



# Accessing Services for Autism Spectrum Disorder

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For Everyone

## KEY POINTS

- Many children with developmental delays or behavior concerns are not identified as early as possible.
- Getting services as early as possible can make a difference in the development of a child with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) or other developmental problems, such as helping them do well in social and educational settings.



## Early intervention services: Ages 0–3 years

Research shows that [early intervention services](#) can greatly improve a child's development and result in better outcomes. [\[1\]](#) [\[2\]](#) [\[3\]](#) [\[4\]](#) Early intervention services help children from birth to 3 years of age learn important skills. Services include therapy to help the child talk, walk, and interact with others. Therefore, it is important to talk to your child's doctor as soon as possible if you think your child has ASD or other developmental problem. However, **a referral from a physician is not necessary** to request an evaluation and, if needed, receive services. It is possible for a parent to self-refer.

### Why Act Early?

Act early on developmental concerns to make a real difference for your child and you! If you're concerned about your child's development, don't wait. You know your child best.

[CDC's Learn the Signs. Act Early. program](#)

If you think your child may have a developmental delay related or unrelated to ASD, they may be eligible for early intervention services. The [Individuals with Disabilities Education Act \(IDEA\)](#) [\[5\]](#) says that children under the age of 3 years who are at risk of having developmental delays may be eligible for services. These services are provided through an early intervention system in your state or territory. Through this system, you can ask for an evaluation.

In addition, treatment for specific symptoms, such as speech therapy for language delays, often does not need to wait for a formal ASD diagnosis. Note: While early intervention is extremely important, intervention at any age can be helpful.

### Find Your State or Territory's Early Intervention Program

Programs are [available in every state and territory](#). These publicly funded programs provide services for free or at reduced cost for any child who is eligible.

[U.S. State, Commonwealth & Territory Early Intervention Contacts](#)

## SEE ALSO:

[Learn more about early intervention](#) [\[6\]](#)

## Special education services: Ages 3–22 years

Children with disabilities, including ASD, may be eligible for services through the local education system beginning at age 3 years. Children with ASD often have an [Individualized Education Program](#) (IEP) or a [504 plan](#). Eligible children can begin to receive services prior to formally starting school, even if the child has not been diagnosed with ASD.

### "Child Find" evaluation

If you are concerned about your child, contact your local public school system. Even if your child is not yet old enough for kindergarten or is not enrolled in a public school, you can call your local elementary school or board of education and ask to speak with someone who can help you have your child evaluated. This is sometimes called a ["Child Find" evaluation](#).

#### Don't Wait. Act Early!

You do not need to wait for a doctor's referral or a medical diagnosis to get a free evaluation of your child's development. For more details, call the Early Childhood Technical Assistance (ECTA) Center at (919) 962-2001, or visit the ECTA [website](#).

[Learn more about the evaluation process](#)



Early intervention services and supports are available to babies and young children with developmental delays and disabilities and their families.

#### SOURCES

##### CONTENT SOURCE:

[National Center on Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities](#)

#### REFERENCES

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