

Does My Child Need an Evaluation?

Signs to notice, questions to ask, and a clear place to begin

START HERE: Use this guide to organize your questions and prepare for a productive conversation with your child's school team.

When should I consider asking about an evaluation?

Consider requesting an evaluation when you suspect that a disability may be affecting your child's education and your child may need special education, related services, accommodations, or other disability-related support. You do not need to know the diagnosis or the eligibility category before raising the concern.

Patterns that may deserve a closer look

- Your child is making much less progress than expected despite appropriate instruction and support.
- Reading, writing, math, communication, attention, memory, behavior, motor skills, sensory needs, health, or emotional regulation are interfering with school.
- Your child understands the material but has unusual difficulty completing work, organizing materials, starting tasks, or showing what they know.
- Schoolwork requires extreme time, effort, prompting, or distress compared with peers.
- There is a persistent gap between your child's apparent ability and classroom performance.
- Your child frequently avoids school, shuts down, melts down, or reports physical symptoms connected to school demands.
- The same concerns appear across teachers, settings, or school years—or the pattern is significant even if it appears mainly in one setting.
- Informal interventions help only a little, do not last, or have continued without enough progress.
- A medical or mental-health condition may be affecting access, attendance, concentration, stamina, communication, mobility, or participation.
- Your child has strong grades but relies on extraordinary effort, extensive help, repeated reteaching, or coping strategies that may hide a disability-related need.

REMEMBER: One difficult subject, a short-term setback, or a single behavior does not by itself prove that a child has a disability. Look for patterns, impact, persistence, and the amount of support required.

Where do I start?

1. **Write down your concerns:** Use specific examples: what you see, how often it happens, when it began, and how it affects learning or participation.
2. **Gather useful information:** Collect work samples, report cards, test results, attendance information, intervention records, teacher messages, outside reports, and notes about what helps.
3. **Talk with the school:** Start with the teacher, school counselor, special education contact, principal, or 504 coordinator. Ask what the school is seeing and what supports have been tried.
4. **Make a written evaluation request:** Send a dated email or letter to the school district asking for a comprehensive evaluation under IDEA, Section 504, or both, as appropriate. State the areas of concern; you do not need to identify the exact disability.
5. **Ask what happens next:** Request the district's written procedures, consent forms, expected timeline, and the name of your contact person.
6. **Review the proposed evaluation plan:** Make sure it covers every suspected area—not only academics. Ask how the team will examine communication, social-emotional functioning, behavior, attention, adaptive skills, motor or sensory needs, and health when relevant.
7. **Participate and share parent input:** Provide developmental, medical, family, and educational information that helps the team understand your child. Evaluation consent is not consent to begin special education services.
8. **Meet to review results and eligibility:** Ask the team to explain the data in plain language, connect findings to classroom functioning, and discuss whether your child needs an IEP, a Section 504 plan, other support, or additional information.

Sample evaluation request

Subject: Request for evaluation for [Child's name]

Dear [Name],

I am requesting a comprehensive evaluation of my child, [name], who is in [grade] at [school]. I am concerned about [briefly describe the concerns and their effect at school]. I would like the district to consider evaluation under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act and Section 504, as appropriate, in all suspected areas of disability.

Please provide the district's written response, procedural safeguards, and any consent forms or next steps. Please confirm that you received this request.

Thank you,
[Parent/caregiver name]
[Date and contact information]

What to know about timing

Under federal IDEA regulations, an initial evaluation generally must be completed within 60 days after the school receives parental consent, unless the state has established a different timeline or a regulatory exception applies. The timeline usually begins with signed consent—not merely the first conversation or request. Ask for your state and district timeline in writing. Section 504 requires timely evaluation but does not establish the same federal 60-day rule.

If the school says “let’s wait”

Schools may use interventions and collect data, but response-to-intervention or other support systems may not be used to delay or deny an IDEA evaluation when a disability is suspected. Ask the school to respond to your written request in writing and to provide its procedural safeguards. Continue documenting dates, communications, supports, and progress.

Important note

This resource provides general educational information, not legal advice. Federal law provides a foundation, but state rules, timelines, forms, and local procedures may differ.

Reliable starting points

[IDEA regulation: Initial evaluations \(34 C.F.R. § 300.301\)](#)

[IDEA statute: Parent or agency request for initial evaluation](#)

[U.S. Department of Education: IDEA Parents and Families](#)

[OSEP guidance: RTI may not delay or deny evaluation](#)

[U.S. Department of Education: Section 504](#)