

# EARLY CHILDHOOD TRANSITION GUIDEBOOK

What You Need to Know Before Your Child's Third Birthday



# Early Childhood Transition Guidebook

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## Your child's third birthday is

**an important day.** Aside from being a time to celebrate, it also marks the transition from Help Me Grow Infant and Toddler Intervention services to a preschool option. This transition changes the services available to you and how they are provided, as the focus moves from your child with a disability or developmental delay and your family to just your child.

This guidebook includes information on what transition is, how and when to plan for it, how to determine if your child is eligible for Help Me Grow Preschool Special Education services, how to implement the transition plan, and what to do if your child is not eligible for special education services. You'll find tips and facts that can help you plan for this important change in services before you light those three candles.



## What Transition Is

In Minnesota, the Infant and Toddler Intervention program covers children ages birth to 3 years who are eligible under Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Part C focuses on helping the family meet the developmental needs of their child, such as learning to sit up, walk, or talk. Typically provided in natural environments, such as the child's home or child-care setting, these services and outcomes for the child and family are defined in an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP).

From age 3 until a child enters kindergarten, Preschool Special Education serves children who are eligible under Part B, Section 619, of IDEA. The IFSP is replaced by an Individualized Education Program (IEP). The preschool IEP contains goals and objectives to address your child's unique needs as he or she learns the skills needed to prepare for kindergarten.

As your child makes this transition, services and supports change. Members of the team who helped you develop the outcomes specified in the IFSP may be different from those who will help to develop your child's IEP. Instead of working with a service coordinator, you will work with an IEP case manager.

## When and How to Plan for Transition

At least three months before your child's third birthday, your service coordinator will call one or more transition conferences to discuss your child's needs and preschool options. This conference could be combined with a regularly scheduled IFSP meeting.

You, your service coordinator, and other members of the IFSP team as appropriate will be included. Others may be invited as well. These people may include early childhood special education staff, representatives from community programs or services (such as a child-care provider, private preschool, or Head Start), and anyone else you would like to have there, such as grandparents, neighbors, or friends who know your child well.

Together, you and the team will address a variety of topics, such as the need for an evaluation to determine eligibility; goals, timelines, and team members' responsibilities; your hopes, dreams, and concerns about your child; services and programs available; and your special education legal rights. Based on those discussions, you'll develop a transition plan and prepare for the change in programs when your child turns 3.

### Questions You May Want to Ask at a Transition Meeting

- What are the differences between early intervention and preschool services?
- How will our child's eligibility be determined?
- What are the different ways services can be provided?
- Whom do we contact if we want to visit a program or classroom?
- How can we help professionals understand the unique strengths and needs of our child?
- When will we meet next?

## How to Determine Your Child's Eligibility

Not everyone who receives services through Infant and Toddler Intervention is eligible for Preschool Special Education services. To determine eligibility, your child will need to be evaluated.

The evaluation will address the following questions:

- Does your child have a developmental delay or disability?
- What are your child's present levels of performance?
- Does your child's developmental delay or

disability have an adverse effect on your child's ability to participate in and benefit from age-appropriate activities?

- Does your child need special education and related services?

To answer these questions, an evaluation will look at relevant cognitive, behavioral, physical, developmental, and other factors. The evaluation involves gathering information from many sources about your child's functioning and development in all areas of suspected developmental delay or disability.

You play an important role by sharing helpful information such as medical reports or the results of private evaluations. You are also the expert on your child and know what your child has learned already. You know what your child likes and dislikes and how your child likes to play. All of this information can be used to determine your child's educational and developmental needs.

The team, including you, will decide what assessments are needed to determine eligibility and plan for your child's education. Depending on your local school district, the professionals who have been providing services to your child and family may remain the same, or a whole new team of professionals may be involved in doing any needed evaluations and providing services if your child qualifies.

You will be given two documents before the evaluation takes place. One is a Prior Written Notice form, which includes all the actions the district proposes to take, including the areas to be assessed and the tests that will be used. The other is a Parent Consent/Objection form. The evaluation will begin after you sign this form.

If your child entered the Infant and Toddler Intervention program after the age of 2, the team may have done both Part C and Part B evaluations at that time. If your child qualified for Part B services then, it is not likely that further evaluation would be needed prior to writing the IEP. If your child was not eligible at that time, the team will review progress and determine if your child is potentially eligible. If so, an evaluation plan will be written.

