



CALECSE

California Early Childhood
Special Education Network



**Funded by the California Department of Education (CDE),
Special Education Division**

Recognize, Refer, Support:
Child Find Essentials for Community-Based Early Learning Programs
August 19, 2026



CALECSE
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Special Education Network

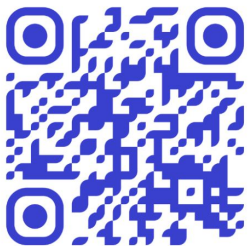


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California Early Childhood Special Education Network (CALECSE)

A CDE-funded technical assistance project supporting Local Education Agencies (LEAs), Special Education Local Plan Areas (SELPA), county offices of education (COEs), and agency partners through:

- Professional learning
- Technical assistance
- Evidence-based resources
- Cross-agency collaboration

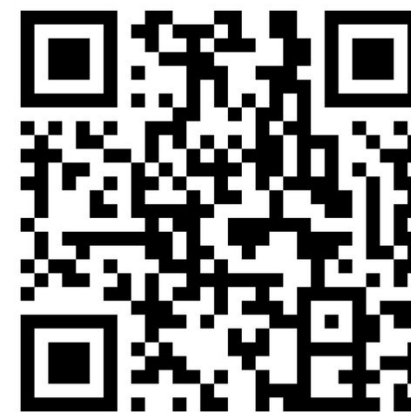
Mission

Strengthen early childhood systems to improve outcomes for young children with disabilities and their families.



Tiny Steps to Golden Futures Symposium Registration is Open

Join us October 20–21, 2026, at
the Hyatt Regency San Francisco
Airport in Burlingame, California,
for two days of exceptional
professional learning,
inspiration, and collaboration.



Learn more at the CalECSE website:
<https://www.calecse.org/symposium2026>

Today's Presenters

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Today's Agenda

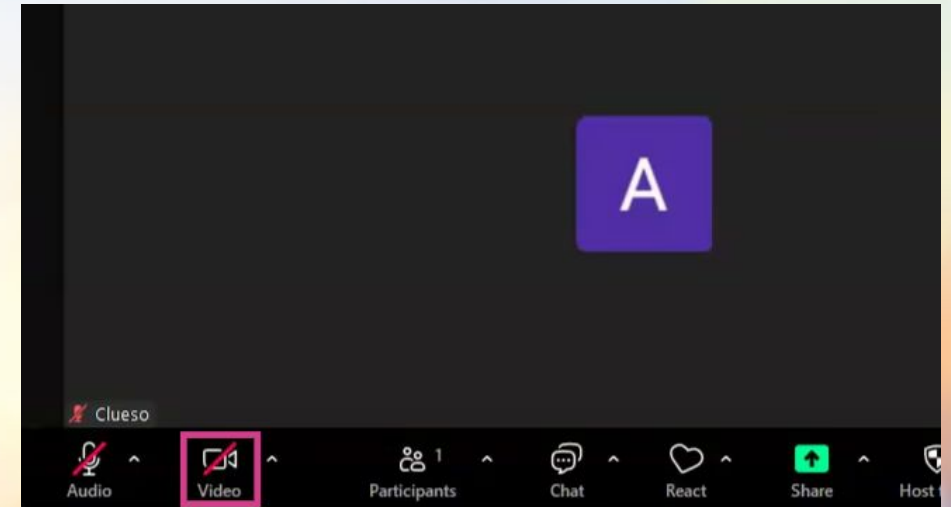
- Child Find Requirements
- Identifying Early Indicators of Possible Concern
- Developmental Screening Tools
- Making the Referral
- Case Study
- Resources



Grounding Activity: Just Like Me

Start with your cameras off.

Turn your camera on if the statement we read describes you or an experience you have had, keep your camera off if it does not.



Child Find Requirements

What is Child Find?



Child Find is a component of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

- States and Local Education Agencies (LEAs) must identify, locate, and evaluate children suspected of having disabilities.
- Community-based child care and early learning programs are important Child Find partners and are identified as primary referral sources for infants and toddlers under IDEA Part C.
- Referrals may be initiated by parents, educators, child care providers, health care providers, or others with knowledge of the child.

Sources: U.S. Department of Education. 2026.

