



# Your Child's Evaluation

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## Laura's Story

When Laura was 8 years old, her teacher, Mrs. Adams, saw that Laura was having a lot of trouble with reading and writing. This surprised Mrs. Adams, because Laura was very good at remembering things she heard. She asked the school to evaluate Laura to see if she had a disability.

Laura's parents had also been worried about Laura's problems. When the school asked for permission to evaluate Laura, Laura's parents said yes.

The evaluation took about one month. It involved many different things and people. The evaluation group, including Laura's parents, looked at Laura's school records and test scores. The group gave Laura more tests and talked to her. They also talked to her teacher and her parents. They watched how she did her work and learned more about when she had problems.

In the end, the evaluation showed that Laura had a learning disability. Now the school knows why she has trouble with reading and writing. Laura is now getting special help in school.

## The Purpose of Evaluation: Finding Out Why

Many children have trouble in school. Some, like Laura, have trouble learning to read or write. Others have a hard time remembering new information. Still others may have trouble behaving themselves. Children can have all sorts of problems.

It's important to find out *why* a child is not doing well in school. The child may have a disability. By law, schools must provide special help to eligible children with disabilities. This help is called *special education and related services*.

You may ask the school to evaluate your child, or the school may ask you for permission to do an evaluation. If the school thinks your child may have a disability and may need special education and related services, the school must evaluate your child before providing your child with these services. *This evaluation is at no cost to you.*

Once you give your informed written permission for the evaluation, the school has 60 days to evaluate your child. (If your state has set its own timeframe for conducting evaluations, then the school will follow the state's timeframe.) The evaluation will tell you and the school:

- ♦ if your child has a disability; and
- ♦ what kind of special help your child needs in school.

## Step 1: Using What Is Known

A team of people, including you, will be involved in evaluating your child. This team will begin by looking at what is already known about your child. The team will look at your child's school file and recent test scores. You and your child's teacher(s) may provide information to be included in this review.



### Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)

Our country's special education law is called the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). The IDEA is a very important law for children with disabilities, their families, and schools. The evaluation process described here is based on what this law requires.

NICHCY offers a lot of information about IDEA. Visit our website and explore our many resources, at:

[www.nichcy.org/laws/idea/](http://www.nichcy.org/laws/idea/)

The evaluation team needs enough information to decide if your child has a disability. It also needs to know what kind of special help your child needs. Is there enough information about your child to answer these questions? If your child is being evaluated for the first time, maybe not.

## Step 2: Collecting More Information

The team of people involved in your child's evaluation, including you, will identify what additional information about your child is needed in order to answer the questions we just mentioned. Before the school may conduct additional testing to collect that information, school personnel must ask you for permission. They must explain to you what the evaluation of your child will involve. This includes describing (a) the tests they will use with your child, and (b) the other ways they will collect information about your child.

The school will collect the additional information about your child in many different ways and from many different people, including you. (The people who will be involved in your child's evaluation are listed in the box to the right.) Tests are an important part of an evaluation, but they are only one part. The evaluation should also include:

- ♦ the observations and opinions of professionals who have worked with your child;
- ♦ your child's medical history, when it's relevant to his or her performance in school; and
- ♦ your observations about your child's experiences, abilities, needs, and behavior in school and outside of school, and his or her feelings about school.

Professionals will observe your child. They may give your child tests. They are trying to get a picture of the "whole child." It's important that the school evaluate your child in all areas where he or she might have a disability. For example, they will want to know more about:

- ♦ how well your child speaks and understands language;
- ♦ how your child thinks and behaves;
- ♦ how well your child adapts to change;
- ♦ what your child has achieved in school;

- ♦ how well your child functions in areas such as movement, thinking, learning, seeing, and hearing; and
- ♦ what job-related and other post-school interests and abilities your child has (important when your child is nearing 16 years old, or sooner, if appropriate).

Evaluating your child completely will help you and the school decide if your child has a disability. The information will also help you and the school plan instruction for your child.

### Who is Involved in Your Child's Evaluation?



The team involved in your child's evaluation will include these people:

- you, as parents or guardians;
- at least one of your child's regular education teachers (if your child is, or may be, participating in the regular education environment);
- at least one of your child's special education teachers or service providers;
- a school administrator who knows about policies for special education, children with disabilities, available resources, and the general curriculum (the curriculum used by children without disabilities);
- someone who can explain the evaluation results and talk about what instruction may be necessary for your child;
- your child, if appropriate;
- representatives from other agencies that may be responsible for paying for or providing transition services (if your child is 16 years, or younger, if appropriate);
- individuals (invited by you or the school) with knowledge or special expertise about your child, including related service providers (such as a speech therapist, physical therapist, or school nurse); and
- other qualified professionals, as appropriate (such as a behavioral or medical specialist).

