



# Special Education: Expert and Parent Tips on Advocating for Your Young Child

Presented by  
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# Objectives

- How to know whether your child needs special education
- Understanding special education, your rights and eligibility
- Knowing what services are available and which are best for your child
- What to do if your child is not getting what he needs
- Tips from parents who have navigated the special needs system



# Signs Your Child May Need Special Education

Your child may require screening if you notice that he/she...

- Doesn't use gestures
- Doesn't point out objects to show interest in the world around him/her
- Doesn't use single words by 16 months or two-word phrases by 24 months
- Loses verbal or social skills
- Withdraws
- Walks on his/her toes or doesn't walk at all - crawls one sided i.e. with one arm





# Where to go for Assessment:

- Home School
- Regional Center
- Psychologist



# Importance of early intervention

## Early intervention

- The key to success and helping your child's progress
- Helps babies and toddlers with developmental delays or disabilities get into less restrictive learning environment
  - For example, full inclusion with related services and support

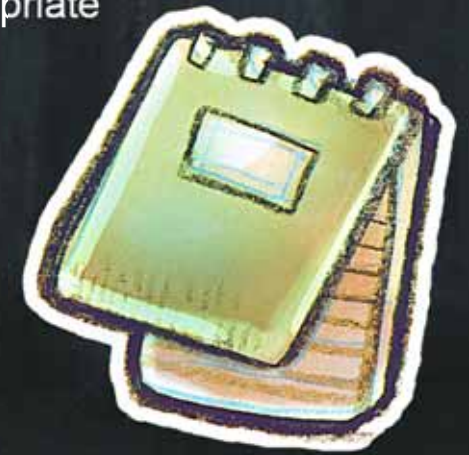




# What is special education?

**Federal law** protects the rights of people with disabilities and requires schools to provide **special education** and **related services** to individuals with disabilities.

- **IDEA** - Individuals with Disabilities Education Act
  - Ensures that students with a disability are provided with Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) tailored to their individual needs
- **ADA** - Americans with Disabilities Act 1990
  - Prohibits discrimination in employment, public services, public accommodations, and telecommunications.
- **504 Plan** (Section 504 ADA)
  - Prohibits discrimination based upon disability
  - Requires that the needs of students with disabilities are met as adequately as the needs of the non-disabled



# Your Rights: Federal & State Regulations

## Six Principles of IDEA:

1. Zero Reject
2. Nondiscriminatory Identification and Evaluation
3. Free, Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)
4. Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)
5. Due Process Safeguards
6. Parent and Student Participation and Shared Decision Making

# Eligibility

For a child to be declared eligible for special education and related services, it must be determined that the child is a “child with a disability” and is in need of special education and related services.





# How is Eligibility Determined?

- An Individualized Education Plan (IEP) is needed.
- IEP Team of parents and qualified professionals must determine whether the child has a disability and needs special education and related services.
- Under IDEA, there are currently 13 categories under which a child can receive these services:

- Autism
- Deaf-blindness
- Deafness
- Emotional disturbance
- Hearing impairment
- Intellectual disability
- Multiple disabilities



- Orthopedic impairment
- Other health impairment
- Specific learning disability
- Speech/language impairment
- Traumatic brain injury
- Visual impairment

# How is eligibility determined?

1. A request is made for an initial evaluation/assessment
2. School has **60 days from date of request** to assess child
3. IEP Team meets to determine if the child is eligible for Special Education Services
4. IEP Team offers services to the parent – parent may accept or deny
5. IEP team determines placement where education will take place
  - Special Day Class
  - Full Inclusion with Related Services:
    - Resource Specialist Program (RSP)
    - Occupational Therapy (OT)
    - Speech (ST)
    - Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA)
    - Adapted Physical Education (APE)



# How is Eligibility Determined?

The IEP team determines that a child has a specific learning disability if:

- The child is provided with learning experiences appropriate for his/her age and ability AND:
- The child has a severe discrepancy between achievement and intellectual ability in one or more of the following areas:
  - Oral expression
  - Listening comprehension
  - Written expression
  - Basic reading skill
  - Reading comprehension
  - Mathematics calculation/mathematics reasoning
  - And/or teacher reports or presents a portfolio on daily work which shows academic performance is not in an acceptable range





# Assessment Guidelines for Eligibility

- **Observation:**

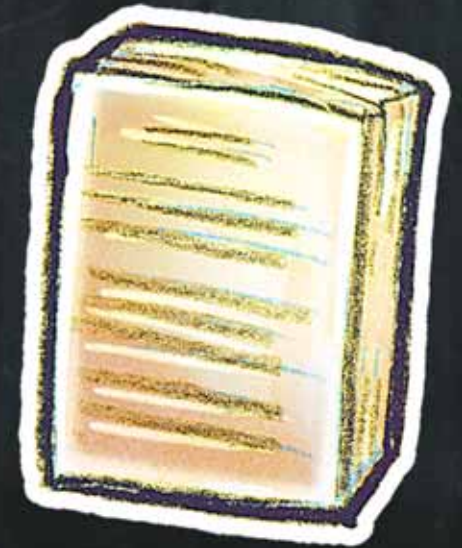
- At least one team member other than the child's regular teacher shall observe the child's academic performance in the regular classroom setting.
- In the case of a child younger than school age or out of school, a team member shall observe the child in an environment appropriate for a child of that age.



