



Preparing for an Educational Evaluation: Tips for Your Child and You

Background

Children can be referred for an educational evaluation when either the school, the parent, or both, believe that a child may have a disability that is significantly affecting performance at school. This may be your first experience with an educational evaluation or the special education process. Many parents are unsure how to talk with their child about the evaluation, or how to be part of the evaluation process. Here are some key pieces of information that you may want to know.

- Talk with your child's teacher or other school personnel regarding any concerns you have about your child. Find out if your child's teacher shares the same concerns and ask if your child behaves or performs differently at school than at home. The school may have suggestions for interventions or other procedures they would like to attempt prior to considering an educational evaluation. Both the school and you want your child to learn and be successful. If the school believes your child may have a disability, they may ask for your permission to complete an educational evaluation.
- A parent can request an educational evaluation, verbally or in writing, to any licensed staff member at school. The school must respond to the parent within 10 school days as to whether they will or will not pursue the evaluation.
- An evaluation for special education can only be started after you, the parent, give your written permission, which is also called giving consent.
- If after giving permission for testing you change your mind, notify the public agency (typically the school) of your decision in writing. It is possible that some testing may have already been completed, but no further testing is done once you write and tell the agency you do not want the testing to continue.
- When you sign permission for testing, you will receive a copy and explanation of the *Notice of Procedural Safeguards*, which is also called your parent's rights. This information will help you to understand what to expect throughout the evaluation and what to expect after the evaluation is completed. *Navigating the Course: Finding your way through Indiana's Special Education Rules* is another document that helps to explain these rights. Both of these documents can be found on the Indiana Department of Education website at <http://www.doe.in.gov/achievement/individualized-learning/laws-rules-and-interpretations>.
- Create a file, folder, or binder for your child's information.
- Each educational evaluation is individualized for the student. The different areas that will be evaluated depend on the disability area(s) suspected and are listed on the written consent for testing.
- The members of the assessment team (or multidisciplinary team) depend on the disability area(s) suspected. There is usually one person designated as the coordinator for this team. This could be an assessment team member, such as the school psychologist or speech-language pathologist, or could be someone such as the school counselor or social worker.
- Find out who you should call with questions or concerns and keep that person's name and phone number handy. Whenever you talk to this person, write down the date you spoke and the information you discussed.
- Many evaluations include an observation of your child in the classroom or another setting. When possible, the observation is completed by someone who has not yet worked with your child. The teacher will know which student is being observed, but the rest of the class is not told and the student is not pointed out.



Background (continued)

- After the evaluation is complete, a report will be written. You will receive a copy of this report. If you would like for this report to be available to you five school days prior to the case conference, be sure to indicate this on the written consent for testing, otherwise you may not get your copy until the case conference. The case conference is the meeting where the evaluation results will be discussed, and it will be determined whether your child is eligible for special education and related services. If your child is found eligible, an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) will be developed.
- You are an important member of the case conference committee. The other committee members are determined in part by the type of disability suspected.
- The evaluation results will be reviewed at the case conference; however, you may also request a meeting to discuss the evaluation results before the case conference. You should indicate this on the written consent for testing as well. If you request this, the meeting will be held within 5 school days prior to the case conference.

Talking With Your Child

Every child is different. As a parent, you will decide how much advance information to share with your child about the upcoming evaluation. Use the following information to guide this conversation.

- Keep the experience positive. Explain that this experience will help your child's teachers know how to help him or her at school.
- Tell your child that the activities will help determine what kinds of things are easier or harder for him or her.
- Explain that the evaluation will include activities that are like school (such as reading, writing and math), but may also include other questions and activities that are more like puzzles, drawings, solving problems, listening, remembering information, or just talking.
- Avoid using the word "test", because it can create unnecessary anxiety for the child. Share that the work that is done during the evaluation will not count on his or her report card and that he or she will not receive a "grade".
- Typically older children need more notice and explanation.
- Consider whether your child is a "worrier". If so, it may be advisable to have less discussion about the evaluation. Each assessment team member who works with your child will give some general information to him or her before starting an evaluation session and will take steps to make your child more at ease.
- Most children enjoy the evaluation activities and are sometimes rewarded for participation with a sticker, pencil, or treat.
- A good practice is to talk with your contact person about what information to share with your child.



Preparations

If your child is currently attending school, you may or may not be notified about the date(s) of evaluation in advance. During the time period that the evaluation may take place (for most evaluations, this is within 50 school days from when the school received your written consent for testing), keep the following routines.

- Keep a consistent bedtime for your child so that he or she gets a good night's sleep.
- Feed your child a healthy breakfast each morning or have him or her eat breakfast at school.
- Be sure that your child has glasses, hearing aids, or other needed devices at school each day.
- Continue to consistently give your child any medications prescribed by his or her doctor.
- Avoid scheduling vacations or appointments during this time period if possible.

Providing Input

You know your child better than anyone else and your input to the multidisciplinary team is extremely important. The following suggestions can help you more effectively contribute to the evaluation.

- Complete history forms, rating scales, and release forms as quickly and thoroughly as possible and return them to school or to the designated office (sometimes parents are provided with an addressed envelope).
- Feel free to ask any questions you have and seek clarification when you do not understand something.
- Ask for assistance if you need an interpreter, or help with reading or completing forms. If your native language is not English, ask the assessment team to provide information in your native language.
- If you have copies of any relevant medical reports, outside evaluations, or therapy reports that you are willing to share, consider letting the school make copies for the assessment team. It can sometimes take a long time to receive these directly from a hospital or other medical provider.

Communicating With The Assessment Team

Don't hesitate to communicate with the assessment team about your child or the evaluation.

- During the evaluation time period, please notify your child's teacher if your child is not feeling well, or had a rough night or morning, so that this can be relayed to the assessment team and testing can be avoided on that day.
- If your child is particularly anxious about the evaluation, please let an assessment team member know.
- Clearly communicate any food allergies your child has to the assessment team, because sometimes a snack or treat is given to students as a reward for effort.
- Your child will be encouraged throughout the evaluation, but will not receive feedback about whether an answer is right or wrong or how many items he or she got correct. Contact an assessment team member if you have questions about how a test session went before receiving the evaluation report, because your child may not be able to accurately tell you how he or she did.
- After you receive the evaluation report, make note of any questions or concerns you have so that you will remember to ask about these things prior to or at the case conference.
- If you are unsure of what kinds of questions you should ask, consider requesting someone to come to the case conference with you to support you. If you do not have someone to go with you, ask the school who they might suggest to talk to before the conference to help you understand the procedure better. You may also contact IN*SOURCE at 1-800-332-4433 at or About Special Kids (ASK) at 1-800-964-4746 for additional assistance.