

Getting Ready for

PRESCHOOL

What Parents of
Toddlers with
Disabilities Need
to Know





Research continues to
show that effective, appropriate
special education and
related services provided at
an early age by skilled
professionals can make
a lifetime of difference.

ASAH...SERVING THE PRIVATE SPECIAL EDUCATION COMMUNITY SINCE 1974.

ASAH is a not-for-profit organization of private schools and agencies in New Jersey which provide highly specialized services to more than 11,000 infants, children and young adults with disabilities. Founded in 1974, ASAH's members include more than 145 schools and agencies throughout the state.

ASAH works closely with its members and the New Jersey Department of Education to develop policy, promote effective educational practices, and foster productive collaborations between private schools, public school districts, families and communities. We advocate for legislative and regulatory changes that improve the quality of life for students with disabilities and their families.

ASAH believes parents are the best advocates for children with disabilities. Since our inception roughly 40 years ago, the association has worked to provide accurate information and meaningful support to help parents do what is best for their children.

This guide is intended to help parents of our youngest children – those in the preschool years – understand and access the high quality, effective services they need to make a lifetime of difference!

We are a resource for you. Whether you need support, information, referral or advocacy assistance, feel free to call us.

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Gerard Thiers". The signature is stylized and fluid, with a large initial "G" and "T".

Gerard Thiers,
Executive Director



ASAH's toll-free Parent Assistance Line (1-877-287-2724) helps parents understand their rights and responsibilities under federal and state special education laws, and provides information and referral to help them identify appropriate services for their child.

Our website: www.asah.org, has resources, videos, fact sheets and guides to help you.

BEGINNING AT AGE THREE, CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES may be eligible for special education services under federal law, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

Parents with toddlers who are facing the transition from home-based Early Intervention Services to preschool special education, as well as those who are new to special education all together, will have many questions. This guide is intended to answer common questions, and help parents understand their rights and options.

WHY? THE PRESCHOOL YEARS

The preschool years are very important. Research continues to show that effective, appropriate special education and related services provided by skilled professionals can make a lifetime of difference.



WHEN? AGE THREE

Under federal law, a child who is preschool disabled should receive special education and related services when he/she turns three.

WHO? YOUR CHILD STUDY TEAM

You will work with a team of educators from your local school district called the Child Study Team (CST). For most preschoolers, this team includes a psychologist, a teacher, a learning specialist, a social worker and a speech-language professional. This team will help determine if your child is eligible for special education, and, if he or she is eligible, will work with you to develop an Individualized Education Program (IEP) to meet your child's needs.



HOW? ASSESSMENT AND ELIGIBILITY

For children who have been in Early Intervention, the transition to special education will be coordinated by your Early Intervention provider. If your child does not yet receive services, but you suspect your child may have a disability, you should contact your local school district and ask to speak to the Director of Special Services. He or she can help you get the process started.

To be eligible for special education and related services, your child must have an educational need. Regardless of medical diagnosis, all children ages three through five who are eligible for services under IDEA are considered “Preschoolers with a Disability.” It is not until age five that a child is eligible based on a particular disability (i.e. autism, cognitive disability, etc.). This does not mean that all preschoolers need the same type of program, however. Services must be individualized to meet the needs of EACH child.



“ Just because a **program** is less **restrictive** than another does **NOT** make it more **appropriate.** ”

WHAT? THE IEP

Every child who is eligible for special education has an “Individualized Education Program,” or IEP. This document describes your child’s goals and objectives, and details the individualized services, supports and accommodations your child needs.

Services under IDEA must be “appropriate” to your child’s needs, and must provide “meaningful educational benefit.” And, they must be provided to you at no cost, and offered in the Least Restrictive Environment. These services might include specialized instruction, supports and modifications, and related services such as speech therapy, occupational therapy and physical therapy.



Under federal law, preschoolers must receive a minimum of 10 hours per week of services. This is a *minimum*, and many preschoolers need more than this. Parent education, training and support are important components of quality preschool programs. For some children, in-home services are an important part of the IEP.



WHERE? SELECTING A PLACEMENT

As part of the IEP process, you and your school district will decide not only *what* services your child needs, but *where* those services will be delivered. This is called “placement.” Placement should be determined only *after* the IEP is completed and the needs of the child have been spelled out.