<https://sites.ed.gov/idea/regs/b/b/300.111>

IDEA Section 303.303(c)

<https://sites.ed.gov/idea/regs/c/d/303.303/c>

Community-Based Early Learning Programs Critical to Child Find

This short video from the CalECSE highlights how community-based early childhood programs play a vital role in helping children and families access early intervention and special education support:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zoi9bGN6Wy8&t=15s>



Identifying Early Indicators of Possible Concern

Why Developmental Monitoring is Important



- Developmental disabilities are common.
- One in six children ages three through 17 has a developmental disability.
- According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), approximately one in 31 (3.2%) children in the United States were identified as having Autism.
- More than one in four U.S. children ages three through 17 have a mental, behavioral, or developmental disorder. (CDC, 2024)

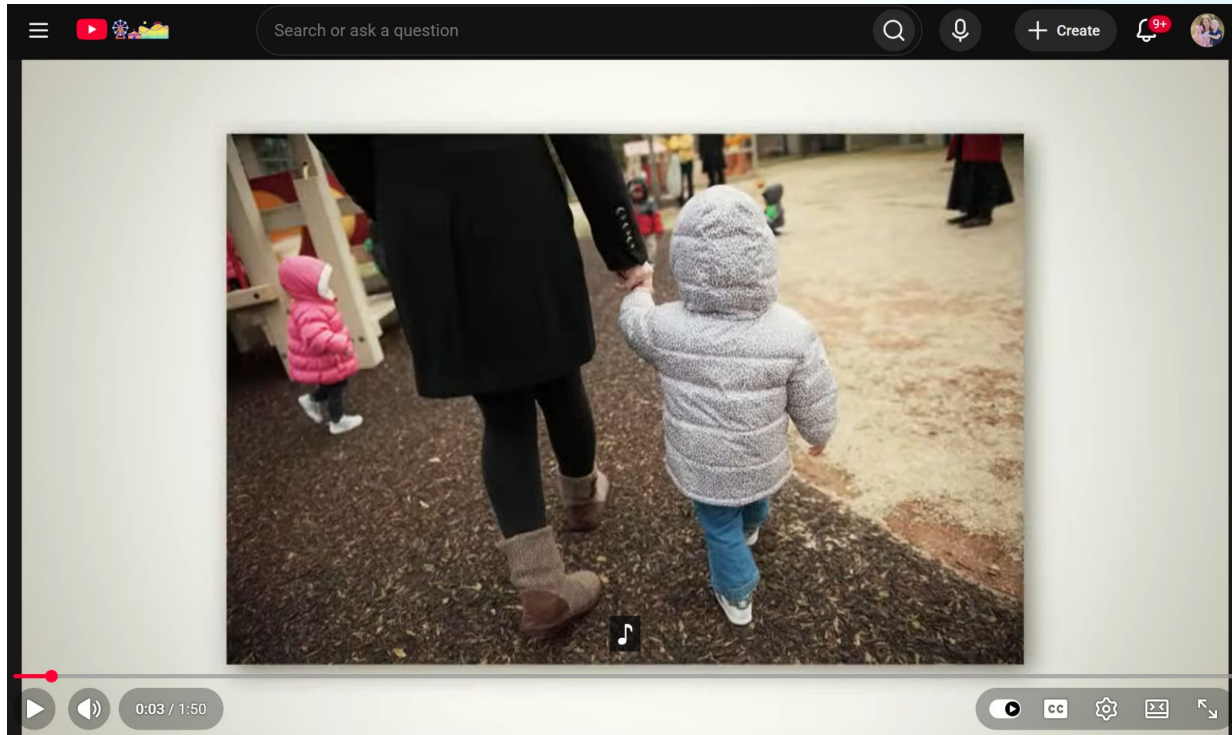
Sources: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. 2026.

<https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/watchmetraining/module1.html#photo-stage>

<https://www.cdc.gov/autism/data-research/>

https://www.cdc.gov/pcd/issues/2024/24_0142

You Play a Key Role



- This video from the CDC discusses how preschool teachers can help families by sharing their insights:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3jUTGSVTRJQ>
- Look for and note each child's developmental milestones
- Share what you have seen with parents
- Encourage parents to talk to their child's primary doctor if you or they have concerns

Developmental Milestones by Age Two

Play/Social-Emotional:

- Onlooker play moves into Parallel Play
- Notices when others are upset

Speech and Language:

- Combines two words (e.g., “More milk.”)
- Points to several body parts when named. Access video sample of this here: <https://youtu.be/HgORKBH2-uc>
- Begins to use nonverbal gestures besides pointing and waving (e.g., nodding, blowing kisses). Access video sample of this here: <https://youtu.be/5zrOdEddcT8>

Cognitive

- Holds something in one hand while using the other hand; for example, holding a container and taking the lid off



Source: CDC. 2025.; American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA). 2025.

Developmental Milestones by Age Three

Socio-Emotional/Play

- Notices other children and joins them in play
- Parallel play should be moving into associative play. Access video sample of this here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X3O7LI3NKq4&t=5s>

Speech and Language

- Talks in a conversation with at least two back-and-forth exchanges. Access video sample of this here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yryiHkVtFmY&t=2s>

- Says what action is happening in a picture or book when asked, like “running,” “eating,” or “playing.” Access video sample of this here: <https://youtu.be/hIMxvZ4K6vA>

Cognitive

- Draws a circle when you show them



Sources: CDC. 2025.

