



# OUR PROCESS

The information below details the Early Stages process.

1

## ***Referral To Early Stages***

Anyone can refer a child to Early Stages. We accept referrals for children ages 2 years 8 months to 5 years 10 months. To make a referral:

- Fill out the online form at [earlystagesdc.org](http://earlystagesdc.org) (the best way to refer)
- Email a completed referral form to [referral@earlystagesdc.org](mailto:referral@earlystagesdc.org)
- Call (202) 698-8037
- Fax a completed referral form to (202) 654-6079



DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA  
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## 2

### **Developmental Screening**

After receiving a referral, we contact you, the parent, for a short screening. We offer in-person, phone, and video call screening options.

During the screening, we use the Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ) to ask you questions about your child's development and medical history. We may ask to speak to your child's other caregivers, including doctors, teachers, and childcare providers. We may request certain documents, like medical records and evaluation reports.

We also give you resources about special education. These help you understand important terms and your rights in the process.

After the screening, we discuss the need for further evaluation.



## 3

### **Evaluation**

We may schedule an evaluation based on screening results. An evaluation determines if your child qualifies for special education services. The evaluation process begins only after we get your consent. Your consent is your written permission.


#### **THE EVALUATION TEAM MAY ASSESS:**

- **Communication (Speech and Language):** how your child speaks, understands, and uses language
- **Early Learning (Thinking, Problem-Solving, and Academic Skills):** how your child learns and uses information
- **Physical Development (Movement, Fine Motor Skills, and Sensory Processing):** how your child moves, sees, and hears; how your child uses the small muscles in their body; how your child uses their senses
- **Social-Emotional Development:** how your child relates with others and how their behavior affects their daily life

#### **THE EVALUATION MAY INCLUDE:**

- Interviews and questionnaires
- Hearing and vision screenings
- Assessments of skills, such as learning, speech, and movement
- Observation of your child
- Review of your child's medical, social, and family history

You are a valuable member of your child's evaluation team. We encourage you to ask questions and share concerns, goals, and information about your child.





## 4

### **Eligibility Meeting**

During the eligibility meeting, the team reviews your child's evaluation results. Together, we determine if your child qualifies for special education services. According to the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA), your child qualifies for services if they have an IDEA-defined disability that impacts their education.

If your child is eligible, they qualify for services, and the team develops an Individualized Education Program (IEP) during an IEP meeting.

If your child is not eligible, they do not qualify for services, and the process ends. You leave with valuable information about your child's development. We can answer questions about how to further support your child.

## 5

### **IEP Meeting (Individualized Education Program)**

An IEP is a written document that lists the special education services that your child needs to succeed in school.

IEP services can only begin after you give consent. You may choose not to provide consent or to take back consent at any time. You and your child's team decide when services start. If your child is younger than three, the IEP cannot begin until their third birthday.

Your child's school team reviews the IEP with you at least once a year.

#### **IEP SERVICES**

Special education services on an IEP include specialized instruction. Specialized instruction adapts the curriculum to your child's needs.

Services may also include specific related services. Related services support classroom instruction. For example, your child may receive speech-language services, occupational therapy, or behavior support services.

#### **SERVICES PLAN**

We can develop a services plan if you choose to enroll your child in a private or religious school. A services plan does not provide all services available on an IEP. It may not fully meet your child's needs. A DCPS case manager reviews the services plan with you at least once a year.



## 6

### **School Enrollment**

The Early Stages process ends with an offer to enroll at a DCPS school. We first confirm that your neighborhood school can implement your child's IEP. This is the school we offer if it has an available seat. If the neighborhood school is not an option, we offer the next closest school that can implement the IEP. We may also consider other factors like sibling preference and accessibility.

You must enroll your child in school to receive services. Early Stages can only offer enrollment with DCPS. If you enroll your child in a public charter school, you can transfer the IEP. If you enroll your child in a private or religious school, you can request a services plan instead.



#### **CANCELLATION POLICY**

Early Stages is required by law to follow strict evaluation timelines. Missed appointments impact our ability to serve families in a timely way. If you must cancel an appointment, please notify Early Stages as soon as possible. A cancellation with less than 24 hours' notice is considered a missed appointment. This may result in your child's case being closed.