

Introduction

Your child may have a disability you are already aware of, or perhaps you suspect your child has learning problems but are unsure of what to do next. Learning how to navigate the Special Education system can be difficult for any family, but for military families whose educational environments are constantly changing, it is an even greater challenge. For any child in a military family where homes, schools, and neighborhoods frequently change, parents are the constant factor. If your child does not receive an adequate education, you and your child will cope with the consequences for years to come. As you learn the system and interact with professionals, remember that you are the expert on your child and that no one else has a greater knowledge or interest in your child than you do.

IDEA

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is the special education legislation that guides school systems throughout the United States, its territories, and Department of Defense schools in the education of children with special needs. IDEA Part B establishes educational requirements for children with disabilities from the ages of 3 to 21. IDEA Part B has six major principles that must be met by school systems.



- Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE). This means that your child is entitled to an education at public expense, under public supervision and direction.
- Appropriate Evaluation. This includes gathering the information necessary to ensure a child is able to be involved in and progress within the general curriculum of the school.
- Individualized Education Program (IEP). This is a written plan for a child with a disability that is developed and reviewed according to the standards detailed in IDEA.
- Least Restrictive Environment (LRE). Children with disabilities are most appropriately educated with non-disabled peers.

Special Education

Separating the child from his or her non-disabled peers should only occur when the nature of the disability is such that education in a regular classroom, even with supplementary aids, cannot be achieved satisfactorily.

- Parents play a key role in decision making. “Congress finds the following:…Almost thirty years of research and experience has demonstrated that the education of children with disabilities can be made more effective by…strengthening the role of parents and ensuring that families of such children have meaningful opportunities to participate in the education of their children at school and at home.” (IDEA 2004 Finding)
- Procedural safeguards must be in place to ensure that the rights of the child and the child’s parents are protected, and that there are clear steps to follow in the case of a dispute.

The purpose of the law is to ensure that all children with disabilities have access to a free, appropriate public education (FAPE) to ensure the rights of children with disabilities and those of their parents are protected and to ensure that teachers and parents have the tools they need to meet educational goals and to assess the effectiveness of educational efforts being made for the child.



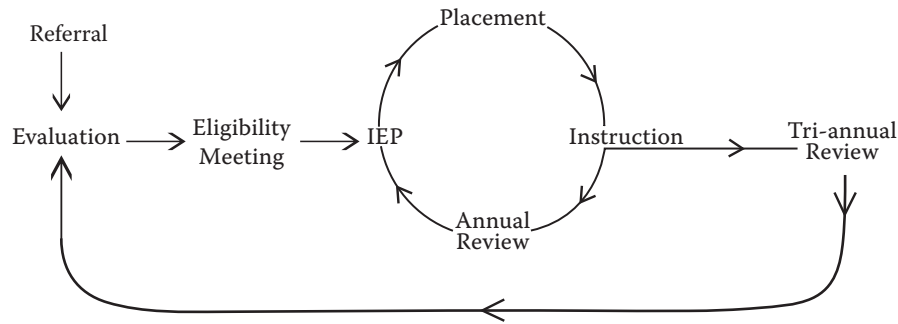
Every state has a Parent Training Center as well as a Protection and Advocacy Agency. These two organizations will help you learn how to advocate for your child within the public school system. If you have a concern you should not hesitate to contact these agencies at www.taalliance.org and www.napas.org.

The Special Education Cycle

How does a child become involved in Special Education? When a child has an obvious handicap or when a parent or teacher notices that a child is not progressing at the rate of his or her peers, this information is usually given in writing to the school system. This is the referral that begins the special education cycle. As the child moves through the cycle he or she will be assessed, and a decision will be made as to whether or not the child is eligible for special services. If so, a unique Individual Education Program will be written and followed to ensure that the child will get an appropriate education.

Referral

A referral is simply a request, usually in writing, to have a child evaluated by the school system for special education services. Some



Special Education Cycle

school systems have a specific form for this. A referral for special education can be made by a parent, teacher, or doctor, or it can come from a child development program. This happens when someone involved with the child notices that the child is not making progress or is showing signs of physical or behavioral challenges that are interfering with learning. Any of these people can contact the school system, in writing, and request that the child in question be evaluated. Usually, after a referral has been made, a screening committee meets to determine whether or not the child needs a full evaluation. This typically occurs at the child's home school. Should the screening committee decide that the child should have an evaluation, the parents will be notified as the child cannot be evaluated without their permission.

