



NAVIGATING EARLY EDUCATION TRANSITIONS IN MASSACHUSETTS

How care teams and parent leaders can promote a child’s successful transition from early intervention to special education

In Massachusetts, infants and toddlers (0-3) who are at risk for a developmental delay may qualify for **Early Intervention (EI)** services. In-home EI Specialists develop and follow an **Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP)** that is designed to address the unique social, behavioral, and skill-based needs of the child. At age three, all children enrolled in EI are reassessed to determine whether they qualify for services through an **Individualized Education Program (IEP)** or a **504 Plan** when they go to school (PreK-12). Use this tool to help families problem-solve during this high-stakes transition!

COMMON QUESTIONS		INFORMATION CARE TEAMS CAN SHARE	
	“My child was born premature. They have received speech and occupational therapy services from EI Specialists since birth. They flourished with the extra support and have met all milestones. Why did they stop getting services on their third birthday? ”		They likely did not meet the heightened eligibility requirements that begin at age 3. Children aged 0-2 who are high risk for a developmental delay may qualify for an IFSP to support their development. Services often include child development, speech therapy, occupational therapy and family support. In MA, the Early Intervention Division at MDPH coordinates these services until the child’s 3rd birthday. As soon as they turn 3, the child must meet a higher standard of eligibility to qualify for continued services through an IEP or 504 Plan.
	“My 3-year-old with Autism aged out of EI, but they are not yet old enough to enter Kindergarten. How can they receive continued services so that they do not regress? ”		They may qualify for an early childhood special education IEP. A child aged 3-6 whose disability makes it difficult for them to participate in pre-school or daycare activities may qualify for Early Childhood Special Education. At age 3, EI can refer them to their local school district to be evaluated for ongoing needs. Services are outlined in a formal, written IEP and re-evaluated by a team annually. Services often include changes to the environment or curriculum, and sometimes include residential placement and transportation.



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COMMON QUESTIONS	INFORMATION CARE TEAMS CAN SHARE
<p> "I enrolled my 6-year-old with speech delays in Kindergarten. We were receiving in-home, wrap-around services three times a week before. How do I ensure they get appropriate educational support in Kindergarten?"</p>	<p> The transition from early childhood to school-based supports can be hard for families. The goal changes from helping the entire family support "developmental progress" at home to focusing on the child's "academic progress" at school. As a result, IEPs rarely include the same level of in-home, family-based support as IFSPs. This can be a difficult shift for families who previously felt supported by their child's service providers.</p>
<p> "When I enrolled my child who has ADHD in Kindergarten, the school created a 504 Plan that covers all of their needs. I heard that IEPs are better. Should I request that they have an IEP instead?"</p>	<p> It depends on whether the 504 Plan is already meeting the individual needs of the child. Most schools (public and private) are required to give people with disabilities equal access to their programs. 504 Plans sometimes require schools to make exceptions to their rules (extra time on a test or being allowed to carry an inhaler) and changes to their physical environment (access to a ramp or a specialized desk). Advocates working with children who do not have specific services, but need them, can support families by helping them request an evaluation for both an IEP and a 504 Plan. This will help them select the plan that is best able to meet all of their child's needs.</p>

KEY EDUCATION RESOURCES IN MA

- [MA Dept of Elementary & Secondary Education](#)
- [Ed Law Project](#)
- [Children's Law Center of MA](#)
- [Federation for Children with Special Needs](#)
- [MA Appleseed Center for Law & Justice](#)