Toddlers
Time for Preschool
Early Childhood
Special Education Services

Three years old! Hard to believe – it comes so quickly. It is a time to celebrate and a time to make the transition from early intervention services to a preschool program that is a match to your child’s individualized strengths and special needs.

Thinking about your baby’s move to a preschool program might make your head spin. Where will she go? Will she be welcome? Will the teachers understand her disabilities and give her the extra help she needs? You are not alone in your feelings -- Being anxious is part of parenting and parents of children with special needs often feel it more intensely. Many families find that the best way to confidently move forward is to give yourself plenty of time to talk with professionals who know your child, as well as knowledgeable parents who have already taken this journey.

The Move to Preschool Services begins at least 6 months before he turns (3) three. During that time you will establish a transition-to-preschool plan with your child’s current service providers.

Schedule a transition planning meeting to review your child’s progress, share your priorities and concerns, talk about possible programs and services and discuss the need for any additional evaluations.

Visit the full range of preschool programs in your community. Check out private preschools in your neighborhood as well as the early childhood special education services provided by your local school division.

Talk to other parents about their experiences.

Participate At least a month before your child’s third birthday, participate in a preschool team meeting. If your child is eligible for services AND you have selected the program offered by your school district, the team (that includes you!) will develop an Individual Education Program (IEP) to define the programs, supports and services your child will receive.
The LRE Dilemma
In
Early Childhood Special Education Services

According to the Virginia Department of Education, “It is the responsibility of the Local Education Administration (LEA) to provide a continuum of placements for young children. The least restrictive environment is always the first consideration.”

However – LEA’s do not (1) pay for a student to attend a neighborhood preschool and (2) do not offer services to non-disabled 3 year olds. As a result, most LEA classrooms for special education preschoolers are segregated settings. Talk with your local schools’ preschool specialist about the different ways early childhood special education services can be provided in your community. Some districts have a preschool class in a local school that is inclusive.

What to Look for When Visiting a Preschool Setting

- Do the children seem happy? Are they actively engaged with materials and each other?
- Is there a mission statement that commits to inclusive attitudes and practices? Is it posted?
- Is the travel time to the program reasonable for my family? (ie: bus, taxi, etc)
- Are there ongoing opportunities for family involvement?
- Do the adults positively interact with the children, promoting critical thinking and social skills?
- Is the staff using an evidence-based developmentally appropriate curriculum?
- Do the staff members encourage interaction among all students?
- Are accommodations imbedded for diverse learners?

Resources

Turning 3, from C to B: Transitions for Kids with Special Needs http://landlockedfilms.com
Transition from Part C to Preschool http://www.nectac.org

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