Evaluation

The evaluation is the series of tests and assessments the school system will use as they try to determine whether or not a child qualifies for special education.

A student's abilities may be evaluated in these areas:

- **Cognitive.** A child's intellect (ability to reason, remember, and understand).
- **Behavioral.** The ability to pay attention, the quality of child's relationships with children and adults, and the behavior at home as well as school and other settings.
- **Physical.** The assessment of the child's health to include vision, hearing, and the ability to communicate and move purposefully.
- **Developmental.** The assessment the child's progress in a number of areas such as understanding and responding to language, social and emotional levels, mobility, and ability to be organized.

You are an expert on your child, and the law requires that parents be included in every step of the evaluation process. It is important



Your school system must communicate with you in a way you can understand. If English is hard for you to understand, there must be an interpreter. If reading is hard for you, the letter from the school should be read and explained by someone from the school.

Referral for Special Education
Request for Evaluation

Date: _____

Director of Special Education

School District

School

Dear: _____ (Director of Special Education)

Re: _____ (Child's name)
_____ (Date of Birth)

I am writing to refer my child to the Committee on special education. I am requesting a special education assessment in all areas of suspected disability and specifically in the following areas: _____

Some of my concerns are based on: _____

If the school district agrees to evaluate my child, I understand I will be presented with a written evaluation plan within fifteen (15) days and that the plan will identify for me the tests to be given, dates for the tests, and the names of the persons who will administer the tests, as well as explanations of the tests and their purposes.

Sincerely,

Parent/Guardian Signature

Parent/Guardian Printed Name

Address

City, State, Zip Code

Telephone Number

Received by: _____ Date: _____

that you share your insight about your child. In fact, without your input, the school cannot have a complete picture of your child's personality and capabilities.

Sometimes talking to teachers and professionals about your child's areas of weakness may feel disloyal. However, without your perspective, the school system will not be able to fully understand your child and help him or her overcome or minimize areas of delay.

The school system must have a procedure that assures the following:

- Parental written consent to testing before the child is evaluated.
- Input from parents about their child's growth and development.
- The results of the evaluation will be available to parents.
- A chance to meet with representatives from the school so that parents can question any results they may disagree with.
- An opportunity to examine the child's records.
- The evaluation is appropriate for the child and without a cultural bias or is not inappropriate because of the child's disability.



- The initial evaluation for special education must be completed within 60 days of parental consent for an evaluation, unless your state has established a different time frame.
- If you think the evaluation is incomplete or inaccurate, you can request an independent educational evaluation.
- The evaluation must consist of a variety of tools. No single measure can determine if a child is eligible for special education.
- The assessment is given in the language the child is most comfortable with, unless this is not feasible.

Evaluation from the Child's Perspective

To many children, being evaluated is just another novel experience. The one-on-one attention can be fun. However, should your child feel anxious about the evaluation, spend some time talking about it. Explain that the evaluation is to help the child's teachers know the best way to teach the him or her. On the day of the evaluation, be sure your child is well rested and fed. If



Prior to the evaluation, you may want to talk to a trusted friend about how you feel about the evaluation process. Write down any questions or concerns you have and contact the evaluator or ask at the Evaluation Conference.



“I wish I had known from the beginning that being assertive doesn’t necessarily mean being a witch. You really do catch more flies with honey than you do with vinegar.”

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*~Adriana,
mom to
daughter
with Downs
Syndrome, and
visual issues,
Ft. Huachuca,
AZ*

*parent
to parent*

you can, give your child a choice such as, “Which breakfast do you think will help you feel strong for your evaluation, oatmeal or eggs?” or “Would you like to wear your favorite shirt for your evaluation?”

When the evaluation is over, ask your child which activities were enjoyable and if there were things he or she didn’t like. Praise your child for the effort.

The Evaluation Conference

The evaluation conference is where the findings of the formal evaluation will be discussed. This may be combined with the eligibility meeting. If you are not notified about such a meeting, you should request one. A copy of the evaluation report will be given to you.

What if there is a Disagreement?

