

General Information about Disabilities

From the National Information Center for Children and Youth with Disabilities

Introduction

Every year, under the federal law known as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), millions of children with disabilities receive special services designed to meet their unique needs. For infants and toddlers with disabilities birth through two and their families, special services are provided through an *early intervention* system. For school-aged children and youth (aged 3 through 21), *special education and related services* are provided through the school system. These services can be very important in helping children and youth with disabilities develop, learn, and succeed in school and other settings.

Who is Eligible for Services?

Under the IDEA, states are responsible for meeting the special needs of eligible children with disabilities. To find out if a child is eligible for services, he or she must first receive a full and individual initial evaluation. This evaluation is free. Two purposes of the evaluation are:

- to see if the child has a disability, as defined by IDEA, and
- to learn in more detail what his or her special needs are.

Infants and Toddlers, Birth Through Two.

Under the IDEA, “infants and toddlers with disabilities” are defined as children “from birth through age two who need early intervention services because they—

- are experiencing developmental delays, as measured by appropriate diagnostic instruments and procedures, in one or more of the following areas:
 - cognitive development.
 - physical development, including vision and hearing.
 - communication development.
 - social or emotional development.
 - adaptive development; or
- have a diagnosed physical or mental condition that has a high probability of resulting in developmental delay.

The term may also include, if a state chooses, children from birth through age two who are at risk of having substantial developmental delays if early intervention services are not provided.” (34 *Code of Federal Regulations* §303.16)

Children Aged 3 Through 4.

It is important to know that, under IDEA, states and local educational agencies (LEAs) are allowed to use the term “developmental delay” with children aged 3 through 4, rather than one of the disability categories listed at the top of page 2. This means that, if they choose, states and LEAs do not have to say that a child has a specific disability. For children aged 3 through 4, a state and LEA may choose to include as an eligible “child with a disability” a child who is experiencing developmental delays in one or more of the following areas:

- physical development,
- cognitive development,
- communication development,
- social or emotional development, or

- adaptive development;
and

who, because of the developmental delays, needs special education and related services.

“Developmental delays” are defined by the state and must be measured by appropriate diagnostic instruments and procedures.

Children and Youth Aged 3 Through 21.

The IDEA lists 13 different disability categories under which 3- through 21-year-olds may be eligible for services. For a child to be eligible for services, the disability must affect the child’s educational performance. The disability categories listed in IDEA are:

- autism,
- deaf-blindness,
- emotional disturbance,
- hearing impairment (including deafness),
- mental retardation,
- multiple disabilities,
- orthopedic impairment,
- other health impairment,
- preschool moderate delay, severe delay, and speech and language
- specific learning disability,
- speech or language impairment,
- traumatic brain injury, or
- visual impairment (including blindness).

Under IDEA, a child may not be identified as a “child with a disability” just 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 instruction in math or reading.

For definitions of these disabilities and other information, go to <http://www.nichcy.org/pubs/genresc/gr3.pdf>

Pre-school children

If you have concerns about the development of your pre-school child, here are some resources.

For detailed lists of developmental milestones relating to physical development, social/emotional development, cognitive skills, and communication skills from birth to age 5, see The ABC’s of Child Development at <http://www.pbs.org/wholechild/>.

If you suspect that your child from birth to age 3 has a disability, contact the Arizona Early Intervention Program (AzEIP). The local contact is Amanda

Bowling at Arizona's Children Association, 527-1000. More information is available at www.de.state.az.us/AzEIP.