ASHA. 2025.

Developmental Milestones by Age Four

Social-Emotional/Play

- Pretends to be something else during play (teacher, superhero).
Access video sample of this here:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sLTgWGGBAqo>
- Asks to go play with children if none are around, like “Can I play with Alex?”
- Comforts others who are hurt or sad, like hugging a crying friend
- Cooperative play with peers

Language

- Says sentences with four or more words. Access video sample of this here: <https://youtu.be/3J8tGSlybC4>
- Talks about at least one thing that happened during their day, like “I played soccer.”
- Answers simple questions like “What is a coat for?” or “What is a crayon for?” Access video sample of this here:
https://youtu.be/is_ZipdZDnM



Sources: CDC. 2025.

ASHA. 2025.

Developmental Milestones by Age Five

Social-Emotional/Play

- Cooperative play with peers, including rule-following and turn-taking in games
- Sings, dances, or acts for you. Access sample video of this here: <https://youtu.be/05Xpy7N9I1M>

Language

- Keeps a conversation going with more than three back-and-forth exchanges. Access sample video of this here: <https://youtu.be/1qGgCOUu-cl>

Cognitive

- Count to 10
- Names some numbers between one and five when you point to them
- Writes some letters in their name
- Uses words about time, like “yesterday,” “tomorrow,” “morning,” or “night”: <https://youtu.be/h1m6TKwzWxs>



Sources: CDC. 2025.
ASHA. 2025.

How Do I Monitor a Child's Development?



Developmental Screening

A developmental screener is a brief, standardized tool used to identify whether a child's development is progressing as expected. Screeners help identify children who may benefit from additional evaluation or early intervention in areas such as communication, motor, cognitive, social-emotional, and adaptive development.

Examples of Developmental Screeners and Monitoring Resources

- Ages and Stages Questionnaires®, Third Edition (ASQ®-3)
- Ages and Stages Questionnaires®: Social-Emotional, Second Edition (ASQ®:SE-2)
- Developmental checklists
- Developmental domain checklists
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Milestone Tracker™
- Language Milestones for Children Who Are Deaf or Hard of Hearing (DHH)

Developmental Screening Tools

Center for Disease Control (CDC) Milestone Tracker

- Free application and printables
- Tracks developmental domains: speech and language, social-emotional, cognitive, motor
- The CDC Milestone Tracker can be accessed on their website:

<https://www.cdc.gov/act-early/about/index.html>

Help your child grow and thrive with CDC's free *Milestone Tracker* app.



[cdc.gov/MilestoneTracker](https://www.cdc.gov/MilestoneTracker)



DHH Language Milestones

Parent profile to track child's language growth

- Visual and auditory pathways
- Early vocabulary benchmarks
- Indicators requiring referrals
- The DHH Language

Milestones can be accessed on the CDE's website:

<https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/ss/dh/sb210langmilestones.asp>



CalECSE Developmental Milestone Tool

On CalECSE's website there is a two-page play-based assessment checklist featuring developmental milestones from the CDC and ASHA:

[https://www.calecse.org/uploads/blogs/files/1755552344_Play-Based%20Assessment%20Observed%20Skill%20Checklist%20Ages%20Two%20to%20Five%20\(2\).pdf](https://www.calecse.org/uploads/blogs/files/1755552344_Play-Based%20Assessment%20Observed%20Skill%20Checklist%20Ages%20Two%20to%20Five%20(2).pdf)

 **Play-Based Assessment Observed Skill Checklist:
Ages Two to Five**

Child's Name: _____ Assessor: _____
Child's Date of Birth: _____ Chronological Age: _____
Date & Time of Assessment: _____ Primary Language: _____

Directions: Check off skills observed during play-based assessment.

**By Age Two Years
Zero Months**

AGE 2

LANGUAGE/COMMUNICATION

- ☐ Uses two- to three-word phrases to communicate
- ☐ Follows single-step instructions
- ☐ Points to things or pictures when they are named
- ☐ Shows joint attention (looks at you, looks at item, looks back at you with social intent)
- ☐ Points to show you an item
- ☐ Engages in a social smile by directing it toward you

COGNITIVE

- ☐ Sorts shapes and colors
- ☐ Completes sentences and rhymes in familiar books

MOVEMENT/PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT

- ☐ Stands on tiptoe
- ☐ Kicks a ball
- ☐ Begins to run

**By Age Three Years
Zero Months**

AGE 3

SOCIAL/EMOTIONAL

- ☐ Joins in play

LANGUAGE/COMMUNICATION

- ☐ Engages in conversations with at least two back-and-forth exchanges
- ☐ Asks questions like "who," "what," "where," or "why"
- ☐ Says what action is happening in a picture or book (e.g., "running," "eating")
- ☐ Says their first name

COGNITIVE

- ☐ Draws a circle when shown how

MOVEMENT/PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT

- ☐ Strings items together, like large beads or macaroni



How Often Should I Monitor?