At this point, parents and the school system should agree that the evaluation results are accurate, complete, and up-to-date. If there is a disagreement, you can ask informally for more testing to be done. However, even informal requests should be followed up with an email repeating your expectations. If this does not get the desired results, you can request an independent educational evaluation (IEE) of your child at public expense. You do not have to prove that the school’s evaluation was faulty. You are entitled to an independent evaluation if there is reason to believe the initial evaluation is incomplete or

inaccurate. An IEE may evaluate any skill related to your child’s educational needs. The school may not agree to this independent evaluation and may choose to hold a hearing during which they will try to show that the initial evaluation was valid and complete. Unless they do this, the school system cannot deny your request for a new evaluation. If, after a hearing the school system is not required to pay for an independent educational evaluation, you may still choose to have your child evaluated independently at your own expense. The school system is required to consider the independent evaluation when planning your child’s education.

Should you agree with the school system that the evaluation is accurate, begin to discuss whether or not your child is eligible for special education. The Evaluation Conference may be held at the same time as the Eligibility Meeting.

Eligibility

Eligibility refers to the decision about whether or not a child qualifies for special education services based on the established criteria. A committee will make this decision. This committee is required to compare the results of the evaluation with the definitions of various disabilities as defined in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). The

Request for an Independent Educational Evaluation

Date: _____

Director of Special Education/Principal

School District

School

Re: _____
 (Child's Name)

 (Date of Birth)

 (School)

Dear: _____
 (Director of Special Education)

I am requesting an Independent Educational Evaluation because I believe the results of my child's School District Assessments are inaccurate or incomplete. Because the results of these assessments are flawed in their accuracy or completeness they are not sufficient to guide the IEP team to an appropriate identification of disability, services, or placement.

Of my child's current assessments, I disagree with the following:

Sincerely,

Parent/Guardian Signature

Parent/Guardian Printed Name

Address

City, State, Zip Code

Telephone Number

Received by: _____ Date: _____



The presence of a disability does not automatically qualify a child for special education services under IDEA. The need for such services must first be supported by the evaluation of the child.

following are the disabilities which qualify children who, because of their disability, require special education in order to benefit from their educational program:

- Mental retardation.
- Hearing, vision, speech, or language impairments.
- Emotional disturbance.
- Autism.
- Traumatic brain injury.
- Orthopedic impairments.
- Learning disabilities.
- Developmental delays for children between the ages of 3 and 9.
- Other health impairments.

Each state, as well as the DoD, has its own categories and definitions of these disabilities. However, all states must follow the regulations under IDEA.

Eligibility Meeting

It is during this meeting that the decision will be made as to whether or not a child qualifies for special education. This meeting may be held at the same time as the Evaluation Conference.

Preparing for the Eligibility Meeting

Before the meeting starts you may want to pass around a picture or two of your child and family. This reinforces that your child is much more than an evaluation can measure. Be sure to ask for copies of the results of the evaluation as well as the official report of the meeting. Have your ideas about your child written down before going into the meeting. Include what you know about your child's way of learning and other information that may be helpful to the team. If desired, ask that your statement be included in the evaluation record.

<i>Checklist for Eligibility and IEP Meetings</i>	
<input type="checkbox"/>	A picture of your child and family.
<input type="checkbox"/>	A list of questions you have developed over time.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Copies of prior evaluations.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Records from Early Intervention, if your child participated.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Pertinent medical records.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Paper and pen for taking notes.
<input type="checkbox"/>	A friend or family member for company and moral support.
<input type="checkbox"/>	A sweet snack to share.

What if there is a Disagreement?

If all goes well, you and the school system will agree on the best course of action for your child's education, be that in or out of special education. Problems may arise

when you think your child qualifies and would benefit from special education services and the school does not, or if the school thinks special education is appropriate, and you do not. Sometimes the problem is that the school system and the parents of the child cannot agree on the nature or definition of the child's disability.

Should any of these disagreements occur, you may request an administrative review within the school system. If this is not available or if you are not satisfied with the results, there are two options. You may request mediation or a due process hearing, or you may request both at the same time. This will accelerate the process and lessen the amount of time your child must wait for an appropriate education.

- Mediation is a process that allows a dispute to be resolved without litigation. When you mediate you have two goals: to resolve the dispute and to protect your relationship with the school system.
- Due process hearings are conducted differently from state to state; however, they provide an opportunity to have your complaint heard in an impartial hearing. Before the hearing takes place, the school must hold a Resolution Session to give the parties a chance to resolve their differences before the hearing.

Managing Emotions

As you walk into the meeting that is to determine whether or not your child will qualify for special education services, be aware of your emotions. You may be feeling worried, nervous, or even defensive. Try to put these feelings aside in this and subsequent meetings.

