

5 TIPS for the Special Education Referral Process

TIP 1

What kind of assessments should be included in the assessment plan? The answer is assessment in **“all areas of suspected disability.”** Because your child is or may be on the autism spectrum, this needs to be taken into account in the assessment plan. This includes areas of assessing functioning in areas including as communication/language, socialization, play, behavior, and sensory. The assessment plan can also include other areas where you see your child is having difficulty, such as cognitive/learning, self-help, adaptive, motor skills, etc.

Tip 2

In the referral letter, you may wish to request specialized autism-related testing like the ADOS (Autism Diagnostic Observation Scale) or the ADI-R (Autism Diagnostic Interview- Revised). These standardized assessments can serve as a baseline of your child’s needs and functioning as he or she starts their educational program. The ADOS and ADI-R can also help to clear up any diagnostic confusion, for example if you think that the school district may “doubt” that your child is on the autism spectrum. It is up to the school district whether they have personnel that can complete this type of specific testing

TIP 3

You might be asked to sign a **“release for information”** so that the school district can speak with *and* access records from services providers, your child’s doctor, or other agencies. Your cooperation with exchange of information helps the process. One option is to sign the release, which is good for one year.

Another option is to sign the release to allow the district to speak with the providers, but not give open access to written records. Instead you can provide copies of specific records upon request. It depends how comfortable you are with the school district having unlimited access to all records and information in your child’s files.

TIP 4

If your child is undergoing assessment the school district at the same time as he or she is being evaluated by a doctor or by an agency such as the regional center, communicate this to everyone involved! You want to avoid duplication of testing, for different reasons. It is helpful when the different “entities” can share findings and results to give a fuller picture of your child. If you have outside assessments showing a diagnosis of autism, this can be a particularly important to share.

TIP 5: Assessment plan checklist

Be sure you know the answers to the key questions shown below. If not, ask the psychologist or another expert, either before you sign agreement with the assessment plan, or before the assessments begin.

- Do you have a thorough understanding of the areas in which your child is being tested?
- Do you understand how the tests or evaluations will be done?
- Does the assessment plan address all areas of your child suspected disability? (Is it *comprehensive?*).
- Did you share important records and information with the school district such as medical reports, independent psychological assessment, a diagnosis, etc.?
- Does your assessment plan note any outside evaluations you may have?
- Will the assessments be given in your child's primary functional language?
- Do the assessments take into account the nature of your child's disability, for example that your child cannot speak to answer a question?