

EVALUATION AND ASSESSMENT

Referral and Identification Process for Children Suspected of Having an Autism Spectrum Disorder

Identification of young children suspected of having an autism spectrum disorder often begins when family members, caregivers, or professionals who know the child suspect a delay in communication or related area of development. Pediatricians can provide families of young children with referral information for the Howard County Infants and Toddlers Program for children under the age of three and the Child Find Program for children of preschool age. All children who are referred will receive a hearing screening at the Howard County Diagnostic Center unless one has recently been completed.

In Howard County, the single point of entry for referrals for children under age three is the Office of Early Intervention Services at 410-313-7017. Demographic information is gathered during the initial phone call as well as information about the parent concerns. The parent is sent a welcome letter, an Ages and Stages developmental questionnaire and a Developmental History questionnaire to complete. The referral information is sent to a service coordinator at a Regional Early Childhood Center (RECC) housed in an elementary school near the family's home. The service coordinator contacts the family within five workdays to make an appointment to meet the child and family for an intake visit. This appointment typically takes place at the family's home but may also be scheduled at a childcare location or other convenient location for the family. During this visit, the service coordinator provides information about the Infants and Toddlers Program to the family, obtains written permission to conduct evaluation and assessment, and reviews the completed questionnaires. A multidisciplinary team of professionals will review the questionnaires and other observations conducted during the intake visit. Parents may attend this meeting. More in-depth evaluations and assessments are planned for children who show evidence of delays that may meet eligibility requirements. Children not suspected of significant delays may be placed on a track and monitor service.

For children over the age of three, the single point of entry for referrals is the Child Find Program at 410-313-7046. Initial demographic information is gathered, as well as information about parent concerns. The parent is sent a packet to complete, including the Ages and Stages developmental questionnaire. Receipt of this packet serves as the written referral to the Individual Educational Program (IEP) team. Observations may be scheduled, as needed, and other medical and developmental records may be requested. An IEP team meeting is scheduled with the family. The IEP team determines if the child may have a disability and be in need of special education services. Information is sent to the child's assigned Regional Early Childhood Center (RECC). The RECC team contacts the parent and arranges a mutually agreeable time to begin the evaluations. Multiple evaluation sessions may be scheduled. The evaluation sessions may take place in the RECC, the home, or a childcare setting. Parental consent will be obtained at the first evaluation session. The parent will take an active role in the sessions.

Evaluation and Assessment

Evaluation and assessment of a young child is a comprehensive process involving extensive parent interview, observations of the child across environments, and administration of developmental tests. The Maryland Autism Task Force Report, Service Delivery Recommendations for Young Children with Autism, states that the assessment should:

- Detail the child's strengths and areas of need.
- Establish the child's health and developmental patterns, and profile family resources and needs within the community context.
- Determine areas in which additional information is needed.
- Establish the foundation for development of an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) or Individualized Education Program (IEP) that meets the needs of the child and family.

In addition to the parents, the evaluation and assessment team may include the following members:

- Early childhood special education teacher
- Speech and language pathologist
- Psychologist
- Occupational therapist
- Physical therapist

The team will develop a collaborative report of evaluation and assessment findings. Parents are encouraged to share this report with their pediatrician.

Evaluation and Assessment Tools for Young Children

The Ages and Stages Questionnaire is sent to all families of age at the time of referral. Professionals may also use screening instruments such as the Denver II or the Early Language Milestones – 2 to gather information about the child's development.

Ages and Stages Questionnaires (ASQ), Second Edition
Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co., P.O. Box 10624, Baltimore, MD 21285-0624

Denver II
Denver Developmental Materials, Inc., P.O. Box 371075, Denver, CO 80237-5075

Early Language Milestone-2 (ELM-2)
Pro-Ed, 8700 Shoal Creek Blvd., Austin, TX 78757

Professionals select additional tests and developmental checklists to gain more indepth information in various developmental areas. The following checklists and assessment instruments are used by the Howard County Infants and Toddlers and Child Find Programs:

Hawaii Early Learning Profile (HELP) Checklist
VORT Corporation, P.O. Box 60132, Palo Alto, CA 94306
Early Learning Accomplishment Profile (ELAP)
Kaplan School Supply, 888 Seventh Ave., New York, NT 10106
Learning Accomplishment Profile- Diagnostic (LAP-D)
Kaplan School Supply, 888 Seventh Ave., New York, NT 10106

The following instruments may be used if autism is suspected:

Autism Diagnostic Observation Schedule
Western Psychological Services, 12031 Wilshire Blvd., Los Angeles, CA
90025-1251

Autism Screening Instrument and Educational Planning, Second Edition
(ASIEP-2)

Pro Ed, 8700 Shoal Creek Blvd., Austin, TX 78757

Checklist for Autism in Toddlers (CHAT)

Baron-Cohen et al., The British Journal of Psychiatry (1996) pp. 158-163

Childhood Autism Rating Scale (CARS)

Western Psychological Services, 12031 Wilshire Blvd., Los Angeles, CA
90025-1251

Communication Assessment Instruments

Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test-Revised (PPVT-R)

The Psychological Corporation, 555 Academic Ct., San Antonio, TX
78204-2498

Preschool Language Scale-3 (PLS-3)

The Psychological Corporation, 555 Academic Ct., San Antonio, TX
78204-2498

Measure of Cognitive Skills and Adaptive Behavior

Bayley's Scales of Infant Development II (BSID-II)

The Psychological Corporation, 555 Academic Ct., San Antonio, TX
78204-2498

Stanford-Binet Intelligence Scale 4th Edition (SBFE)

The Riverside Publishing Co., 425 Spring Lake Dr., Itasca, IL 60143-2079

Weschler Preschool and Primary Scale of Intelligence-Revised (WPPSI-R)

The Psychological Corporation, 555 Academic Ct., San Antonio, TX
78204-2498

Vineland Adaptive Behavior Scales

American Guidance Services, Inc. Publisher's Building, Circle Pines, MO
55014

Eligibility for Children Under the Age of Three

The child must display a developmental delay as defined by one of the following eligibility categories to be eligible for services through the Howard County Infants and Toddlers Program:

- 25 percent delay, as measured by appropriate diagnostic instruments and procedures, in one or more of the following developmental areas:
 - Cognitive development
 - Physical development, including vision and hearing
 - Communication development
 - Social or emotional development
 - Adaptive development
- Atypical development or behavior, which is demonstrated by abnormal quality of performance and function in one or more of the above specified developmental areas, interfering with current development and is likely to result in a subsequent delay (even when diagnostic instruments or procedures do not document a 25 percent delay)
- Diagnosed physical or mental condition that has a high probability of resulting in developmental delay, with examples of these conditions including chromosomal abnormalities, genetic or congenital disorders, severe sensory impairments, inborn errors of metabolism, disorders reflecting disturbance of the development of the nervous system, congenital infections, disorders secondary to exposure to toxic substances including fetal alcohol syndrome, and severe attachment disorders (COMAR 13A.13.01.02)

Eligibility for Children of Preschool Age

The child must meet criteria for one of fifteen federally defined disability categories, including the developmental delay categories listed above. If the child meets the eligibility requirements for the disability of autism, the team states that information and supports the decision using the evaluation report. For a child under the age of five, the family and team may determine that the disability category of developmental delay best describes the child's development at this time.

Definitions of the IDEA disability categories may be found in another section of this document.

Outside Assessments

Parents who have had evaluations and assessments completed by other agencies are encouraged to share those reports with the evaluation team.