Focus on the goals you have for your child. Be a good listener, and let the others at the meeting know you understand their perspective. That does not have to mean you are agreeing with them.

If someone says something you don't understand, either about your child or the procedures used to qualify for special education, don't hesitate to ask. There is so much to absorb, and it can be overwhelming. If you still don't understand, ask again. While all parents want the best possible education for their children, it can be a blow to realize a child needs special education to grow academically. Bring your spouse, a friend, or a professional who knows your child with you. If your spouse is deployed, bringing someone with you to the meeting is even more important. This person can provide moral support as well as another perspective on your child. It is also nice to have someone with whom you can discuss the meeting.

Once the disagreements, if any, have been worked out, it is time to write your child's Individual Education Program.



When talking to school staff, you will be most successful when you keep your cool, stay positive and clear about your goals, and keep the focus on meeting your child's needs.

How to organize an IEP Notebook

Supplies:

A three ring note book
 A three hole punch
 Highlighter
 Sticky notes
 #10 envelopes
 Stamps
 Dividers for binder
 Calendar
 Phone log

1. Request a complete copy of your child's school records. See the form letter on page 33.
2. Start a photo record of your child adding a school picture to the record each year.
3. Label dividers, and organize information in the following way:
 - Assessments
 - IEP
 - Report cards/ interim reports
 - Health records, immunizations
 - Discipline records
 - Calendar
 - Phone log
 - Correspondence to school system
 - Correspondence from the school system
 - Addresses

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act

Section 504 is a civil rights law that prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability and applies to public schools among other entities. Because Section 504's definition of disability is broader than the IDEA's definition, some children who do not qualify for special education under IDEA do qualify under Section 504. This can be especially helpful for children with invisible conditions, such as learning disabilities or Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. For a link to more information about Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, look in the "For More Information" section at the end of this module.

Individual Education Program (IEP)

An IEP is a written plan describing a detailed program for the child's education. It will contain the following:

- A description of the child's present level of academic achievement and functional performance.
- Consideration of parental concerns about their child's education and progress.
- Goals that are measurable and specific (e.g., David will write a paragraph

with opening and closing sentences, or Becky will feed herself with a spoon).

- A list of the related services the child will receive and details about where the services will be located, who will offer them and for what length of time, and how much time the child will spend in the services.
- Special Education Placement includes a description of how much of the day the student will spend in the regular education classroom with students who are not in special ed, as well as a description of the special education programs and services that will be provided to the student.
- The IEP will include the methods that will be used to determine if the child is meeting goals and objectives. This might be classroom observation, test results, or examples of school work.
- The projected date for the beginning of services as well as the frequency, location, and duration of services.

Who Attends IEP Meetings?

The following people must attend the IEP meeting: the parent, a teacher of the child's regular education class (if the child is or will be in a regular class room), a special education teacher,

and an administrator who is not only knowledgeable about special education and the general curriculum, but is also able to commit the schools resources to meet the child's needs. Sometimes specialists and other educators attend. It may be appropriate for the child to attend, especially as parents begin to plan their child's transition out of school. Bring a spouse or friend to the meeting. It is a good idea to explain to this person the role they should take during the meeting (e.g., another view point on the child or just moral support and another set of eyes and ears).

Preparing for the IEP Meeting

In order to prepare for this IEP meeting and future meetings, it is a good idea to take a little time to organize your child's school records. Many parents create an IEP notebook, which is kept up-to-date with copies of past evaluations, past IEPs, and correspondence with the school. If creating a notebook seems overwhelming right now, be sure to have a designated folder for all special education paperwork until you have time to create a notebook.

Potential Problems

You may be presented with an IEP that was completed before the meeting. Should this happen, keep in mind that you have a right to participate in the development of your child's IEP. Consider and refer to this IEP as a draft. If you feel pressured to sign it, simply remind the other members of the committee that you need time to

parent
to parent

"I never go in there alone. The most productive IEP meetings have been the ones where I have had the necessary moral support."

*~ Isabel,
mom to son
with autism,
Quantico,
Virginia*





*If you would like to learn more about advocating for your child, see module five, **Advocating for Your Child**, of this Parent Tool Kit.*

read and digest such an important document, and that you will need a copy to take home with you.

If the school system says a course of action is prohibited by law or regulation, ask politely for help identifying this law or regulation.



If you move to a new state mid year, the school must provide comparable services to the previous IEP until the new school conducts an evaluation and develops a new IEP.

