



# Tips for Parents: Special Education

## **How does a child qualify for special education?**

If parents or physicians believe a child has a disability, they may request special education services. Often, however, it is the school that will alert parents to a disability that may be hampering their child's progress. In either case, the school will provide free psychological and academic testing unless the parents prefer to have the testing done privately at their own expense. The school may also request medical information. After a full review of test results and records, a disabilities diagnosis is determined. An appeals process is available if parents disagree with the resulting diagnosis.

## **How do parents react to a disabilities diagnosis?**

Some parents are unable to accept the confirmation of their child's disability, or feel that their child will "outgrow" the problem without special help. They may start a long and expensive search for different opinions and they may seek to enroll their child in private school, even though most private schools cannot provide the comprehensive special education services that today's public schools offer. But most parents accept and trust the diagnosis, and welcome the early intervention that will help their child overcome or compensate for a disability.

## **What makes special education programs succeed?**

The main ingredient for successful special education programs is the same as education for non-disable children—parent participation. Only an effective home/school partnership can enable a child, with or without disabilities, to develop his or her education potential.

## **How can parents help?**

Parents can help ensure school success for a child with a disability by communicating regularly with the teacher about the child's progress, by supporting the school's efforts, by helping with homework, and by encouraging good habits and behavior at home. Family participation in school activities enables special education students to feel that they are members of the school community.

Perhaps the most important thing for parents and educators to remember is that the focus on special education in schools today is on children's *abilities*, and not on their *disabilities*.

For more information:

### **Web links:**

US Department of Education's Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services:  
<http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/osers/index.html>

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