinary** team or group of persons. Who is involved depends on the rules in your state or school district. Ask your school contact person what the policy is for getting an evaluation for your child.

Q: *Will I have to pay for the evaluation or for any services my child may be eligible for?*

A: Special education services are offered for children ages 3-5 years at no cost to parents. The evaluation is considered part of these services and is provided at no cost to families.

Q: *Are there any parent groups in my area that can give me more information about special education?*

A: There are several types of parent programs, including:

- Support groups (such as Parent-to-Parent) for families of children with **disabilities**;
- **Parent training and information programs** funded by the federal government and operating in each state; and
- Groups concerned with a specific disability, such as United Cerebral Palsy Associations, Inc. (UPCA), or the Arc (formerly the Association for Retarded Citizens of the United States).

We have listed some of these groups on your *State Resource Sheet*. You can also check with someone in your local school or call NICHCY.

Parent groups can offer information, support, and/or training to families of children with disabilities to help them take a more active role in their children's education. Through such groups, families meet other families with similar needs to discuss local resources, daily problems, and personal insights. For more details on these and other parent groups, contact NICHCY and ask for our "Parent's Guide to Accessing Parent Groups."

Q: *I still have a lot of questions. How can I find out more about special education programs and services?*

A: See pages 12 and 13 to learn more about one of the most important special education laws. Also, see the "References" section beginning on page 18 for information on raising and caring for a young child with special needs.

Once your child has been found eligible for special education, you will most likely have more questions. For example:

- How do I check on my child's special education program?
- What do I do if I am not satisfied with my child's **evaluation, placement, program, or progress**?
- What happens to my child when he or she is too old for the program?
- What about **private therapists** and private schools?

For answers to these and other questions, talk to your **special education coordinator** or school principal or contact a parent support and/or training group in your area.

Also, write to NICHCY and ask for a copy of *Questions Often Asked by Parents About Special Education Services*, and/or the longer, more detailed *Questions and Answers About the IDEA*. Both documents contain information about special education laws and parents' rights in getting school services for their children with disabilities.

We hope these materials are useful. If you need more help or information from NICHCY, please call us (toll free) at 1.800.695.0285 (Voice/TTY), or write to us at this address:

NICHCY
P. O. Box 1492
Washington, D.C. 20013-1492
E-mail: nichcy@aed.org

Visit our Web site: www.nichcy.org

PART III:

Questions and Answers About Programs and Services for Rural, Native American, Adoptive/Foster, and Military Families and Their Young Children With Disabilities

Q: *What about services for families in remote or rural areas?*

A: The goals of **early intervention** or **special education programs** and **services** for young children with **special needs** are the same for both rural and urban families. However, the ways in which these **services** are offered may be different. Two groups that may be able to offer information specifically about **services** for rural families are:

The Rural Institute
52 Corbin Hall
The University of Montana
Missoula, MT 59812
(800) 732-0323; (406) 243-5467
E-mail: rural@ruralinstitute.umt.edu
Web: <http://ruralinstitute.umt.edu>

National Rural Education Association
820 Van Vleet Oval, Room 227
University of Oklahoma
Norman, OK 73019
(405) 325-7959
E-mail: bmooneyham@ou.edu
Web: www.nrea.net

Q: *What about services for Native American families living on reservations?*

A: The **lead agency** for the state is responsible for seeing that **early intervention programs** and **services** are provided to infants and toddlers (ages birth through two years) with **special needs** in the state. The State Education Agency (SEA) is responsible for seeing that programs and services are provided to preschool children (ages three through five) with special needs. These requirements include Native American infants, toddlers, and children living on reservations. Information on these services is available from the **lead agency**, from the SEA, or by contacting the office of the tribal leader or the tribal education committee. Local public or BIA schools and Indian Health Service (IHS) offices and clinics are also possible sources of information.

You may also wish to contact these two organizations:

Bureau of Indian Affairs
Office of Indian Education Programs
1849 C Street NW, MS-3512MIB
Washington, DC 20240
(202) 208-6123
Web: www.oiep.bia.edu

National Indian Education Association
700 N. Fairfax Street, Suite 210
Alexandria, VA 22314
(703) 838-2870
E-mail: niea@niea.org
Web: www.niea.org

Q: *What information and support groups are available to help families?*

A: There are several types of parent groups, including:

- Support groups (such as Parent-to-Parent) for families of children with **disabilities**;
- **Parent training and information (PTI) programs** funded by the federal government, including some specializing in services for Indian families (such as the Native American Families Together Parent Center, which serves as a nationwide resource for Native American families, tribes, communities, parent centers, and others, and can be visited at: www.nativefamilynetwork.com); and
- Groups concerned with a specific disability, such as United Cerebral Palsy Associations, Inc. (UCPA) or the Arc (formerly the Association for Retarded Citizens of the United States).

