

Getting ready for kindergarten is an important step for every child. When your child has a disability, a bit of extra planning and thoughtful preparation can help ensure a smooth and successful transition.

Preparation Begins with the IEP (Individualized Education Plan)

Some children with disabilities get support from the school system before kindergarten, like preschool or home-based services. If your child has an IEP, they've already been working on goals to get ready. Before school starts, there will be a meeting to talk about what your child needs in kindergarten. Some children with disabilities don't get school services until they start kindergarten. If this is your child - or you think they might need support - call your school to ask for an evaluation. It's best to do this in the spring before kindergarten starts, since schools have 60 days (not counting summer break) to complete the process.

How Do I Know If My Child Is Ready for Kindergarten?

Many children entering kindergarten are not able to read, write or do math. Kindergarten teachers will tell you that it is more important that children are able to follow directions, share and know how to take turns, pay attention and get along with others. These skills and a good attitude will help make it easier for a child to learn in a kindergarten classroom.

Many children with disabilities will have some of these skills. Others may still be developing them. You can use the following list to help identify some of your child's strengths and the areas in which they may need extra help.

- 1) Can my child follow two step directions?
- 2) Can my child manage buttons and zippers on their own?
- 3) Can my child recite the alphabet and count to 20?
- 4) Can my child use classroom supplies such as pencils and scissors appropriately?
- 5) Does my child seem excited about books or reading activities?
- 6) Is my child receptive to learning new things?
- 7) Does my child share and know how to take turns?

How Will an IEP Help My Child?

The IEP team should talk about any weaknesses in these and other identified areas. Goals should be written to address your child's weakness and any services he/she will need to help them meet his/her goals. For example, if your child is unable to hold a pencil or cut with scissors, the IEP might contain a goal of being able to cut out 5 different shapes with scissors or hold a pencil and draw 5 different shapes. Your child might need to work with an occupational therapist to help them achieve this goal. If your child has difficulty listening to and following instructions, he/she might need to have special guidance or cues from the teacher or teaching assistant. Some children may even require smaller group instruction or more specialized instruction from a special education teacher. The IEP team makes these types of decisions.

What If I Disagree with the IEP Team?

Remember, you are a part of this team and all decisions by the team should consider your input. You know your child best, especially at this young age when they spend less time in school settings. Parents can bring others to the IEP meetings that may know the child well and can speak

about their strengths and weaknesses. These can include babysitters, childcare workers, church members, neighbors, and relatives. You are at the beginning of a parent-school relationship that will last for at least 13 years, so it is important to start off on the right foot and work positively and collaboratively to provide your child with a good education. You should spend some time learning what your rights are and what special education laws require schools to provide for your child. If, however, you disagree with important decisions made by the team, you have the right to pursue dispute resolution which includes mediation. The IEP team can provide you with information about this process or you can contact Parent to Parent of Georgia for more information.

What Should I Do to Help My Child Adjust to Kindergarten?

- Establish a morning routine that includes getting up and dressed for school.
- Visit the new school and spend time with the teacher, explore the classroom, and see the cafeteria.
- Visit the playground.
- Use pictures and/or stories to familiarize your child with their new school, classroom, and teacher.
- Check out children's books or videos about starting kindergarten from your local library.
- Talk about the bus ride or other transportation to and from school.

Once Your Child Begins Kindergarten:

- Your child may experience separation anxiety or shyness initially, but teachers are trained to help them adjust.
- If your child cries at drop-off, remain calm and positive. Do not linger but rather reassure your child that he/she will be okay and that you will be back soon.
- Share information about how you think your child is adjusting to school. Ask the teacher to do the same through email or other forms of communication.
- Develop a relationship with your child's teacher and other students by volunteering in the classroom.
- Check your child's backpack daily for notes and fliers. These include important information and communication from the school.
- Schedule a follow-up IEP meeting half-way through the school year, or sooner if needed, to evaluate how well the plan is working.

Where to go for more information:

Parent to Parent of Georgia
770 451-5484 or 800-229-2038
<https://www.p2pga.org>

Georgia Department of Education Division for Exceptional Children
404 656-3963 or 800-311-3627 and ask to be transferred to Special Education
<https://gadoe.org/special-education/>

Additional resources: Contact the **Special Education Director** for your school system.