## How Evaluations Are Conducted

Your school district must have your informed, written consent to evaluate your child. Before you consent to the evaluation, you may wish to consider the following questions:

- What tests and other evaluation materials are being considered for my child and why?
- How will the information be used to plan my child's education?
- Will my child's disability interfere with obtaining valid tests scores in any area?
- How will my child's native language and culture be taken into consideration during testing?
- What will be done to help my child feel comfortable during the testing session?
- What kind of information will I be asked to contribute to the evaluation?

**Families know their child best and are an important part of the team.**

After you sign the consent form, your child's individualized evaluation will be conducted by a team of professionals at your home, child-care setting, school district, or other location. The purpose of the evaluation process is to help members of your child's IEP team paint a complete picture of your child. You may be asked to share information through an interview or as part of a questionnaire. The questions may be about your child's birth and medical history, developmental milestones and progress, and home and family environments.

PACER encourages you to ask questions about the process at any point. If there is anything you do not understand, talk to your service coordinator or call PACER Center.

When the process is complete, you will be given a copy of the evaluation report and an explanation of how your child does or doesn't qualify for early childhood special education services. If your child is eligible for services and you agree to receive them, the team will meet to write an IEP.

If you disagree with the evaluation results, you may have the right to obtain an independent educational evaluation (IEE) at school district expense. An IEE is conducted by qualified staff not employed by the school district. You can contact PACER Center for further information.

## Writing the IEP

When a child qualifies for Preschool Special Education and related services, the IEP team determines the appropriate services based on the results of your child's evaluation. That determination begins with one or more IEP meetings, which include the family, a special education teacher, administrative personnel, related service providers as appropriate, and others the family or school district may wish to invite.

## Preparing for the Meeting

As you prepare for the IEP meeting, you may want to consider the following questions:

- How is your child progressing?
- What is he or she doing or learning?
- What do you want your child to learn or be able to do?
- How does your child learn best (e.g., in a very small group, with lots of movement and exploration, with gestures and signs, etc.)?
- What services and supports are needed to help your child learn?

Your answers to these questions will help the team create an effective IEP. The IEP will include information from the evaluation about your child's strengths and needs. It will also include goals, describe services, and identify locations where your child will be educated.

## Writing Goals

Together, the IEP team, which includes you as the parent, will put specific goals into writing. These goals will be based on your child's strengths and needs that were identified in the evaluation.

As an IEP team member, you'll share information about your hopes for your child, your child's current activities, and what activities you would like your child to work on during the next year. The goals should fit into everyday routines and help your child become more independent in learning, living, and playing in different environments.

## Identifying What Services Will Be Provided, Where

Under federal law, your child's type of disability should not determine what kind of services he or she receives. Services should be determined individually and be based on the IEP team's consideration of your child's present levels of educational performance, abilities, and specific needs. The IEP team will consider what services are necessary to carry out the goals and objectives and to allow your child to benefit from the IEP.

Likewise, your child's type of disability should not determine where he or she receives services. In fact, federal law says that preschool children with disabilities should be educated in the same environments where children without disabilities are educated, to the maximum extent appropriate. The law, (known as the least restrictive environment (LRE)), applies even if placing the child in such an environment requires additional staff training, changes in surroundings or equipment, or specially chosen materials in order to help your child learn. Your child should be placed in a location that is as close to home as possible.

Decisions about where services will be provided occur at the IEP meeting, after the IEP goals have been written and LRE program options have been explored. When identifying specific locations where services will be provided, the IEP team members will consider:

- the goals and objectives

- all necessary related services (such as transportation, occupational therapy, physical therapy, or speech-language services)
- any needed supports, accommodations, or modifications
- the LRE in which the child can best meet the goals and objectives

## Determining When Services Will Be Provided

Most preschool services take place during the school year. Some children, however, may be eligible to receive services during the summer if doing so will help them maintain skills, prevent the loss of skills, or protect emerging skills.

The decision about whether these extended school year (ESY) services are appropriate will be made by you and your fellow IEP team members. If your child's birthday is during the summer, you and the IEP team will determine when your child's services will begin.

### IEP or IIIP?

If your child receives services from the school and at least one other public agency and you would like to continue the interagency approach the IFSP provided, you may want to request the use of the Individual Interagency Intervention Plan (IIIP\*) to coordinate your child's school and county plans.

The IIIP includes both school district and county services for which the child is eligible. It looks at the child's needs in all environments — home, school, and community. It may also consider services or information needed by the family in order to help the child develop and learn. This may be helpful for a child who could benefit from a consistent, coordinated effort across several environments.

The IIIP will combine the Individualized Education Program (IEP) and the county plan. All of the required parts of the IEP and the additional plan(s) will be addressed in the IIIP.