Q: *What additional information do families of adopted or foster children with disabilities need about early intervention or special education services?*

A: In general, the process for getting early intervention or special education programs and services for adopted children with special needs is the same as it is for all children with special needs.

The National Adoption Information Clearinghouse provides information to families who have adopted a child. Their contact information is:

National Adoption Information Clearinghouse
330 C Street SW
Washington, DC 20447
(888) 251-0075; (703) 352-3488
E-mail: naic@calib.com
Web: <http://naic.acf.hhs.gov/index.cfm>

There is also the *Adoptive Families Magazine*, a source of help for parents that includes information and resources for families of adopted children that have special needs. Information about subscriptions is available from:

Adoptive Families Magazine
42 West 38th Street, Suite 901
New York, NY 10018
(800) 372-3300
E-mail: letters@adoptivefamilies.com
Web: www.adoptivefamilies.com

Families who provide foster homes to children who have disabilities or who are **at risk** of developing disabilities may want to contact the National Foster Parent Association, Inc. (NFPA). This national, non-profit group offers information and support to all foster parents. Members of the group receive a bimonthly newsletter and can use all the resources of NFPA. For the Information/Services Office of NFPA, contact:

National Foster Parent Association, Inc.
7512 Stanich Avenue #6
Gig Harbor, WA 98335
(800) 557-5238; (253) 853-4000
E-mail: info@NFPAinc.org
Web site: www.nfpainc.org

Q: *How do I find out about programs and services for military families whose young children have special needs?*

A: One way is through a project known as Specialized Training of Military Parents (STOMP). This organization provides information and help to military families (both in the U.S. and overseas) who have children with special needs. The STOMP staff is made up of parents of children with special needs who are trained to work with other parents of children with special needs. As spouses of members of the military, the staff understand the unique needs of military families. To contact STOMP, call or write:

Specialized Training of Military Parents (STOMP)
6316 S. 12th Street
Takoma, WA 98465
(800)-5PARENT (V/TTY); (253) 565-2266
E-mail: rfullerton@washingtonpave.com
Web: www.stompproject.org

Another way to learn more about early intervention and special education programs and services for children in military families stateside is to contact the Community Service Center (also called Family Service Center or Family Resource Center) or the assigned community contact person on your installation.

The office of Department of Defense Dependent Schools (DODDS) overseas issues a handbook for military families with children who have special needs and who are receiving, or are **eligible** to receive, a **free appropriate public education** through DODDS overseas. The manual is available on-line at: www.odedodea.edu/instruction/curriculum/sped/parentpage13.htm, or by writing or calling:

Department of Defense Dependent Schools
4040 North Fairfax Drive
Arlington, VA 22203-1635
(703) 696-4493
www.odedodea.edu

For information about special education services: www.eu.odedodea.edu/ed/special.htm

INFORMATION ABOUT IDEA

For the past 25 years, laws have been passed by Congress instructing states to provide education for children and youth with disabilities. Public Law 94-142, the *Education For All Handicapped Children Act of 1975* was passed by Congress and signed into law by President Ford. This law is most commonly referred to as the *Education of the Handicapped Act (EHA)*. The EHA is well known; it required states to fully educate all children with disabilities. It has been amended several times. In 1986, the EHA was amended through P.L. 99-457 to, among other things, lower the age at which children can receive special services to three years old. It also established the Handicapped Infants and Toddlers Program (Part H), which is for children who need help from birth to their third birthday. The amendments of 1990 and 1991 brought about more changes, among which was a change in the name of the law. Now the EHA is called the *IDEA, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act*. The most recent amendment was passed in 1997. The Part H program is now called Part C and is known as the Early Intervention Program for Infants and Toddlers with Disabilities.

Information About Programs for Children Ages 3-21

The *IDEA* requires that all states and territories provide a public school education to children with disabilities from ages 3 to 21, no matter how severe their disabilities are.

There are several basic rights that this law promises to children with **disabilities** (ages 3 to 21) and their parents:

- The right to a “**free appropriate public education**” at public expense (in some cases, this may include placing a child in a private school);
- The right to an educational **placement** that is based on an **evaluation** of each child’s own special needs;
- The right of children with **disabilities** to receive teaching or instruction that is designed to meet their needs; these needs are to be clearly written and included in an **Individualized Education Program (IEP)** for each child, with statements about what **services** the child will receive;
- The right to a full range of educational **services** that may include **related services** such as **counseling**, transportation, **speech/language pathology**, or **occupational or physical therapy**;
- The right of parents (or guardians) to be included in making decisions about their child’s educational needs and to approve the educational plans for their child; and
- The right of parents (or guardians) to **appeal** any decisions made about the **identification**, **evaluation**, and **placement** of the child through a **due process procedure**.

