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### Early Childhood Intervention and Early Childhood Special Education Guide

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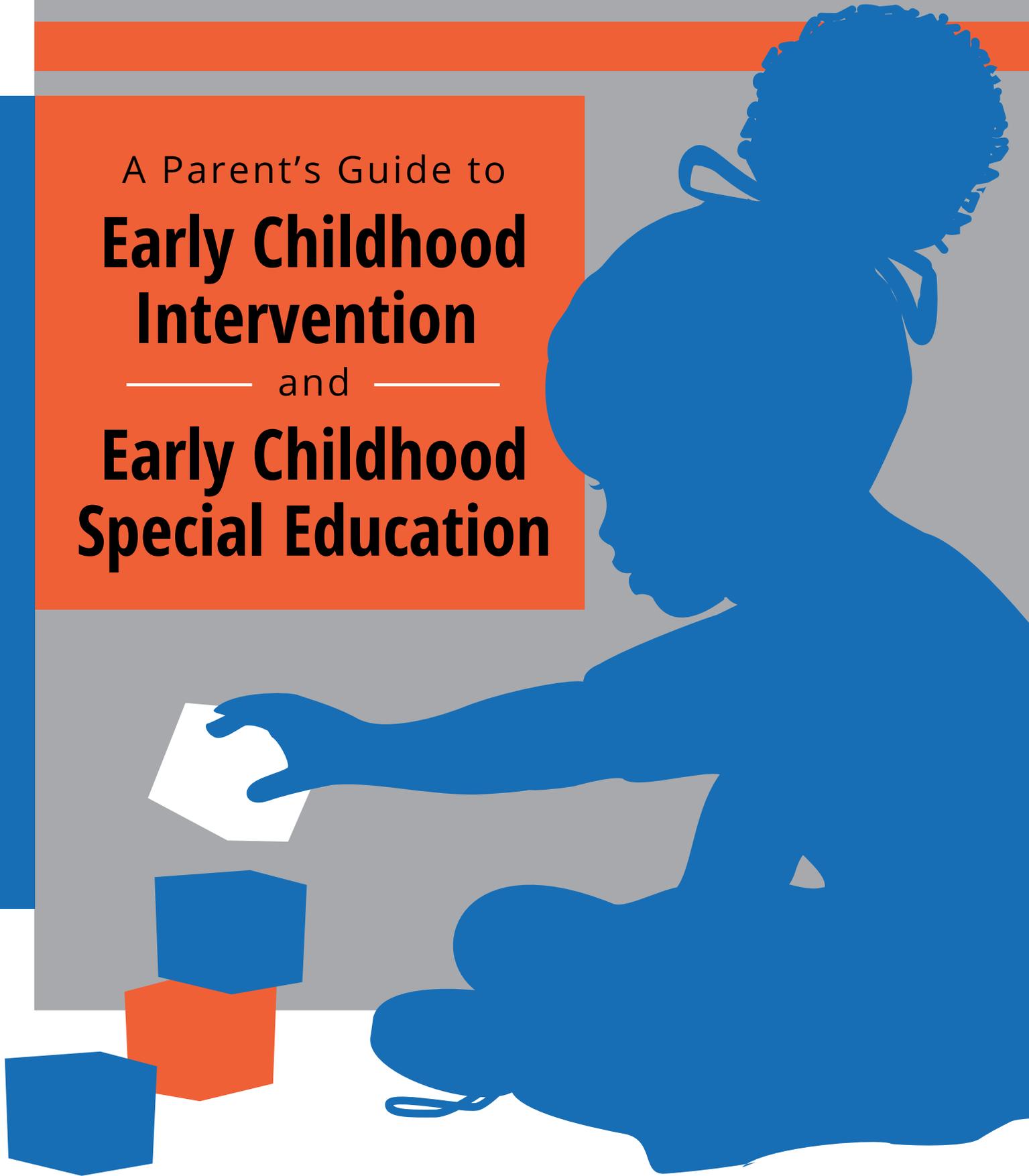
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A Parent's Guide to

# Early Childhood Intervention

— and —

# Early Childhood Special Education



# What is ECI?



**Early Childhood Intervention (ECI)** is a statewide program in the [Texas Health and Human Services Commission](#) that serves both children and their families from birth up to age 3. Children with developmental disabilities, delays or medical diagnoses may be eligible for ECI services.



**It is important for families to know that a medical diagnosis or a doctor's referral is not needed to access ECI services. Anyone involved with the child – family members, caregivers, teachers, doctors, or friends – may make a referral.**

## ECI Eligibility

**To be eligible for ECI services, a child must:**

- a. have a medically diagnosed condition that is likely to cause a developmental delay
- b. be deaf or hard of hearing or have a visual impairment
- c. have a developmental delay of at least 25 percent in one or more of the following areas of development - social-emotional, self-help, communication, motor functions, or cognitive skills. A delay in expressive language must be 33 percent or more.