# Assessment Guidelines for Eligibility

- **Written report:**

- Whether the child has a specific learning disability
- The basis for making the determination
- Relevant behavior noted during the observation of the child
- Relationship of that behavior to the child's academic functioning
- Educationally relevant medical findings, if any
- Whether there is a severe discrepancy between achievement and ability that is not correctable without special education and related services
- Determination of the team concerning the effects of environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage



# IEP Meetings, Emergency IEP

Annual IEP meetings with the team are held every school year:

- Goals and objectives of the student are addressed
- Present levels of performance (PLOP) are discussed
- Everyone on the IEP Team is held accountable for reporting the student's progress
  - Parents, Special Ed teachers, General Ed teacher, Administrator and service providers





# IEP Meetings, Emergency IEP

- **3-Year IEP** meetings with formal assessment
  - Conducted by Special Ed teacher, nurse and psychologist
  - This is the comprehensive IEP and everyone is present to determine continued eligibility of special education and progress over the last 3 years.
  - Placement is also reviewed.
- **Emergency IEP**
  - Request in writing
    - IEP team has 10 days to comply with your request.



# Appropriate Educational Setting

- Full Inclusion (less restrictive)
  - Student is enrolled in a General Education classroom with typical age-appropriate peers
  - Related services are delivered in one of two ways:
    - Push in: service provider goes into the classroom
    - Pull out: student goes to another setting to receive the service
      - Occupational Therapy (OT), Physical Therapy (PT)
      - Speech (ST)
      - Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA)
      - Adapted Physical Education (APE)
      - Assistive Technology (AT)
      - Counseling



# Appropriate Educational Setting

- Mainstreaming

- Student is enrolled in a Special Day Class for the majority of the day and goes out to the General Education classes and settings

- Nutrition, lunch, recess

- IEP team determines what % of time the student spends in the General Education setting

- Typically 25% initially





# Appropriate Educational Setting

- Special Day Program/Class
  - More restrictive
  - Student is enrolled in this setting for 100% of the day



# Advocacy, Mediation, Due Process

You have the right to...

- **Go** to mediation if your issues are not resolved.
- **Continue** to Due Process if you are not satisfied with your mediation results
- **Bring** an attorney or any other person to an IEP meeting who you consider a team member for your child
- **Record** the IEP meeting if you let the school know in advance in writing
- **Adjourn** an IEP meeting at any time and ask for a “re-schedule” date



# Additional Therapies

- Brain disorders, such as autism, make your child **different, not less!**
- **Neuroplasticity = the ability for the brain to change.**
  - We know that we can stimulate areas of the brain that are interfering with audial, visual and gross motor processing
- **Alternative therapies**
  - Autism Movement Therapy
  - Dance Movement Therapy
  - Music and Art Therapy
  - Hippotherapy (horseback riding therapy)
  - Yoga





# Resources

- US Department of Education: IDEA <http://idea.ed.gov/>
- Wrightslaw <http://www.wrightslaw.com/>
- Center for Parent Information and Resources <http://www.parentcenterhub.org/>
- Learning Disabilities Association of America <https://ldaamerica.org/>
- The Arc <http://www.thearc.org/>
- Regional Centers (California) <http://www.dds.ca.gov/rc/>
- Autism Movement Therapy <http://www.autismmovementtherapy.com/>



# Parent Advocate: Amy Collen

Amy Collen is mother to Sam, who was born very early at 25 weeks at just over a pound. He has mild Ataxic Cerebral Palsy and Retinopathy of Prematurity.

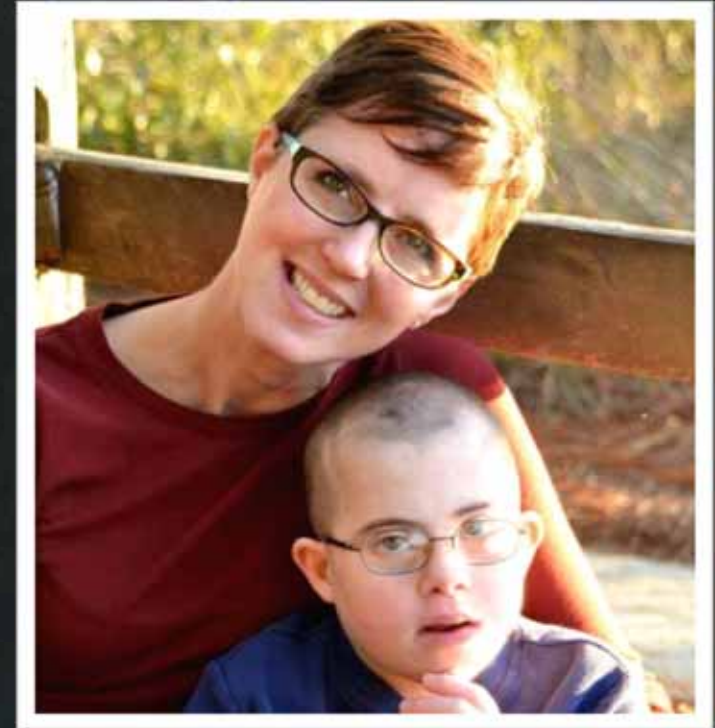
He is a thriving 10 year old and is mainstreamed in school and part of a Resource Specialist Program which helps him qualify for special education services.



# Parent Advocate: Alethea Mshar

Alethea Mshar has 2 sons with Down syndrome.

The youngest, at 10 years old, also has Hirschsprung's Disease, hearing impairment, Cyclical Vomiting Syndrome, is on the autism spectrum and is a leukemia survivor.





# Questions?



Supporting the physical, mental and emotional needs of children with special needs and their families

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