Finally, the *IDEA* requires that children with disabilities be educated in the “**Least Restrictive Environment**” (**LRE**), that is, in a setting with children who have no disabilities, with special help provided to those who need it.

Information About Programs for Very Young Children

Under the IDEA, **early intervention services** are to be made available to infants and toddlers with disabilities, ages birth through two years. Services are not the same in all areas. To find out what is available where you live, call the early childhood specialist in your school system or check under “Programs for Infants and Toddlers with Disabilities” on NICHCY’s *State Resource Sheet*. You can also call NICHCY at 1.800.695.0285 and ask for assistance.

Congress made funds available to help states and territories plan a **comprehensive service system** to provide the following services:

- **Early intervention services** to infants and toddlers (ages birth through 2 years) with disabilities. If a state chooses to, it can also serve infants and toddlers **at risk** of developing disabilities; and
- **Special education programs and related services** to preschoolers (ages 3 through 5 years) who have disabilities.

Services for children 3 years old and up are provided by the state department of education. However, programs for children under age 3 are provided by different agencies in different states. Sometimes the department of education will handle all these programs; in other states it may be the health department or another agency.

The term “infants and toddlers with disabilities” in the law refers to children (ages birth through 2 years) who need early intervention services in any of the following areas:

- Physical,
- **Cognitive,**
- **Communication,**
- **Social or emotional,** and/or
- **Adaptive development.**

Early intervention services must be provided by people who are qualified to work with infants and toddlers who have disabilities or who are **at risk** of developing disabilities. Any services provided must be written into an **Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP)** that is reviewed at least every 6 months.

For more information about the laws that affect children with disabilities and their families, call NICHCY at 1.800.695.0285 (Voice/TTY), e-mail us at nichcy@aed.org, or visit our Web site (www.nichcy.org).

PARENT'S DICTIONARY OF SPECIAL EDUCATION TERMS*

*Note: The following definitions have been compiled from a variety of sources. The contents of this dictionary do not necessarily represent definitions endorsed by the U.S. Department of Education.

adaptive development - development of the child in comparison to other children the same age. This might include the child's ability to dress, eat without the assistance of others, toilet training, how he/she plays with other children, how he/she plays alone, understanding dangers in crossing the street, how he/she behaves if mother leaves the room, etc.

advocate - someone who takes action to help someone else (as in "educational advocate"); also, to take action on someone's behalf

amendment - a change, revision, or addition made to a law

appeal - a written request for a change in a decision; also, to make such a request

appropriate - able to meet a need; suitable or fitting; in special education, it usually means the most normal situation possible

assessment - a collecting and bringing together of information about a child's needs, which may include social, psychological, and educational evaluations used to determine services; a process using observation, testing, and test analysis to determine an individual's strengths and weaknesses in order to plan his or her educational services

assessment team - a team of people from different backgrounds who observe and test a child to determine his or her strengths and weaknesses

at risk - a term used with children who have, or could have, problems with their development that may affect later learning

Child Find - a service directed by each state's Department of Education or lead agency for identifying and diagnosing unserved children with disabilities; while Child Find looks for all unserved children, it makes a special effort to identify children from birth to six years old

cognitive - a term that describes the process people use for remembering, reasoning, understanding, and using judgment; in special education terms, a cognitive disability refers to difficulty in learning

comprehensive service system - refers to a list of 14 areas each participating state is to provide under the Early Intervention Program for Infants and Toddlers with Disabilities (Part H). These 14 points range from definition of developmentally delayed, to guidelines for identification, assessment, and provision of early intervention services for the child and family

counseling - advice or help given by someone qualified to give such advice or help (often psychological counseling)

developmental - having to do with the steps or stages in growth and development before the age of 18 years

developmental history - the developmental progress of a child (ages birth to 18 years) in such skills as sitting, walking, talking, or learning

developmental tests - standardized tests that measure a child's development as it compares to the development of all other children at that age

disability - the result of any physical or mental condition that affects or prevents one's ability to develop, achieve, and/or function in an educational setting at a normal rate

due process (procedure) - action that protects a person's rights; in special education, this applies to action taken to protect the educational rights of students with disabilities

