

What Do I Do When I Suspect My Child May Have Difficulties That Could Affect His/Her Educational Achievement?

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Some children may have difficulties that are easy to identify, such as a hearing impairment, and others may have difficulties that are not quite so obvious. If you suspect that your child is struggling academically or may struggle when he/she reaches school age, there are many resources available to you and your child to support his/her education. There are many professionals who provide special education services to children with different types of difficulties and disabilities. Among these professionals are speech-language pathologists, learning specialists, occupational therapists, physical therapists, behavior specialists, and school psychologists.

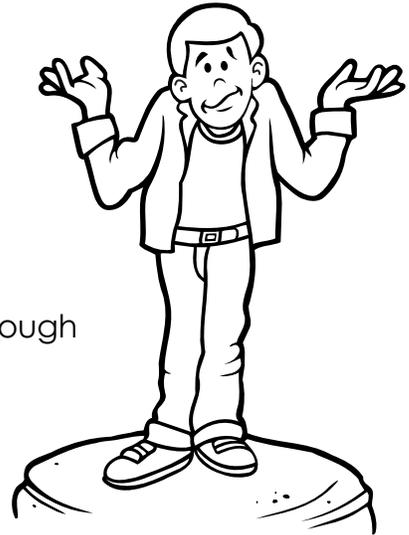


Often, if a child appears to have educational difficulties (academic and/or social), the classroom teacher refers the child to the appropriate specialist in the school. That specialist may give suggestions to the teacher on how to make simple adjustments to the child's daily routine that may improve some of the difficulties.

If these "pre-interventions" do not appear to be effective, the child may receive an evaluation in the problem areas. The specialist will obtain the parent's permission to test, perform the testing, write a report, and convene a meeting with the child's team of educators. In this meeting, the specialist(s), teachers, and parents will discuss the results of the testing and determine if the child is qualified to receive special education services. Due to the reauthorization of *IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act)*, the law has recently changed the way some districts determine how a child qualifies to receive special education services. Ask the education or pre-referral team how eligibility is determined in your child's school district.

If your child qualifies for special education services, the appropriate specialist will write goals for your child to help support areas of weakness. These goals and this plan are called an *Individualized Education Program (IEP)*. Each year, you will meet with the other members of the IEP team to discuss progress toward goals and to create new goals. Every three years, your child should be re-evaluated to determine the continuing need to receive special education services.

If your child is not yet school-age and needs special attention due to difficulties identified at birth or later, you may still obtain special services. Federal law protects all qualifying individuals from birth to 21 years old. Children younger than five years old that need special services go through evaluations by a specialist who identifies problem areas. The specialist writes a plan called the *Individualized Family Services Plan (IFSP)*. This plan will have goals for the child to achieve. The team will typically reconvene every six months to review the child's progress.



There are many resources available to you as a parent. If you are concerned that your child is having difficulties with learning, language, mobility, cognition, or other problems, please contact your school district to begin working as a team with your child's educators. Children with difficulties benefit most from early detection of problems. Catching these problems early will help reduce their academic and social impact.

Resources

American Speech-Language-Hearing Association www.asha.org

American Occupational Therapy Association, Inc. www.aota.org

Council for Exceptional Children www.cec.sped.org

International Dyslexia Association www.interdys.org

International Reading Association www.reading.org

National Association of School Psychologists www.nasponline.org

Physical Therapy.com www.physicaltherapy.com