



# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

## ***What is Early Stages?***

Early Stages is an evaluation center for children aged 2 years 8 months to 5 years 10 months. We identify developmental delays and disabilities in children. We provide evaluations for DC children who are not in school or who are homeschooled. We evaluate children living outside of DC if they attend a private school or child care center in DC. Early Stages is a program of DC Public Schools (DCPS). All our services are FREE.

## ***Where can I refer a child who is outside the Early Stages age range?***

Early Stages can only screen and evaluate children aged 2 years 8 months to 5 years 10 months. For children under 2 years 8 months, refer to Strong Start DC at [eip.osse.dc.gov](http://eip.osse.dc.gov). For children older than 5 years 10 months, contact the child's school. If you have any questions about where to refer, call or email Early Stages.

## ***Who can refer a child to Early Stages?***

Anyone can refer a child for a developmental screening or evaluation. Early Stages needs consent from the parent before beginning an evaluation. It is important to refer if you have any questions about how a child is playing, learning, or developing.

## ***How do I refer a child to Early Stages?***

To refer a child to Early Stages:

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



### ***What happens after a child is referred to Early Stages?***

Each child receives a developmental screening if they have not had a recent screening. Early Stages may ask a parent for consent to evaluate based on screening results. An evaluation then determines if a child qualifies for special education services. If a child qualifies, Early Stages develops an IEP (Individualized Education Program). We then offer them a seat in a DCPS classroom. The school provides IEP services once a child is enrolled.

### ***Can Early Stages evaluate a child who lives outside DC?***

Early Stages can evaluate a child who lives outside DC if they attend a private school or child care center in DC. A child cannot receive IEP services in DC if they do not live in DC. These children can receive IEP services at a public school where they live. They can receive a services plan in a private or religious school. A services plan does not provide the full range of services available on an IEP.

### ***Does Early Stages evaluate children enrolled in public charter schools?***

Early Stages cannot evaluate children enrolled in public charter schools. We can help transfer the referral to a child's school. Public charter schools evaluate their enrolled children.

### ***How is eligibility for special education services determined?***

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is a federal law. According to IDEA, a child is eligible for special education if they have an IDEA-defined disability that impacts their education.

### ***How does Early Stages determine where an eligible child receives IEP services?***

We first confirm that the neighborhood school can implement a 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.

### ***Does a child have to enroll at a DCPS school to receive IEP services?***

Children can receive IEP services from any public school (DCPS or charter). Early Stages can only offer a seat in a DCPS school. Public charter schools provide IEP services for their enrolled children.

### ***What if a child has/had an IEP or services plan from another state?***

Please include any existing special education records with a referral.

### ***What happens if a child is receiving services from Strong Start?***

Strong Start invites Early Stages to a transition meeting after a child reaches 2 years 6 months. This meeting explains next steps in the special education process.