

[My Child is Struggling in School. What Should I Do?](#)

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Guest Blog from Amy Eisner, MA, Educational Advocate

Dear Parents,

So you have a child who is struggling, and you want to know what to do. First let's identify a few key factors. If your child is from ages Birth - three your state has a program called "Birth to three". This service is free and your child will be helped by this agency. If you cannot find it, ask your local school, or your local Town Hall. If your child is between ages 3 and 5 your child will additionally receive free services from this agency too. It is frequently called a "Head Start Program". You will also have what is called a "transition meeting", as you enter your public school for kindergarten. If you were getting these services from a Head Start program, your child should **not** be exited from Special Education without exit testing. In other words, these services should follow you into you public school. The label of "Developmental Delay" it is used for all children requiring Special Education/Related services for children ages 3-9 years old.

Get a loose-leaf notebook, and save every piece of documentation you are given from your school, or any place your child has been receiving services! Organize this book by dates, and used dividers to separate each school year. Be sure to keep this in a safe place. If you can narrow down the area in which your child seems to be having difficulties that would also be helpful. (Reading, Math, Behaviorally)? I cannot express the importance of saving your child's documentation! If you need to hire an advocate, they will need these papers, in order to get a sense of your child's history of academic and social functioning levels. If your child is already attending a local public school then you can write a small note to your school, requesting a complete copy of your child's cumulative files, including state mastery testing and any diagnostics that your LEA may have done. You are entitled to one free copy of your child's cumulative file, and it must be copied for you within 10 business days. As soon as you submit this letter, your school will know that you either have an advocate/attorney working for you. (I have never had a client wait for more than four days to have their records photocopied).

Where do you find an advocate/attorney? One of my favorite sites is: www.wrightslaw.com. Find your state under the yellow pages for children on their website, ask for references and make sure that you feel confident that this person will advocate in your child's best interest. Remember early intervention is key for success! Another great website to familiarize you with all of the special education acronyms is: www.help4specialeducation.com.

When do I need an advocate? Immediately! The first time you see a "needs improvement" or a "not mastered" on your report card in any content area, (Math Reading and Writing) get help for your child immediately! An advocate is a lot cheaper than an attorney, and is often just as good. Most attorneys do not know

curriculum, or have knowledge of the testing/diagnostics your school may use to determine eligibility. One of the most important things you can do is find a website that lists the endless acronyms of special education. It has a language of its very own. Additionally; beginning in third grade, your child will begin taking state mastery testing. Look at your child's score, and compare it with the school's average score. If your child is ten or more points below your schools average, in any content area, it is time to ask your school some serious questions!

EMPOWER YOURSELF WITH KNOWLEDGE. Special education law can be tricky, and if you are not a specialist don't go alone! A child can be referred to Special Education one of two ways: This will be either by a "teacher referral" or by a "parent referral". Since the majority of teachers have a "gag order" you need to assert yourself when advocating for your child. Get the name and level of whatever reading program your child is using. (Now you have a baseline and will be able to monitor for progress). Please do not wait for your school to tell you this crucial information, as they usually do not. As a parent who has a child with special needs, you will always be your child's best advocate, as you know them the best! The law "No Child Left Behind" enacted in 2001, has made it very easy to shuffle your child through school, whether they know the material or not! I recently attended a PPT for an eleventh grader who could not read "cat, hat, bat" words.

Respectfully yours,

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