*\*All references to the IEP in this booklet include the IIIP.*

## Choosing a Preschool Program

Once you've written your child's IEP goals, you and the team are ready to look at some specific programs for your child. For some children, their day may include a combination of setting, such as:

### Child Care

- Child-care center
- Family child care

### Early Childhood Setting

- Public or private preschools
- Head Start centers
- Preschool classes offered by the public school system to eligible children ages 3 to 5
- Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE) classes
- Early childhood special education classrooms, if your child is eligible for preschool special education

As you consider these options, you may also want to consider a few additional questions:

- What are my hopes and dreams for my child?
- What does my child need now to grow and develop?
- Where do I want my child to play and learn with other children in age-appropriate settings?
- What information do I want to share with the new staff?

**Once you've narrowed the field,** your service coordinator or primary service provider can help you set up appointments to visit the potential program sites. You may wish to consider these questions when visiting and evaluating these options:

- Do the children appear happy? Are they actively involved with materials and each other?
- Does the program appear to match the way my child learns?
- How is communication between parents and staff encouraged?

- Does the program appear to complement my family's values and cultural traditions?
- Do program staff appear open to suggestions from families and others?
- How are families involved?
- What is the ratio of adults to children in the program?
- Is the travel time to the program reasonable for my child and family?
- How would my child be transported to the new program?
- What are the program hours? Are they reasonable for my child and family?
- How will special education services be provided?
- How will this program help my child get ready for kindergarten?

**Once you've chosen a program for your child,** you may want to ask:

- When can I meet the staff before my child receives services?
- What supplies will my child need?
- Does the staff understand medication that may be needed and all medical information necessary to care safely for my child's health concerns?
- How are food and snacks handled?
- How will my child's toileting needs be handled?
- Does the staff understand the times when my child needs special help?
- What activities are available for families?
- When can we visit the setting and tour the facility?
- When can we do a trial run on the bus if needed?
- If my child will be attending a community-based program or child-care center, how will special education staff and program staff communicate?
- How will staff communicate with me? Are they open to using a daily communication notebook?
- What is my child expected to learn this year?
- What precautions are taken to ensure my child's safety?



## Next Steps

After a proposed IEP is written, you will receive a copy to review, along with a Prior Written Notice form and a Parent Consent/Objection form. If you disagree with the IEP team's proposed action and do not consent to initial placement, check "no," then sign and return the form to begin the process of resolving your disagreement. (For more information on this process, you can contact PACER Center).

If you do consent in writing, it's time to put the plan into action. This is an exciting time of new beginnings for your child and your family.

## Preparing Your Team, Family, and Child for the Changes

As with anything new, many questions will arise and decisions will need to be made. It's important for you and other members of your IEP team to discuss these issues together, share information, and make decisions that are in the best interests of your child. As you talk together, you will think of many creative ways to help your child enjoy the step ahead. You might, for example, decide to make a trial visit to the new classroom, practice riding the bus, or allow your child to bring a familiar toy from home.

The next step is to prepare your family and child for the new teachers, children, schedules, routines, classroom activities, and expectations. To help make the transition easier, you may want to try these tips:

- Plan ahead. Allow enough time to make decisions.
- Talk with other families about what the process was like for them.
- Learn how to advocate for your child.
- Make sure your child's medical, educational, and assessment records are up to date.

Remember to include your child in the preparations. Knowing what to expect can help any child feel more confident going into a new situation. You might want to consider these steps:

- Talk with your child about the new setting in a positive way. Acknowledge any fears your child may express and talk them through.
- If possible, take pictures of the new setting and any staff that might be working with your child. Create a simple storybook to help prepare for the first day at the new setting.
- If your child has not spent much time in small groups, try to provide some opportunities, such as a story hour at your local library.
- If possible, plan a visit to the new setting prior to your child's first day.
- Shop for a new backpack and save it for the first day. Make the first day of school special and take a picture of your child as he or she leaves home to go to preschool.
- If possible, try to meet with other families whose children are already attending the new setting.
- Encourage your child to communicate with others and ask for help when needed.

### Parents Need to Know

As you leave the Infant and Toddler Intervention program, you will be asked to complete a family outcomes survey. There is no personally identifiable information on the survey, so your responses are anonymous. The information is important because it will be used to improve programs and services at both the local and state levels.

## What to Do if Your Child Is Not Eligible for Preschool Special Education Services

If the team determines that your child does not qualify for special education services and you disagree, you can request an independent educational evaluation. These steps are outlined in a document called Special Education Procedural Safeguards, which will be given to you at your transition planning meeting. You also can ask team members to recommend community-based programs, services, or activities for you and your child.