Focus on Your Child's Needs

This is another time when emotions can run high because your child's education is so important. Remember to keep the needs of your child the focus of the discussion. When possible, have educational options for your child already in mind. If you feel resistance to your ideas, suggest trying a new idea for eight weeks to see how it works. Look for common ground and be sure the others in the room know you are trying to understand their point of view. Remember that a pleasant attitude is much more productive than a negative one and thank those who have been helpful.

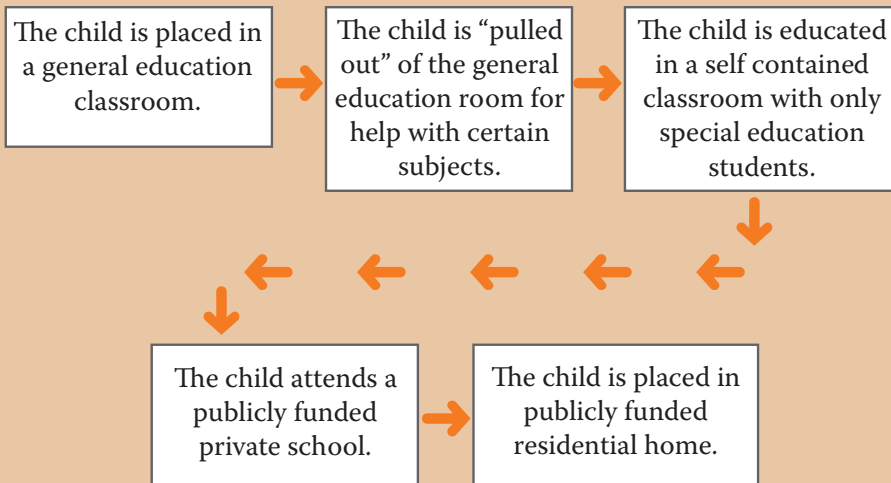
Are You Satisfied With the IEP?

If you are satisfied with the IEP, sign it to show you accept the plan. If you would like a few days to think about it, you can ask for that. If you do not agree with all or part of the IEP, identify which parts are unacceptable. If the school refuses to make the changes, three options are available:

- Sign the IEP but indicate in writing the parts you find objectionable. You will then be on record as stating that you believe the IEP does not meet all your child's needs.
- Sign the IEP but list the parts you find objectionable and write that you plan to appeal those parts. This way your child can begin or continue to receive the services while the appeal is pending.
- Refuse to sign the IEP and indicate in writing that you plan to appeal the IEP. Before doing this, ask what services your child can receive while the appeal is pending since he or she may be denied services until the IEP is signed.

Remember, parental consent for an evaluation is not consent for a child to receive special education services. The school must have an informed consent before providing services.

Spectrum of Placement for Special Education



Your child's IEP will be reviewed each year and rewritten to reflect the gains your child has made and the new goals that have been set. Because your input is crucial to the completeness of the IEP, the school system is required to notify you in writing when a meeting is scheduled. Once your child reaches the age of 16, the school is required to include him or her in meetings to address the transition from high school into post high school life. If you would like to request the IEP team meet mid-year to discuss your child's progress, you need to do so in writing.

Placement

Placement refers to the setting in which a child will be educated, including the school, classroom, and related services, and how much time the child will spend with children who are not disabled. The details of your child's placement

should be spelled out in the IEP. An integral part of IDEA is the concept of the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE). This means that a child with disabilities should be removed from the regular classroom only when the child's disability is of a nature that it is necessary to do so.

Placement Options

School systems are required to provide a range of placement options to ensure differing needs can be met. This spectrum of placement starts with the general education classroom, moving to time in a resource room or "pull out" classes for certain subjects, to self-contained classrooms with only special education students, to private school, and finally to residential placements. Once you know which specific services your child will need, you can address the question of where these services should be provided. The focus is on



Inclusion refers to the schools intent to educate students with disabilities in a regular classroom whenever possible.

how to best educate your child in the least restrictive environment. Least restrictive environment also means that whenever possible your child should be educated in the neighborhood school that he or she would normally attend, unless the IEP requires another arrangement. When appropriate placement cannot be provided by the public school system, a private day or residential school must be paid for at public expense.

Plan—Discuss the assignment with your child and share ideas on how to complete it.

Organize—Visually identify the steps needed to complete the task. This may be pictures or words to identify the beginning, middle, and end of a story.