early interventionist - someone who specializes in early childhood development, usually having a Master's degree or Ph.D. in an area related to the development of infants, toddlers, and preschoolers

early intervention policies - see policy/policies

early intervention services or programs - programs or services designed to identify and treat a developmental problem as early as possible, before age 3 (services for 3-5 year olds are referred to as preschool services)

eligible - able to qualify

evaluation - (as applied to children from birth through two years of age) the procedures used to determine if a child is eligible for early intervention services; (as applied to preschool and school-aged children) the procedures used to determine whether a child has a disability and the nature and extent of the special education and related services the child needs

free appropriate public education [often referred to as FAPE] - one of the key requirements of the IDEA, which requires that an education program be provided for all school-aged children (regardless of disability) without cost to families; the exact requirements of "appropriate" are not defined, but other references within the law imply the most "normal" setting available

handicap - see disability

identification - the process of locating and identifying children needing special services

Individualized Education Program (IEP) - a written education plan for a preschool or school-aged child with disabilities developed by a team of professionals (teachers, therapists, etc.) and the child's parents; it is reviewed and updated yearly and describes how the child is presently doing, what the child's learning needs are, and what services the child will need. (For children ages birth through 2 years, the IFSP is used.)

Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) - a written statement for an infant or toddler (ages birth through 2 years old) developed by a team of people who have worked with the child and the family; the IFSP must describe the child's developmental levels; family information; major outcomes expected to be achieved for the child and family; the services the child will be receiving; when and where the child will receive these services; and the steps to be taken to support the transition of the child to another program; the IFSP will also list the name of the service coordinator assigned to the child and his/her family

lead agency - the agency (office) within a state or territory in charge of overseeing and coordinating the service system for children ages birth through 2

Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) - an educational setting or program that provides a student with disabilities with the chance to work and learn to the best of his or her ability; it also provides the student as much contact as possible with children without disabilities, while meeting all of the child's learning needs and physical requirements

multidisciplinary - a team approach involving specialists from more than one discipline, such as a team made up of a physical therapist, a speech and language pathologist, a child development specialist, an occupational therapist, or other specialists as needed

occupational therapy - a therapy or treatment provided by an occupational therapist that helps individual developmental or physical skills that will aid in daily living; it focuses on sensory integration, on coordination of movement, and on fine motor and self-help skills, such as dressing, eating with a fork and spoon, etc.

parent training and information programs - programs that provide information to parents of children with special needs about acquiring services, working with schools and educators to ensure the most effective educational placement for their child, understanding the methods of testing and evaluating a child with special needs, and making informed decisions about their child's special needs

physical therapy - treatment of (physical) disabilities given by a trained physical therapist (under doctor's orders) that includes the use of massage, exercise, etc. to help the person improve the use of bones, muscles, joints, and nerves

placement - the classroom, program, service, and/or therapy that is selected for a student with special needs

policy/policies - rules and regulations; as related to early intervention and special education programs, the rules that a state or local school system has for providing services for and educating its students with special needs

private agency - a non-public agency which may be receiving public funds to provide services for some children

private therapist - any professional (therapist, tutor, psychologist, etc.) not connected with the public school system or with a public agency

program(s) - in special education, a service, placement, and/or therapy designed to help a child with special needs

psychologist - a specialist in the field of psychology, usually having a Master's degree or Ph.D. in psychology

public agency - an agency, office, or organization that is supported by public funds and serves the community at large

Public Law (P.L.) 94-142 - a law passed in 1975 requiring that public schools provide a "free appropriate public education" to school-aged children ages 3-21 (exact ages depend on your state's mandate), regardless of disabling condition; also called the *Education For All Handicapped Children Act of 1975* or the *Education of the Handicapped Act (EHA)*, with recent amendments now called the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)*

Public Law (P.L.) 105-17 - passed in 1997, this is the most recent amendment to the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)*

related services - transportation and developmental, corrective, and other support services that a child with disabilities requires in order to benefit from education; examples of related services include: speech/language pathology and audiology, psychological services, physical and occupational therapy, recreation, counseling services, interpreters for those with hearing impairments, medical services for diagnostic and evaluation purposes, and assistive technology devices and services

service coordinator - someone who acts as a coordinator of an infant's or toddler's services, working in partnership with the family and providers of special programs; service coordinators may be employed by the early intervention agency

services/service delivery - the services (therapies, instruction, treatment) given to a child with special needs

social or emotional (development) - the psychological development of a person in relation to his or her social environment

special education - see special education programs and services

special education coordinator - the person in charge of special education programs at the school, district, or state level

special education programs/services - programs, services, or specially designed instruction (offered at no cost to families) for children over 3 years old with special needs who are found eligible for such services; these include special learning methods or materials in the regular classroom, and special classes and programs if the learning or physical problems indicate this type of program

special needs - (as in "special needs" child) - a term to describe a child who has disabilities or who is at risk of developing disabilities and who, therefore, requires special services or treatment in order to progress

speech/language pathology - a planned program to improve and/or correct communication problems

