

Developmental Delay (DD)

Parents of newborns are thrilled to see their child experience their first smile, laugh, roll-over, and first-steps. As the child grows, he is able to do more things on his own at expected ages and stages of development. We call this timetable the developmental milestones. What's considered normal development is described in broad terms, because children don't learn skills at the same pace. Even two children who learn the same skills months apart could still be considered on schedule. All children grow and develop at their own rate; some faster or slower than others.

It is when the skills *don't* emerge, more or less on that schedule, that parents become concerned. What's worse is if friends or relatives mention what he is "supposed" to be doing. If you have noticed some things that are troubling to you, there is help available to address those difficulties. Help is usually free and available in every state.

SEEK ADVICE FROM PHYSICIAN

The first thing you should do is speak with your child's pediatrician about your concerns. Don't wait! He should be completing well-baby developmental check-ups at certain intervals. He may tell you that your child is developing normally, or he might suggest a developmental screening to be conducted to see if your child is experiencing a developmental delay. This quick screening is a general measure of your child's skills and development and is not meant to provide a diagnosis. The results will show whether or not your child should be referred for a more in depth developmental evaluation. If a child has a

developmental delay, it is important to get help as soon as possible. Early identification and intervention can have a significant impact on a child's ability to learn new skills, as well as reduce the need for costly interventions over time.

HELP IS AVAILABLE

Yes, help is available to your child through Early Intervention or public schools, and it begins with a free evaluation for special services. Those special services are:

Early Intervention Services-a system of services to support infants and toddlers with disabilities (birth through 2) and their families. If a child is found eligible for Early Intervention services, staff work with you to develop what is known as an Individualized Family Services Plan or IFSP, which will describe your child's unique needs as well as the services he will receive to address those needs. Contact Alabama Early Intervention Services at 1-800-543-3098.

Special Education and Related Services-Services available through the public school system for school-aged children, including preschool ages (3-21). The federal special education law called IDEA, and corresponding state law called Alabama Administrative Code (AAC), require that special education and related services be made available free of charge to every eligible child with a disability, including preschoolers. These services are designed to address the child's individual needs in the classroom resulting from the disability.



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PO Box 118 * Wetumpka AL, 36092 * 334-567-2252 * 866-532-7660 * www.alabamaparentcenter.com

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REFERRAL AND EVALUATION

Early Intervention Services are meant for children under the age of three, who are experiencing delay in any of the developmental areas. The developmental evaluation should be conducted by a highly trained professional who can use the results to create a profile of your child's strengths and weaknesses across five developmental areas. Those areas are:

- Physical development (fine motor skills, gross motor skills)
- Cognitive development (intellectual abilities)
- Communication development (speech and language)
- Social or emotional development (social skills, emotional control)
- Adaptive development (self-care skills)

The results of the evaluation will be used to decide if your child needs Early Intervention Services and/or a treatment plan. Services are tailored to meet the child's unique needs in their natural environment, and are an important resource to children experiencing developmental delays. For example, early intervention services could include:

- Assistive technology (devices a child might need)
- Audiology or hearing services
- Speech and language services
- Counseling and training for a family

- Medical services, Nursing services
- Occupation therapy
- Physical therapy
- Speech therapy

Special education services for developmental delays are meant for children ages 3-8 in Alabama. Each state may have their own age requirements for eligibility. According to IDEA, the nation's special education law, it requires that all children suspected of having a disability be evaluated without cost to their parents to determine if they have a disability and need special education services. It is important to understand that a medical diagnosis does not mean the same as having a disability in education.



If you feel your child is in need of special education and related services, the first step is to make a referral to your child's school indicating your concerns, and request that an evaluation be conducted. The referral team will meet with you to review existing data and parental concerns to determine if evaluation is necessary. If the referral is accepted, a formal referral form is completed, and you must give written consent for the evaluation to be done. The school has 60 calendar days from written consent to complete the evaluation process. If the referral is not accepted,



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written notice is given to the parent, and the child is referred to the problem-solving team.

Keep in mind that a child does not have to fail in school to be eligible for special education services.