Write—Have your student write the story elaborating on the ideas or pictures of earlier steps.

Edit—Have student proofread for a single component at a time. Kids tend to read what they intended to write, and may miss holes in the story. If the child is overwhelmed take turns editing. Have the child check for capital letters and periods, and you can check for spelling errors. Learning to edit is a long but valuable lesson.

Revise—Many kids balk at revision. Revision leads to a product the child will be proud of.

Instruction and Related Services

Instruction is the actual educating of a child. It refers to time spent in the general education classroom and in special education, as well as time receiving related services.

Instruction

After all the evaluations and meetings have been held, the instructional time should be structured in such a way that your child's needs for an education are being met. Although the majority of instructional time is spent in school, parents have an important part to play as back up for their child's teacher. It is up to you to create a homework routine that will work for your child and family and to help your child remain motivated and feel successful.

Remember that children learn best when they are relaxed. If your child is stressed about an assignment, he or she may not be able to do the work for worrying about how to get it done or fear of not doing it well. Help your child by showing how to break the task into more manageable parts. Some teachers call this "chunking." The first step might be to read the directions, gather supplies, and then perhaps make an outline of what the child will do to complete the assignment.

If learning a new concept, be sure the child understands the vocabulary involved. Instead of asking, "Do you understand these words?" say, "Can you tell me what

Location

- Help your child choose a distraction free work space that will be regularly available for homework.
- Your child should have a comfortable chair and good lighting. Some children concentrate better with total silence, others with low music.
- A chewy snack, like sugar free gum may help with concentration.

Fatigue

- Be aware that your child may need a break; this could mean physical activity, or relaxing with a snack. Avoid TV. Use a timer to let your child know the break is over and it is time to get back to work.
- If your child is spending an unusually long time doing homework, contact the teacher and see if some modification can be made. Make sure your child's teacher knows how hard this is for him or her.

Organization

- If the work space is used by others during the day, fill a basket with school supplies and let your child pull it out at homework time.
- Supply your child with different color folders for different subjects.
- Help your child prioritize assignments.
- Teach your child that his or her homework is not finished until it is in the correct folder and put in a backpack by the door.
- Provide your child with a calendar for tracking test dates and project due dates.

Encouragement

- Use concrete statements of praise like, "The way you drew that tree makes it look like the branches are waving in the wind. I like that!"
- Give non verbal reassurance with a squeeze of a shoulder or a kiss on the head.
- Let your child hear you praise him or her to another adult.

homework help hints

germination is?” A good place to start is to find out what the child already knows. Ask the child, “What can you tell me about George Washington?” Almost any answer can be used as a good beginning to start a conversation. Children will remember new information better if they can relate it to something they already know.

Writing can be especially challenging to a child who learns differently. To write, the child must do many things at once. First, the child must hold the story in his or her head, tell it in the correct order, remember punctuation and spelling, and once all this is done the child may feel defeated because the end result looks so messy. Brainstorm with your child before writing begins about words that might be used and have them listed near by. Another way of helping a child tackle a writing assignment might be to teach and then post the POWER strategy on page 28. This will help the child to break the assignment into smaller, more manageable parts.

Related Services

In order to adequately educate your child, his or her IEP may specify services other than those provided by the classroom teacher. The following are some of the related services your child may receive:

- **Assistive Technology.** Any piece of equipment that improves a child’s ability to communicate, to be independent, and to learn.



It could be an augmentative communication board or a wheel chair.

- **Audiological.** Services to identify children with hearing loss and to help with language improvement, speech, lipreading, conversation, or the appropriate use of hearing aids.
- **Counseling.** School counselors who work to improve behavior, self-control, and self-esteem of students.
- **Medical.** Available for diagnostic reasons and to make recommendations for special ed services based on the child’s disability.
- **Occupational Therapy.** Activities focus fine motor skills, such as writing,

sorting, eating, and other skills that assist in improving daily life.

- **Orientation and Mobility.** Assistance for any child who needs to be taught how to travel around the school building, perhaps because of visual impairment.
- **Parent Counseling and Training.** Helps parents of children with special needs to understand how their child is developing, and also refers to other groups who can offer financial planning or other professional services.
- **Physical Therapy.** Provided by a licensed therapist, this service concentrates on gross motor functioning. That is, large body movements like sitting, standing, and moving.
- **Psychological.** School psychologist gives testing, interprets results, and acts as a consultant to school staff.
- **Rehabilitative Counseling.** Independence training, employment preparation, vocational training, and integration into the work place.
- **School Health Services.** Nursing services that are necessary to assist a child so he or she will benefit from the educational plan must be described in the IEP, and may be services such as

administering medication, providing assistance with catheterization, or breathing therapy.