RESOURCES FOR FAMILIES

Anderson, W., Chitwood, S., & Hayden, D. (1997). *Negotiating the special education maze: A guide for parents and teachers* (3rd ed.). Bethesda, MD: Woodbine House. (Available from Woodbine House, 6510 Bells Mill Rd., Bethesda, MD 20817. Telephone: (800) 843-7323. Web: www.woodbinehouse.com)

This classic guide to the special education process is available in both English and Spanish and is one of the best tools available to parents and teachers for developing an effective special education program for their child or student.

Batshaw, M.L. (Ed.). (2001). *When your child has a disability: A complete sourcebook of daily and medical care* (Rev. ed.). Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes. (Available from Paul H. Brookes Publishing, P.O. Box 10624, Baltimore, MD 21285-0624. Telephone: (800) 638-3775. Web: www.brookespublishing.com.)

This book offers practical information to help parents meet the daily physical and emotional needs of their child with a disability. Includes information on finding the right doctor, the daily and long-term care requirements of different disabilities, behavior management techniques, nutrition, the use of medications, and much more.

Hanlon, G.M. (Producer). (1999). *Successfully parenting your baby with special needs: Early intervention for ages birth to three* [video]. Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes. (Available from Paul H. Brookes Publishing, at the contact information above.)

This 60-minute video gives first-time parents of infants with special needs a full introduction to the early intervention process. Real moms and dads share their experiences, and professionals involved in early intervention talk about the diagnosis and referral process, evaluation criteria, IFSPs, community resources, and transition.



Küpper, L. (Ed.). (2003). Parenting a child with special needs (3rd ed.). *NICHCY News Digest*, No. 20, 1-16.

This publication from NICHCY discusses common reactions and emotions that parents may have upon learning that their child has a disability or chronic illness. Suggestions are given about how to meet the challenges of raising a child with special needs, and insights from other parents are shared. The publication is available on-line at NICHCY's Web site (www.nichcy.org), as are many other resources on special education, evaluation, and educational rights.

Special Needs Collection. Available from Woodbine House, 6510 Bells Mill Rd., Bethesda, MD 20817. Telephone: (800) 843-7323. Web: www.woodbinehouse.com

Woodbine House publishes an extensive collection on disabilities, with a special emphasis on parent guides to various disabilities, including individual books on parenting children with: autism, celiac disease, cerebral palsy, Down syndrome, facial difference, Fragile X syndrome, spina bifida, Tourette syndrome, traumatic brain injury, and visual impairments. Children's books are also available, a series on autism and on Down syndrome, and Spanish editions of several books.

Other Material

Exceptional Parent.

A magazine published twelve times a year for parents, individuals, organizations, librarians, schools, and agencies. Exceptional Parent's Web site also offers much additional information about disability issues. Subscribe on-line (www.exceptionalparent.com), by calling (877) 372-7368, or by writing to: Exceptional Parent, 65 East Route 4, River Edge, NJ 07661.



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PARENT'S "NEXT STEP" RECORD-KEEPING WORKSHEET

The sample record-keeping worksheet below can help you start a file of information about your child. As you contact different people and places, it's a good idea to keep records of people you've talked with and what was said. As time goes by, you will want to add other information to your file, such as:

- Letters and notes (from doctors, therapists, etc.);
- Medical records and reports;
- Results of tests and evaluations;
- Notes from meetings about your child;
- Therapist(s') reports;
- IFSP and IEP records;
- Your child's developmental history, including personal notes or diaries on your child's development;
- Records of shots and vaccinations; and
- Family medical histories.

Make sure you get copies of all written information about your child (records, reports, etc.). This will help you become an important coordinator of services and a better advocate for your child. Remember, as time goes on, you'll probably have more information to keep track of, so it's a good idea to keep it together in one place.

SAMPLE RECORD-KEEPING WORKSHEET

Problem/Topic: _____

Name of person or agency you talked to: _____

Name of your contact person
(may be same as above): _____

Date you called: _____ Phone # _____

Results of discussion: _____

Action taken
(if any): _____

Person not helpful on this topic, but may be helpful regarding
(list topics/areas/issues): _____

