

Concerned about your child's development?

For preschoolers (children who are 3 years or older)



Young children are busy learning and growing in so many ways. They are working on:

- Learning to think and solve problems
- Moving, seeing, and hearing
- Talking and listening to others
- Forming relationships
- Doing things on their own
- And more!

Sometimes children struggle in one or more of these areas. These struggles can lead to behaviors that may be frustrating both for you and for your child. If you feel concerned about your child's growth or behavior, you can ask your child's doctor or nurse to check to see how your child is developing.

There are programs that can provide your family with services to help your child grow to his or her fullest potential, at no cost to you! Anyone—including parents, relatives, friends, childcare staff and doctors—can refer a family for free programs that can check your child's development and offer support.

Children ages 3 and up with physical or developmental disabilities or delays may be eligible to receive free support from your local public school through a program called **Child Find**, discussed more below. Child Find is required to provide special education services in every school district under Part B of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Even school districts without preschools provide Part B special education services for children who haven't started school yet.

If you are interested in no-cost developmental services for children younger than three, you can contact the **First Steps Early Intervention Program**, administered through the Mississippi Department of Health, at **1-800-451-3903**. Advocates at the **Mississippi Parent Training and Information Center** can also give parents of all children more information and support, reachable at **1-800-721-7255**.

Mississippi Child Find

Child Find identifies children with disabilities or developmental delays who need specially-designed supports to help them meet their unique educational needs. The process for getting these services goes like this:

Referral: The earlier support begins, the better for the child's development. If you think your child might need special education services, call your local school district's special education office. To find the phone number for your local office, call **601-359-3498**. You may also need to write a letter asking for your child to be evaluated.

Enrollment: A team of providers will meet with you within 14 days of the referral. This is a meeting for the Child Find team to meet you and your child and for you all to decide together whether to evaluate your child's development. The school will not evaluate your child or provide services without your written permission.

At this initial meeting, staff will tell you about your rights and will give you a written copy of those rights. The Child Find team will also send you a letter within a week of the meeting with the decision that was made about evaluating your child.

Evaluation: Once you give permission, a team of people will evaluate your child to determine any need for special education services within 60 days. At the evaluation the team will measure your child's development using play activities and other methods and will talk with you and anyone else you would like to be there. The team will review all the information in your child's record and decide whether more information is needed. If more information is needed from you, your child's doctor, or others who know your child well, the school may ask for your written permission to obtain it. You will receive a copy of the evaluation results and will meet with the team to discuss them.

Qualifying for Services: To get special education services, the evaluation results must show that your child both has one of the conditions listed below and needs special education services because of that condition.

Conditions that qualify a child for Part B special education services are:

autism, blindness, deafness, developmental delay, emotional disability, hearing impairment, language/speech impairment, intellectual disability, multiple disabilities, orthopedic impairment, specific learning disability, traumatic brain injury, visual impairment, or other health impairment.

If you disagree with your child's evaluation results or recommended services, you can ask for an independent educational evaluation from someone who is not a school employee and ask the school district to pay for it. The school district may agree or may challenge this request.

Individualized Education Program (IEP): If your child qualifies for special education services, you and the team will develop an IEP within 30 days of the evaluation. The IEP is an educational plan that lays out the program of special education supports that will help your child learn and grow. The IEP may include language, reading, and/or numbers skills development and other special activities based on your child's needs.

Choosing Services: Children learn a lot during daily routines with their families. Services usually happen in places where your child normally learns, like your home, school or childcare center. Services will not start or stop without your written permission. You are always free to deny or cancel services.

Your Rights: You may ask your local school district staff to see your child's records at any time. If you do not agree with any part of your child's program, you can:

- ask for a mediation session to assist you and school district staff in reaching an agreement,
- ask for a due process hearing to resolve your complaint, or
- file a State Complaint if you don't feel the issue has been resolved.

You can call the [Mississippi Department of Special Education Parent Hotline](tel:1-877-544-0408) at 1-877-544-0408 or the [Mississippi Protection and Advocacy programs of Disability Rights Mississippi](tel:601-968-0600) at 601-968-0600 for more information and support.



For more information please visit
www.MississippiThrive.com.