- **Social Work.** Provides group or individual therapy and helps with problems in the child's home that may affect the child's adjustment in school.
- **Speech.** Diagnoses speech and language disorders, provides therapy, and counsels parents and teachers regarding speech problems.
- **Transportation.** Schools are responsible for transportation of special education students to and from school and in and around the building.

There may be other services that the IEP team identifies that are not on this list. Specific goals will be written for related services, just as goals are written for class work.

Finally, You Have a Plan

Now that you are past the evaluation stage and have a written plan and a comfortable routine, relax a little. You deserve it. It is a good idea to give your child's teachers a little time to get the program running smoothly before checking on it. Once the school year is underway and the teacher has had a chance to get your child's program up and running, establish an atmosphere of cooperation with the teacher. This is essential to keeping

track of your child's academic, behavioral, and social activity in the classroom. Some parents and teachers stay in touch by way of a notebook that is passed back and forth everyday, by telephone, or by frequent conferences. Probably some combination of the above is best. Be as positive as you can be and let the teacher know that you appreciate the work done on behalf of your child.

Annual Review

Once a year the school system is required to review your child's Individual Education Program. This is called the annual review. Your school system is required to notify you in writing of the purpose of the meeting and who will attend. It should be attended by at least three people: the parent, the teacher, and a representative of the school system who is authorized to commit the school resources. If your child spends time in a regular classroom, the teacher of that class must attend. In addition, specialists such as the school psychologist, an occupational therapist, or the school nurse may attend. The meeting must be at a time and place that is convenient for you. Also, if you need assistance with English, they must provide an interpreter.

There is an option in some states to replace the annual review with a review every 3 years. The benefit may be that teachers spend less time on paperwork this way. However, children grow and change a lot in 3 years, and if you are not

comfortable with this idea you may opt for an annual review. As with the evaluation conference and the eligibility meeting, have your thoughts, ideas, and questions written down before the meeting begins. You may want to bring someone with you, a spouse or friend, who has seen your child progress.

Triennial Review

Every 3 years the school system is required to conduct an extensive review of your child's progress. This is called the triennial review. There may be entirely new evaluations done, and there will be a new eligibility decision about whether to continue special education. There will be a thorough review of existing data to determine which new evaluations may be needed. If there are any new areas of suspected disability, you may request certain evaluations, and unless they provide rational for refusing, the school is required to provide them.

Records

Many school systems keep three types of records:

- Cumulative File. This file contains report cards, standardized test scores, teacher reports, and a copy of your child's Individual Education Plan (IEP) if your child is already in special

Request for School Records

Date: _____

 Director of Special Education or Principal

 School District

 School

Re: _____
 (Child's name)

 (Date of Birth)

 (School)

Dear: _____
 (Director of Special Education or Principal)

I am developing a personal home file for my Child's Special Education information. I am requesting a complete copy of all school records, cumulative and confidential, within the school district that contains my child's name, _____.

Please include copies of all evaluations and actual test scores, the Cumulative Record, Health Record, Disciple Record, Psychological Record, Confidential Record, Assessments, Individual Educational Plans, and Teacher Record.

If the school district charges a fee for this service, please alert me as soon as possible. If you have any questions about my request contact me at _____.

Sincerely,

 Parent/Guardian Signature

 Parent/Guardian Printed Name

 Address

 City, State, Zip Code

 Telephone Number

Received by: _____ Date: _____



For more information about raising a special needs child while in the military, see module four, "Families in Transition," of this Parent Tool Kit.

education. You can get a copy of this through your school office.

- **Confidential File.** This may be kept at the school or in an administrative office. It has all the reports written about your child's evaluation, medical records if available, summaries of meetings held by the evaluation team, and sometimes a record of your correspondence with the school. Ask the principal to see this file.
- **Compliance File.** Some school systems keep a separate file with all reports, records of meetings, and all correspondence. You can ask the principal if this file exists.