If you continue to have concerns about your child's development, you may participate in early childhood preschool screening through your school district. Preschool screening is required for all children before they enter kindergarten, but your child can be screened as early as age 3 ½. If issues are identified, your child may be referred back to Preschool Special Education for a new evaluation.

You may also want to ask your service coordinator for information on other resources. These may include programs such as Head Start, library story hours and activities, and other community opportunities.

## The Journey Continues

Whether or not your child continues to receive special education services, you will find that being involved in your child's education as he or she grows and learns will help your child be more successful. There are many professionals along the way who can help you understand your child's needs and assist you as you help your child learn. These people include early childhood professionals, medical staff, and other service providers. In addition, parents of children with similar disabilities or special needs can prove to be an invaluable resource to you. They can all provide useful information and support to you as you help your child continue the journey of learning.

## Additional Resources

A Guide for Minnesota Parents to the Individualized Education Program (IEP), a PACER Center publication

Parents Can Be The Key, a PACER Center Publication

Disability Specific Organizations. Call PACER for a Resource List of Disability Organizations or visit the PACER Center website, [PACER.org](http://PACER.org).



# Transition Checklist

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The following checklist can help you keep track of activities and progress as you go through the transition process.

## **For all children currently receiving Infant and Toddler Intervention services:**

- My child will soon be 3 years old, and my transition planning meeting is scheduled or has already been held.
- My child's transition plan includes activities, timelines, and names of people responsible for carrying out the plan.
- If my child is not eligible for Help Me Grow Preschool Special Education services from the school district, my service coordinator and I have discussed other options.
- I have received a copy of the procedural safeguards. I know that if I do not understand them or have questions, I can contact my service coordinator.
- I know I have a right to agree or disagree with what the school proposes.
- I have visited potential program sites for my child.

## **For children who are being evaluated for Preschool Special Education services:**

- I have received a copy of the proposed evaluation plan and have signed and returned the Parent Consent/Objection form.
- All needed evaluations have been completed, and I agree with the results.
- Eligibility for special education services has been determined.
- The IEP conference has been held, and the IEP has been developed. Goals and related services (if necessary) have been determined.
- Placement for my child has been determined.
- I have received a copy of the proposed IEP, signed that I agreed or disagreed, and returned the Parent Consent/Objection form.
- If I disagree, a meeting has been set up to resolve my disagreement.
- If needed, transportation has been arranged.
- I have met and talked with my child's new teacher and service providers. The teacher knows that my child has an IEP and is familiar with it.

## Glossary

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**Adaptive Development** – a child’s current level of self-care skills, such as dressing, eating, and using the toilet

**Assistive Technology (AT) Device** – any item, piece of equipment, or product that is used to increase, maintain, or improve the functional capabilities of a child with a disability in any life activity. The device may be acquired commercially off the shelf, modified, or customized

**Assistive Technology (AT) Service** – any service that directly assists a parent, professional, or child with a disability in the selection, acquisition, or use of an AT device

**Eligibility** – the criteria used to determine if a child qualifies for early intervention or special education and related services

**Evaluation** – the process used to determine eligibility

**Extended School Year (ESY)** – special education and related services provided when school is not typically in session

**Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)** – a right guaranteed to children with disabilities who qualify for special education and related services. IDEA states that these services must be provided by the school district at no cost to parents

**Individualized Education Program (IEP)** – a written education program to meet the individual special education and related service needs of a child with a disability

**Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP)** – a written plan that helps the family meet the developmental needs of their infant or toddler

**Individual Interagency Intervention Plan (IIIP)** – a planning process used when a child receives special education services from a school district and at least one additional public agency

**Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)** – the requirement that children with disabilities are to be educated with children without disabilities to the maximum extent appropriate

**Local Educational Agency (LEA)** – the local school district

**Mediation** – a free, voluntary process available to parents or guardians and the school to settle differences of opinion if they cannot agree on the evaluation, the eligibility determination, the placement, or the provision of a free appropriate public education for the child. Both parties participate in drafting and approving the agreement