## Individualized Family Services Plan (IFSP)

ECI programs develop an Individualized Family Services Plan (IFSP) for children who qualify for services. The IFSP addresses the unique needs of both the child and the family.

## ECI Services

The initial services to identify a child's strengths and weaknesses are provided by ECI at no cost to families. If a child qualifies for services through ECI, families may be asked to share a portion of the cost, called Family Cost Share, and the amount that families pay is based on a sliding scale.

## Sensory Impairments

In Texas, children who are deaf or hard of hearing (DHH), have a visual impairment (VI), or are deafblind (DB) are entitled to a free appropriate public education (FAPE) from birth. Therefore, the ECI and the local education agency (LEA) coordinate services in the area where your child resides.

## Who to Contact at ECI

You can search for the ECI program in your area by using the [ECI Program Search Tool](#).

# What is ECSE?

**Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE)** services are for children three through five years of age. These services are provided through local school districts and charter schools. Children with disabilities who qualify for ECSE services can receive a FAPE under the federal law called the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). This law states that children should be taught in the least restrictive environment (LRE) that will best meet their individual needs. Early childhood teachers and other professionals provide services in a variety of settings such as child-care, preschool, Head Start, pre-kindergarten, kindergarten, and other early childhood settings.

## ECSE Eligibility

A child must be evaluated and meet one of the 13 disability areas identified in the IDEA to receive ECSE services. Also, the disability must indicate an educational need for school-based services. After an evaluation is completed, the admission, review, and dismissal (ARD) committee will determine whether the child qualifies as a child with a disability and the child's educational needs.

Texas uses the following list of [disability categories](#) to determine if a student (aged 3-21) is eligible for special education and related services:



**Under IDEA, younger students may be eligible for special education and related services under Non-Categorical Early Childhood (NCEC).**

It is often difficult to identify very young children with a disability. With early intervention and appropriate services, children may not need special education when they reach first grade. The NCEC category allows preschoolers to benefit from special education and related services without being labeled with a specific disability. In Texas, a child between the ages of 3-5 may be eligible for services as NCEC if he or she has been identified as having one of the following:



- Intellectual Disability
- Emotional Disturbance
- Specific Learning Disability
- Autism

## Individualized Education Program (IEP)

IEP may be the most important acronym you learn when your child is referred to special education. The school provides an IEP for all students receiving special education services. The IEP is different from an IFSP because it is designed to address the student's disability-related needs instead of the entire family's needs. The IEP is based on a written plan designed specifically for your child. The IEP is created by a group of people who are referred to as the ARD committee. You are an essential member of your child's ARD committee, and you play a big part in creating your child's IEP.

## What Parents Need to Know

The IEP is the centerpiece of the federal legislation called the IDEA. Disability Rights Texas and the Arc of Texas created a [manual](#) for parents that explains the IDEA's major requirements in simple language. Another resource you should be familiar with is the [Parent's Guide to the Admission, Review, and Dismissal Process](#). The IEP should begin to prepare your child for [life beyond school](#). Every step you take and every IEP you sign should have your child's adult life in mind. Think of the IEP as a contract between you and the school. It is your role as a parent to participate in developing your child's IEP and asking questions to ensure you understand all aspects of the IEP.

## Who to Contact about ECSE

Your ECI provider will initiate contact with your local school district. If your child is not receiving ECI services or if you need additional information, you can contact the Child Find representative at your local school district or the ECSE representative at the Regional Education Service Center (ESC) that serves your zip code.

## Transition Conference



The transition conference is a meeting between parents, ECI programs, and school districts to begin moving from one program to another. ECI must obtain your written consent before initiating contact with the LEA and sharing your child's information. If you decline, the process stops. ECI will contact the school district where your child lives to share information and schedule a transition conference if you give consent. This meeting will be held at least 90 days before a child receiving ECI services turns 3.

The entire transition process must be completed by the child's third birthday, including the evaluation and eligibility determination by the ARD committee and the development and implementation of the IEP.



## Who attends the transition conference?

- Parents/guardians of the child
- Family members, advocates or others as requested by the parent(s)
- ECI Service Coordinator
- Evaluation personnel
- Person providing services, as appropriate
- LEA representative



## Where can the conference be held?

- Family's home
- ECI provider's location
- Location within the LEA
- Other mutually agreed upon location

## What happens at the conference?

### Members will:

- Discuss the rights of the parents/guardians to keep consistency.
- Explain the referral process, steps, and timelines for a school-based evaluation.
- Discuss the rights of the parents/guardians.
- Discuss the rights of the parents/guardians to keep consistency.
- Answer any questions the parents/guardians may have.
- Discuss potential placement options if the child is determined eligible for ESCE services.