### Step 3: Deciding if Your Child is Eligible for Special Education

The next step is to decide if your child is eligible for special education and related services. This decision will be based on the results of your child's evaluation and the policies in your area about eligibility for these special services.

It's important that your child's evaluation results be explained to you in a way that's easy to understand. The school will discuss your child's scores on tests and what they mean. Is your child doing as well as other children his or her age? What does your child do well? Where is your child having trouble? What is causing the trouble?

If you don't understand something in your child's evaluation results, be sure to speak up and ask questions. This is your child. You know your child very well. Do the results make sense, considering what you know about your child? Share your special insights. Your knowledge of your child is important.

Based on your child's evaluation results, a group of people will decide if your child is eligible for special education and related services. ***Under IDEA, you have the right to be part of any group that decides your child's eligibility for special education and related services.***

This decision is based in part on IDEA's definition of a "child with a disability." You should know that:

- ◆ The IDEA lists 13 different disability categories (listed below) under which a child may be eligible for services. To learn more about these disabilities, visit NICHCY's website and read our fact sheets, at: [www.nichcy.org/disability/specific](http://www.nichcy.org/disability/specific)
- ◆ The disability must affect the child's educational performance. (Your child does not have to be failing school, however, and may be moving from grade to grade.)

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#### Four Evaluation "Musts"

- ❑ **Using the native language:** The evaluation must be conducted in your child's native language (for example, Spanish) or other means of communication (for example, sign language, if your child is deaf), unless it clearly isn't possible to do so.
- ❑ **No discrimination:** Each test must be given in a way that does not discriminate against your child because he or she has a disability or is from a different racial or cultural background.
- ❑ **Trained evaluators:** The people who test your child must know how to give the tests they decide to use. They must give each test according to the instructions that came with the test.
- ❑ **More than one procedure:** Evaluation results will be used to decide if your child is a "child with a disability" and to determine what kind of educational program your child needs. These decisions cannot be made based on only one procedure such as only one test.

#### IDEA's Categories of Disability

- ◆ Autism
- ◆ Deaf-blindness
- ◆ Deafness
- ◆ Hearing impairment
- ◆ Mental retardation
- ◆ Multiple disabilities
- ◆ Orthopedic impairment
- ◆ Other health impairment (i.e., having limited strength, vitality, or alertness that affects a child's educational performance)
- ◆ Serious emotional disturbance
- ◆ Specific learning disability
- ◆ Speech or language impairment
- ◆ Traumatic brain injury
- ◆ Visual impairment, including blindness



- ♦ A child may not be identified as having a disability primarily because he or she speaks a language other than English and does not speak or understand English well. A child may not be identified as having a disability just because he or she has not had enough appropriate instruction in math or reading.

As a parent, you have the right to receive a copy of the evaluation report on your child at no cost to you. You also have the right to receive a copy of the paperwork about your child’s eligibility for special education and related services.

If your child is eligible for special education and related services (such as speech therapy) and you agree with this determination, then you and the school will meet and talk about your child’s special educational needs (see Step 4 below). However, you can disagree with decision and refuse special education and related services for your child.

If your child is *not* eligible for special education and related services, the school must tell you so in writing. You must also receive information about what to do if you disagree with this decision. If this information is not in the materials the school gives you, ask for it. You have the right to disagree with the eligibility decision and be heard. Also ask how the school will help your child if he or she will not be getting special education services.

### Step 4: Developing Your Child’s Educational Program

If, however, your child is found eligible for special education and related services and you agree, the next step is to write an Individualized Education Program (IEP) for your child. This is a written

document that you and school personnel develop together. The IEP will describe your child’s educational program, including the special services your child will receive.

### Organizations That Can Help

There’s a lot to know about disabilities, special education, and parenting a child with a disability. Here are some people who can help you with your questions and concerns.

- ♦ **NICHCY** offers many useful publications. Our information specialists are also available to talk with you personally. See the top of page 1 for all our contact information.
- ♦ Your state’s **Parent Training and Information (PTI) Center** serves parents. Your PTI can answer questions about special education, help you work with the school, and put you in touch with parent groups near your home. Your PTI’s contact information is listed our *State Resource Sheet* for your state, under “Organizations Especially for Parents.” Find your State Resource Sheet on our website, at: [www.nichcy.org/families-community/states/](http://www.nichcy.org/families-community/states/)
- ♦ The **special education director** in your school or district can share information about local special education guidelines. Call the school or your local district office, and ask to speak to the person in charge of special education.
- ♦ The **State Director of Special Education** in your state can tell you about state policies. This person’s name is listed on the first page of NICHCY’s *State Resource Sheet*.



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