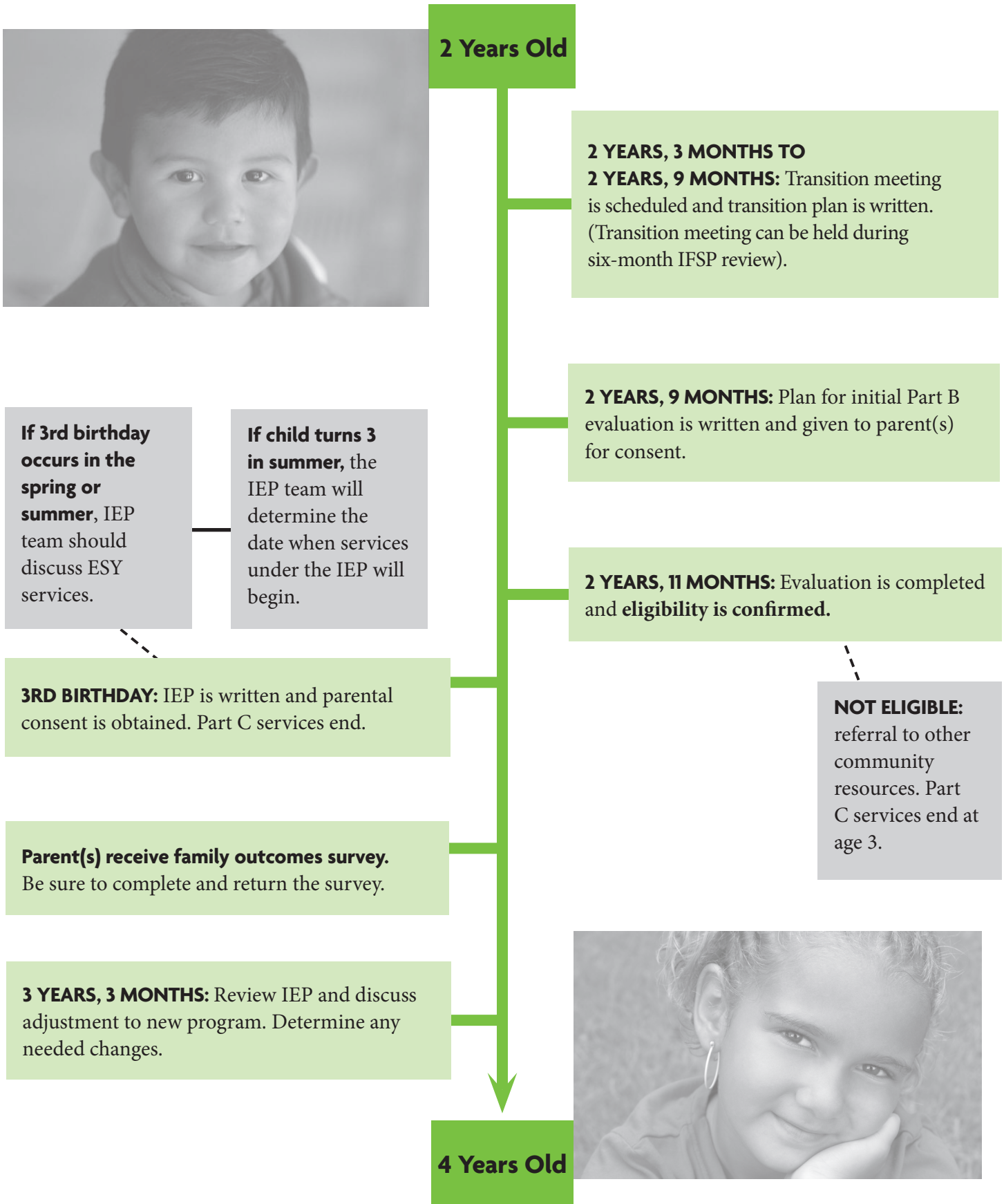
**Parental Consent** – the voluntary written agreement from parents or guardians that is required before the school initially evaluates or serves the child in special education

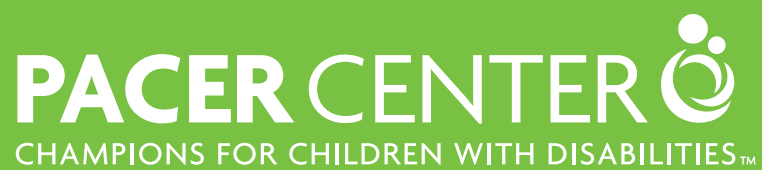
**Prior Written Notice** – a written document the school district must provide to parents or guardians if it proposes to or refuses to evaluate, reevaluate, or place the child in special education. Prior written notice must be provided at least 14 calendar days before the school district takes the proposed action

**Procedural Safeguards** – all special education rights that the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act guarantees to children with disabilities and their families

**Related Services** – Any specially designed services that enable a child to benefit from special education instruction. Examples include assistive technology, transportation, and occupational, physical, or speech therapy

# Transition Timeline





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