



# If You Have Concerns: When and How to Request a Special Education Evaluation for Your Preschool Child

As a parent of young child, you may have concerns about your child's development. Perhaps you've noticed delays or unevenness in meeting typical milestones. Perhaps you suspect that your child is having greater-than-expected difficulty in learning necessary skills. While parents know their children best, not all parents know where or how to get assistance to evaluate their child's development and access help they may need. Here are some tips that can help.

## Tip #1: Ask others who know your child

Your child's care providers or preschool teachers can be a valuable source of information about how your child is developing and adapting in the classroom or child care setting. The medical provider your child sees for well-child check-ups can also provide advice about your child's development. If any of these experts tell you they have concerns, be sure to ask for specific examples based on their observations of your child. Also, ask them for any strategies they have tried to help your child succeed. This information will be useful if you need to seek additional supports to help your child be more successful in the future.

## Tip #2: Reach out to resources

- Help Me Grow is a free referral source for parents and professionals who have concerns about a young child's development. Once you make a referral through Help Me Grow, your local school district's early childhood special education staff will contact you directly to discuss your concerns and possible next steps. These could include a screening or evaluation. Contact Help Me Grow at <http://helpmegrowmn.org/HMG/Refer/index.html> or (866) 693-GROW (4769).
- Early Childhood Screening is a free program in Minnesota that checks how a child is developing and growing. Screening promotes positive developmental outcomes and may lead to referrals for early learning opportunities. Screening is available to children when they turn three years old. You can find contact information for your local screening program on the Minnesota Department of Education's website at <https://education.mn.gov/MDE/fam/elsprog/screen>.

## Tip # 3: Request a special education evaluation

Young children who qualify for special education services receive individualized services and supports in the setting the child's IEP team determines to be most appropriate for the child, while maximizing the time spent with learners who do not receive special education. These services and supports help children learn skills they do not yet have because of a disability. Some examples might include learning how to:

- Interact with other children and adults
- Understand and follow classroom rules or directions from a teacher or child care provider
- Transition from one activity to another or their ability to stay focused on a task or activity
- Understand preschool concepts like numbers and colors, sometimes through one-to-one instruction
- Talk or say words clearly so peers and adults can understand
- Develop strategies for self-regulation and how to name and cope with their emotions

**If you have concerns about your child’s development in any area, you have a right to request a special education evaluation.**

- It is important to request this in writing, not just verbally. Here is a sample letter you can edit to fit your situation:

(Insert Date)

(Insert School Principal, Name of School, Address, City, State, Zip Code)

RE: (Insert Student’s Name and Student’s Date of Birth)

Dear (Mr./Ms. - Insert Principal’s Name):

I request that the school district conduct a full and comprehensive educational evaluation of my child to determine whether my child qualifies for special education services.

I have some concerns about my young child’s development. Some things that concern me are my child’s difficulties with [insert examples: behaving appropriately; following rules; following directions; paying attention; communicating; speaking; expressing thoughts or feelings; making friends; etc.].

Please contact me to discuss my concerns and to plan for the educational evaluation. I can be contacted at the address listed below or by phone at \_\_\_\_\_. Thank you for your assistance.

Sincerely,

(Insert your signature)

(Insert your Name, Address, City, State, Zip Code)

- Keep a copy of the communication, including the date on which you sent it.
- Once you make this request, the district must respond by providing you a form that describes why the district agrees or disagrees with your request for a special education evaluation and what the district proposes or refuses to do. The form is called a Prior Written Notice (PWN).
- If the district knows or suspects that your child has a disability, it must propose an evaluation itself. If the district does not suspect that your child is eligible for special education services, it must tell you in the PWN that it does not agree to do an evaluation and why.
- Along with the PWN, you will receive a Parent Consent/Object form. You will use this form to tell the school district whether you agree or disagree with what the district proposes or refuses to do. A parent must give consent to an initial evaluation before it can begin. Please send this form back as soon as you determine that you agree or disagree with the district’s proposal, as nothing can happen until the district receives your decision.

**Tip # 4: Call PACER**.....

If you have concerns about your child’s development or how they are doing in preschool or child care, you are not alone. You can contact a PACER early childhood advocate for help to understand your options and support to navigate the process. PACER helps to ensure that all children have the opportunity to reach their highest potential. Contact PACER at [PACER.org](http://PACER.org) or (952) 838-9000.