School districts must offer a full range of placement options, including a private school (see box, page 7). The law requires the CST to consider these options in order of how restrictive they are. The closer the program is to your home, and the more it is like “regular preschool,” the less restrictive it is considered. Just because a program is less restrictive than another does NOT make it more appropriate.

DISAGREEMENTS

Sometimes, parents and school districts do not agree on eligibility, services or placement. If that occurs, you have the right to appeal. You also have the right to request an independent evaluation at no cost to you. ASAH can help you.



PLACEMENT OPTIONS

Programs Designed for Typical Preschoolers

Neighborhood preschool and nursery school programs (public and private early childhood programs, non-sectarian preschool programs and Head Start Programs) can be provided with or without supports and accommodations. These programs offer opportunities for integration with typically developing children who do not have disabilities. Often, however, they cannot provide specialized services.

Public Programs Designed Specifically for Preschoolers with Disabilities

Many local school districts operate a preschool disabled program within the district. In addition, public regional programs operate more intensive preschool disabled classes.

Private School Programs Designed Specifically for Preschoolers with Disabilities

New Jersey is home to hundreds of high quality, state-approved private special education

schools, many of which operate preschool programs. Services offered by these schools tend to be more intensive and comprehensive than non-specialized programs. While some private special education schools offer opportunities for learning along side typically developing children, most are 'self contained', meaning that the entire classroom, or in some cases, the entire school building, serves only children with disabilities.

Why consider a private specialized school?

These schools can often offer a high degree of expertise and specialization, intensive services and year round instruction and support. Many also offer more related services, family support and parent education than generic preschool programs. Most have been providing services to children with disabilities for decades and have a track record of success. Children are placed in private special education schools by your school district. Tuition and transportation are paid by the school district, never the parents.

DO YOU NEED HELP? INFORMATION? REFERRAL? ADVOCACY SUPPORT?

ASAH is a resource. Since its inception in 1974, ASAH has worked to provide accurate information and meaningful support to help parents do what is best for their children with disabilities.

ASAH offers several levels of support for families and educators who need help:

PARENT ASSISTANCE LINE — Call us toll free — Our trained advocates can answer questions, provide information and referral. 1-877-287-2724.

FREE IEP REVIEW — Meet with our advocates to discuss specific concerns and get your questions answered.

WORKSHOPS AND PROGRAMS — ASAH offers experts at no charge to speak at your child's school and parent support groups.

DIRECT IEP ASSISTANCE — Our trained advocates can provide one-to-one assistance to help you advocate for your child, and resolve disputes and disagreements in a way that preserves the important relationship you have with your school district.

REFERRAL TO LEGAL SUPPORTS — ASAH maintains a list of public interest law firms and private attorneys who specialize in special education law, and who can provide legal assistance, if needed.

Our website offers a wide range of tools and resources to help parents. Visit us on line at www.asah.org.



ASAH PRIVATE SCHOOLS WITH PRESCHOOL PROGRAMS

Allegro School, Inc.	Githens Center	P.G. Chambers School
Alpine Learning Group, Inc.	Hawkswood School	Phoenix Center
The Arc Kohler School	HollyDELL School	Princeton Child Development Institute
Arc of Essex County – Stepping Stones School	Horizon School	REED Academy
Bancroft School – Early Education Program	Institute for Educational Achievement	Rock Brook School
Calais School	Jardine Academy – Cranford Campus	School for Children with Hidden Intelligence (SCHI)
Celebrate the Children	JCC Therapeutic Nursery	SEARCH Day Program, Inc.
Cerebral Palsy League	Kingsway Learning Center - Haddonfield	Somerset Hills Learning Institute
Children's Center of Monmouth County	LADACIN Network (Lehmann and Schroth Schools)	St. John of God Community Services – Archbishop Damiano School
The Children's Institute	Lakeview School	Summit Speech School
The Children's Therapy Center	Larc School	Windsor Bergen Academy – The RISE Program
Concordia Learning Center at St. Joseph's School for the Blind	Learning Center for Exceptional Children, Inc.	Y.A.L.E. Schools
Durand Academy	The Matheny School	YCS – Sawtelle Learning Center – Kearny
Eden School	Mt. Carmel Guild Academy	YCS – Therapeutic Learning Center
EPIC (Educational Partnership for Instructing Children)	New Road School of Ocean	You & Me School
Felician School for Exceptional Children, Inc.	Northwest Essex Community Healthcare Network	
First Children	North Jersey Elks Developmental Disabilities Agency (NJEDDA)	
The Forum School		
Garden Academy		



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