

How to Get a Free Evaluation

Three routes, and how to start each one. You do not need a doctor's referral.

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How old is your child?

Age	Where it goes	What it costs
Under 3	Early intervention, run by your state. No referral. You can call today.	Evaluation free everywhere. Services vary by state.
3 to 21	Your school district. Request in writing.	No cost for the evaluation.
Any age	Private evaluation, directly.	Varies. Insurance coverage differs.

The part most parents are never told

You do not need a doctor's referral. A parent can contact their state's early intervention program directly. It is free, there is no income requirement, and you do not need a diagnosis.

Under three, step by step

1. **Search "[your state] early intervention".** Every state runs a program under a different name.
2. **Call, or use the online referral form.** You are referring your own child. This is allowed and expected.
3. **Say what you have noticed.** Ordinary language is fine. You do not need a diagnosis or a medical opinion.
4. **They will arrange an evaluation,** usually at your home.
5. **If your child qualifies,** a plan is written with you and services are arranged.
6. **If they do not qualify,** ask what to watch for and when to come back.

There is a legal timeline once you make contact. If you are told there is a long wait before anyone can evaluate, ask what the timeline is, and ask for the answer in writing.

Three and over

Request it in writing. A line you can copy:

"I am requesting a full initial evaluation for my child under IDEA to determine eligibility for special education and related services."

- ☐ Date it and keep a copy.
- ☐ Describe what you have noticed, briefly and specifically.

- ☐ Ask for the district's response in writing.

Why writing matters: it starts the process formally; a conversation does not. **What happens next:** consent, evaluation, then a meeting to decide eligibility.

A district may offer classroom support first. Being asked to wait through a trial period does not remove your right to request an evaluation. A district that declines a request has to tell you so in writing and say why.

Timelines are set in federal regulation and a number of states set their own, so ask your district what applies where you live rather than relying on a single national figure. The fuller template is at drsensory.com/guides/school-evaluation-letter

Preparing, and what if they say no

What to bring

- ☐ Specific examples, with rough dates
- ☐ Video of what you are describing at home
- ☐ Reports from school or childcare
- ☐ What has changed, and over what period
- ☐ What you have already tried

If your child does not qualify

- ☐ Ask for the decision and the reasons in writing
- ☐ Ask what specifically would change the answer
- ☐ Ask about a 504 plan, which uses different criteria
- ☐ You may request an independent educational evaluation

Do not wait for a diagnosis. Services in both systems are based on assessed need, not on a label.

This guide explains a process and is not legal advice, medical advice, or a diagnosis. Rules and timelines vary by state; confirm what applies where you live. © 2026 DrSensory LLC · drsensory.com/guides/free-evaluation