### Questions to Ask at the Transition Conference

- What are the differences between ECI and school-based services?
- How will our child's eligibility be determined?
- If my child qualifies for services, what are the various ways that the school may provide services?
- If my child qualifies for services, is it possible to visit a program or classroom?
- How can we best share our child's unique strengths and needs with the evaluation team?
- What are the next steps?

## The Evaluation Process



### Consent

The LEA must notify the parent and obtain signed consent before evaluating a child. The notice and consent must be provided and explained in a language that the parents understand. It must include the evaluation process and all areas the school plans to test. Parents must also be given a copy of the procedural safeguards that explain the parents' and child's rights throughout the evaluation process.



### Evaluation

When the child has received services for at least 90 days before his or her third birthday, and the ECI program notifies the LEA, the full and individual initial evaluation (FIIE), the ARD committee meeting and the IEP must be developed and implemented by your child's third birthday. The first evaluation that occurs as a result of referral to special education is called the initial evaluation. This evaluation assesses a child in all areas of suspected disability and lays the groundwork for the ARD committee to determine the child's eligibility for services. The initial evaluation also sets the first baseline for goals and monitoring of progress moving forward.



### ARD Committee

The ARD committee develops and adopts an IEP at least annually. Parents, the student when appropriate, school professionals, and others, when needed, serve on the committee. The ARD committee determines the start date of the IEP. If the child's birthday occurs during the summer, services will begin by the first day of school or earlier, as determined by the IEP. The IEP focuses on the educational needs of the child.



### Eligibility and IEP Development

The ARD committee will meet to determine eligibility based on the results of the FIEE. If the child is determined to be eligible for special education, the ARD committee will develop an IEP. The IEP describes the specific services and supports a student needs. It is a written plan that guides the specialized aspects of the student's instructional day and school experience. This plan includes ensuring the student is educated with the non-disabled peers to the maximum extent appropriate.

## ECSE Continuum of Services

Some people believe that ECSE is a place where preschoolers with disabilities are taught together. However, special education and related services can be provided in a variety of settings. This [continuum of services](#) link provides more information.

## What are the ECSE Options?

There is a continuum of placements where children with disabilities ages 3-5 may receive ECSE services. These services can be delivered through programs available through public and charter school early childhood programs, collaboration with Head Start programs, and community preschools. Placement does not refer to the specific site where the services will be delivered. The ARD committee determines the educational placement based on the child's IEP.



The LEA must provide ECSE services in the LRE based on the child's individual needs. In other words, children with disabilities should be served in the same setting as students without disabilities. It is often appropriate for special education services to be delivered in a regular preschool classroom. Children have the advantage of same-age peers for language and behavior models and the opportunity to develop friendships. When considering placement for ECSE, be sure to explore options that would offer your child a more inclusive educational setting to the greatest extent appropriate.

## ECI/ECSE Tips for Parents

- For an example of how to organize your child's IEP binder, [watch this video](#).
- Always ask questions and make sure you understand the process and recommendations for your child.
- Engage in pretend play activities with your child that mimic school.
- Visit the new teacher or classroom before the first day. Ask to take a picture of the teacher to take home to help your child become familiar and ease the transition.
- Read books to your child about their first day of school. [The Kissing Hand](#) by Audrey Penn and [Don't Go](#) by Jane Breskin Zalben are popular selections.
- Share information about your child's interests, likes and dislikes with the new teacher and therapists so that they can get to know your child. Explore the video and samples of How to Make a One Page Profile for Your Child [here](#).
- Ask if your child can take a small favorite toy or a photo of your family to school on the first day to provide security and ease the transition.

## Resources

[Special Education Acronyms](#)

[Texas Health and Human Services Commission \(HHSC\)](#)

[Beyond ECI: Next Steps for Your Child](#)

[Early Childhood Intervention Parent Handbook](#)

[ECI Information for Families](#)

[Early Childhood Intervention Developmental Checklist](#)

[SpedTEX-Special Education Information Center](#)

[TEA Early Childhood Special Education Information](#)

[Student-Centered Transitions Network](#)

[Inclusion in Texas - Early Childhood Special Education](#)

[Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center](#)

[Family Guide to At-Home Learning](#)

[Improving Literacy for Parents & Families](#)

[Family Guide to Assistive Technology & Transition Planning](#)

[Parenting A Child with Special Needs](#)

[Building Self-Determination Skills for Parents](#)

[Texas Project First](#)



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