To receive copies of any of these files, ask your school system what the procedure is. If you request copies of your child's records, the school must provide them, but there may be a charge for the cost of copying. You must request a copy of your child's records in writing

Transition to Adulthood

If your child has been involved with special education for several years, you have a good understanding of the IEP process. Transitioning out of school and into the world has a different focus. Instead of identifying and working to minimize your child's challenges, you are looking toward the future

and exploring what it will take for your child to learn a job or live on his or her own.

Once a child graduates or leaves the school system, there is no guaranteed program to pick up where IDEA leaves off. However, starting between the ages of 14 and 16, your child's IEP will begin to address the transition process. Transition services are a coordinated set of activities that will aid a child with a disability as he or she moves from school to post school activities. These activities should be based on the child's needs, taking into account his or her strengths and interests.

Your child should be assisted in developing post school living objectives concerning employment or daily living skills. Time in school might be spent with an emphasis on practical life matters, like reading job applications or menus and



learning money skills. Ask your child what kind of work he or she would like to do. Is it realistic? Is there a compromise that can be made so that your child's desires can be met? Perhaps a child who wants to be a veterinarian could work in a vet's office.

These transition services should start no later than the first IEP in order to be in effect when the child turns 16, and should be updated annually thereafter. Also, no later than 1 year before reaching the age of majority under state law, your child must be informed of his or her rights under IDEA, if any, that will transfer to him or her upon reaching the age of majority.

What options are there for your child?

- **College.** Whether two or four year, colleges offer opportunities for students with disabilities to continue their education. Because of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), colleges cannot discriminate against otherwise qualified students with disabilities.
- **Continuing and Adult Education.** These courses range from computer skills to cooking and offer a way to expand your child's horizons.
- **Vocational Training.** There are trade schools that typically prepare students for specific occupations, such as beautician or electrician and requires a high school diploma to attend.
- **On-the-Job Training.** Is short-term training that allows a child to learn a job while working on the site. Many vocational rehabilitation agencies, disability organizations, and large companies provide this sort of training and placement.
- **Competitive Employment.** These are jobs in the mainstream of everyday life. Competitive employment describes jobs for which your child would get paid the going rate. The law prohibits discrimination and requires reasonable accommodations be made if the person is qualified for the job.
- **Supported Employment.** This is paid employment for people with severe disabilities, who have a job coach that provides guidance by helping the employee improve job skills or any other job related needs. Generally the coach is involved heavily in the beginning of employment, but is less involved as the employee gains in skill and comfort.
- **Adult Day Programs.** These programs provide a work environment in a supervised setting with other disabled



If you are considering obtaining guardianship for your child, learn about the guardianship laws in your state, and begin the process well before your child turns 18.

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workers. They will usually receive training in life skills and recreation.

- Centers for Independent Living. Here people with disabilities develop self help and advocacy skills like balancing a check book, cleaning, and cooking nutritious foods.

Guardianship and Declaration of Incapacitation

Usually when a child reaches the age of majority, 18 in most states, it is assumed that he or she will be able to make decisions about health, finances and the future. However, for some children this is not the case. Once your child reaches the age of majority you will have no control over educational, financial, or health related decisions your child might make. If you are concerned that your child will not be capable of making these decisions responsibly, consider asking the courts for guardianship. The age of majority varies from state to state. Check www.militaryhomefront.dod.mil/efm to find out information about your state.

Guardianship is a court approved relationship between a legal guardian and the person with a disability. The court will define the degree of legal authority that the guardian will have to act on behalf of the disabled person. Detailed documentation from a physician

will be needed to show that your child is not mentally capable of becoming independent.

Laws concerning guardianship vary from state to state, so if you move to another state, you will have to reapply in the new state.

For More Information

Obtain the other modules of this Parent Tool Kit at www.militaryhomefront.dod.mil/efm or from your EFMP coordinator.

- Module One, *Birth to Age Three*
- Module Three, *Health Benefits*
- Module Four, *Families in Transition*
- Module Five, *Advocating for Your Child*
- Module Six, *Resources and Support*

Parenting Advice

The National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities www.nichcy.org

Visit the STOMP (Specialized Training for Military Parents) website and consider joining their list serve. This group can help you find other military families with exceptional children. www.stompproject.org

Writing A Successful IEP

www.ldonline.org

Advocacy Information

State by state list of Protection and Advocacy Agencies as well as information on advocacy strategies.

www.napas.org

Your Rights

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act

www.ed.gov (search 504)

IDEA

U.S. Department of Education

IDEA 2004 website:

<http://idea.ed.gov>