Developmental Delay

IDEA and AAC definition:

Developmental Delay means a delay that adversely affects daily life and/or educational performance in one or more of the following developmental areas: 1-Adaptive 2-Cognitive 3-Communication 4-Social or Emotional, and/or, 5-Physical and results in the need for special education and related services. A child may become eligible for this area of disability on his or her third birthday. A child identified with a developmental delay must be reevaluated prior to his or her ninth birthday to determine continued eligibility for special education services. At age nine, a child can no longer be eligible in the area of developmental delay and must be eligible in another area of disability in order to continue special education services.

AAC 290-8-9.03(3)(a)

A referral for special education should never be denied based solely on the student having passing grades.

All four areas of possible delay are likely to affect learning. In school, children have to be able to interact and answer questions. They have to be able to take in information and process it. Both language and motor skills have an impact on their ability for self-expression. We can't talk without controlling muscles around the mouth and tongue. To write, we need good control of our arm and hand muscles. And, in order to understand how one step follows another when doing a problem, we need motor-planning skills. Learning also draws on visual/spatial skills that allow our understanding of concepts such as bigger, smaller, higher, or lower.

EVALUATION FOR SCHOOL

An evaluation is the process of gathering information about your child, their potential disability, strengths, weaknesses, and areas of need. If your child is struggling in school and you are concerned about their learning, educational progress, social skills, or behavior, comprehensive special education evaluation may be the information that can help you and your child's school to meet your child's educational needs. The initial evaluation will serve to answer these questions:

- 1-Does my child have a disability?
- 2-does his disability affect his educational performance?
- 3-Does my child need special education and related services?

EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS



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Just the mere presence of a disability does not automatically qualify your child as “a child with a disability” under special education laws. Your child must comply with criteria listed for Developmental Delay by meeting minimum evaluative components. The evaluative components include passing a hearing and visual screening. Other components include evaluation in all five developmental domains and scoring as delayed in one domain, and evidence of adverse effect documented by a family interview and observation of the child in their environment.

DETERMINING ELIGIBILITY

When the evaluation process has been completed, the team has 30 days to review all the assessment data and scores, meet with all the other team members, including parents, and make an eligibility decision.

The team will collaborate and create a written report of the testing results. The report will describe your child’s strengths and needs, how your child’s skills compare to others of the same age or grade level, whether your child has a qualifying disability, and what individualized instruction and related services are recommended to help your child. If you disagree with the report, you have the right to request an independent educational evaluation or IEE, provided at the school’s expense. The school is also allowed to deny your request for IEE, but it must take additional steps to prove its evaluation is appropriate.

If your child is identified as “a child with a disability” determined to be eligible, a meeting to develop the Individualized Education Program (IEP) must be held within 30 calendar days of the initial eligibility determination. The data obtained during the evaluation is used to determine what services are required for the child to make educational progress. An IEP must be developed and in effect before special education and related services are provided. The school must obtain written informed consent from the parent before the initial provision of services to the child.

Sometimes the test scores and data do not meet the qualifying criteria for disability, and your child is denied eligibility for services. If you disagree with the ineligibility decision, you have the right to appeal this decision and should inform the school. You will receive a written copy of your Special Education Rights from the school, which contains information on due process procedures to follow. Ask the school if your child could benefit from 504 plan services. You can also contact our staff for assistance.

RESOURCES

Contact the Alabama Department of Education, Special Education Services Ages 3-21
www.alsde.edu/sec/ses/.

Early Intervention Services, Birth-Age 2.
<http://www.rehab.alabama.gov/individuals-and-families/early-intervention>

Alabama Medicaid EPSDE
<http://www.medicaid.alabama.gov/>



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Children's Rehabilitation Service

www.rehab.alabama.gov/crs

Family Voices <http://www.familyvoicesal.org/>

YOUR OPINION MATTERS

Stakeholder opinion is very important to our center. We invite you tell us what you think and make suggestions for trainings and publications. Complete a brief survey, call our center, or join our advisory committee. Your input is always welcome.

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/ALPTI>



APEC IS HERE TO HELP

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