

Child Find: What It Is and How It Works

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At a Glance

- Child Find is a legal requirement that schools find all children who have disabilities and who may be entitled to special education services.
- Child Find covers every child from birth through age 21.
- The school must evaluate any child that it knows or suspects may have a disability.

You may not have heard of the Child Find mandate. It's a legal requirement for schools to find children who have disabilities and need services. Identifying these kids is an important first step toward getting them the help they need to succeed in school.

Child Find is part of a federal law called the [Individuals with Disabilities Education Act \(IDEA\)](#). This law protects the rights of students with disabilities.

Who's covered by Child Find?

Children with disabilities from birth through age 21 are covered. This includes children who are being homeschooled or who are in [private school](#).

Child Find requires school districts to have a process for identifying and evaluating children who may need [special education](#) and [related services](#), such as counseling or [speech therapy](#). Even

infants and toddlers can be evaluated. They could then receive help for learning disabilities and developmental delays through the government's [early intervention](#) programs. These programs help parents find out if their young children are on track. Then, if needed, the programs can connect families with appropriate services early in the child's life.

Parents whose children don't attend public schools may not know what kind of help is available. Schools use various methods to reach those families. Outreach efforts can include local media campaigns, notices to parents and notices posted in public places.

Does Child Find mean the school has to agree to every request for an evaluation?

If the school knows or has reason to suspect your child has a disability, then by law (IDEA) it must agree to do an evaluation. For example, a child's teacher or parents may be concerned about a child's academic work and request an evaluation. By law, the school must seriously consider their request.

The school doesn't have to agree to *every* request for evaluation, though. If there's no reason to think your child has a disability that requires services, the school doesn't have to evaluate.

What if the school won't evaluate your child?

The Child Find mandate gives parents some power. If the school turns down a request for an evaluation, parents can seek a [due process hearing](#). This hearing gives parents and the school a chance to tell their side of the story to a trained, independent hearing officer. Teachers or outside professionals can explain what they know about the child. Parents may present evidence such as evaluation results and samples of their child's work.

In some cases, when the school fails to evaluate, the parents may have a claim for monetary damages.

The Child Find mandate gives schools an important legal responsibility. Understanding their responsibility can help you ensure that your child gets the services he needs.

Key Takeaways

- Every child from birth to age 21 is covered, including infants, toddlers and children who are homeschooled or in private school.
- Child Find does not require schools to agree to evaluate every child.
- If a school refuses to evaluate a child, parents may challenge that decision.