1. Developmental monitoring means looking at the child's development over time and keeping a record of milestones you see.
2. Print a copy of a checklist for every child at the start of the school year; every month, take time to update the checklist with the milestones they have reached.
3. Print blank checklists for each child's family and let them know you will be updating observations each month and encourage them to do the same at home.
4. Review the latest checklist at every parent-teacher conference as a way to share child's progress with parents/caregivers.

Sharing Concerns With Parents



- Start with the child's strengths and positive progress.
- Discuss specific behavioral observations (describe what you are seeing using neutral language and provide examples).
- Use your developmental milestones guides as references.
- Make it a discussion. Give the family time to listen, reflect, and provide input
- Have the discussion sooner, rather than later.
- It is never your role to make or suggest a diagnosis.
- Provide next steps such as consulting with their pediatrician or reaching out to their regional center or school district.

Keys to Remember



- Parents see you as a trusted partner in their child's care.
- When a child is having difficulty meeting developmental milestones, it is important to share that information with parents.
- Not all cultures place the same emphasis on particular developmental milestones.
- Follow your program's policies.

Making the Referral

Understanding Referral Pathways to Access Support for Children



Early Intervention

Birth through Under Age Three (Part C)

- Most referrals for evaluations to determine eligibility for early intervention services go through local Regional Centers. Local Regional Centers can be identified by county at the Department of Developmental Services website:
<https://www.dds.ca.gov/rc/lookup-rs-by-county/>.
- Referrals for evaluations to determine eligibility for early intervention services for infants and toddlers with a solely visual, hearing, or severe orthopedic impairments, and any combination thereof, go through the local educational agency (LEA). Families can contact the district or county office of education to confirm which LEA serves their home address.

Special Education

Ages Three to 21 (Part B)

- Referrals are made to the child's school district of residence—the public school district responsible for serving the child based on the family's home address.
- Families can determine their district by checking their local school district website or calling their local school district's enrollment office.

Parent and Caregiver Initiates the Formal Referral Process



Birth Through Under Age Three

Early Start (Early Intervention)

Families may call or submit a referral to their local regional center to request an evaluation for their child.

- Within 45 calendar days of the referral, the regional center must obtain parental consent and complete the evaluation and assessment to determine eligibility and identify the child's needs.
- If the child is eligible, an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) is developed within the 45-day timeline.
- For infants and toddlers with solely visual, hearing, or severe orthopedic impairments, or any combination thereof, referrals are made to the LEA.

Age Three and Older

Special Education

Families must submit a written request for evaluation to their local school district.

- The school district is obligated to respond to a written request for assessment within 15 calendar days (with the exception of school breaks longer than two weeks) with an assessment plan for parent/guardian to consent to.
- Once parent/guardian consent is given an assessment of the child and determine of eligibility via an initial eligibility meeting within 60 days of the (excluding school breaks over two weeks).
- If the child is eligible, an Individualized Education Program (IEP) is developed.

Procedural Safeguards



Procedural Safeguards (sometimes called **Parents' Rights**) are legal rights provided under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and California law, including the California Education Code, to protect the rights of children with disabilities and their families and ensure parents can meaningfully participate in the early intervention and special education process.

- Parents must receive a written copy of the Procedural Safeguards at the time of the initial referral.
- Parents must receive Prior Written Notice (PWN) from the agency before proposing or refusing to initiate the identification, evaluation, or placement of a child.
- The High Quality IEPs and Pathways to Partnership state initiatives developed the document, **Procedural Safeguards: A Companion Guide for Parents**, to help families understand the rights outlined in the Procedural Safeguards Notice. The guide is available at: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Js5ZRT7tYZMym2RC8N2Lc1wWrDnkDfid/view>

Sources: U.S. Department of Education. 2026.

<https://sites.ed.gov/idea/statute-chapter-33/subchapter-ii/1415>

California Education Code, sections 56500–56509, Procedural Safeguards. 2026.

https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/codes_displayText.xhtml?article=&chapter=5.&division=4.&lawCode=EDC&part=30.&title=2

Consent and Confidentiality



- Written parental consent is required before an initial evaluation and before the initial provision of early intervention or special education services.
- Educational records are confidential and protected under IDEA and the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA).
- Providers should obtain written parent consent before sharing personally identifiable information or records with another agency.

Sources: United States Department of Education. 2026.

<https://sites.ed.gov/idea/regs/b/d/300.300>

<https://sites.ed.gov/idea/regs/b/f>

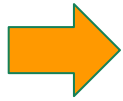
<https://sites.ed.gov/idea/regs/b/f/300.622>

<https://sites.ed.gov/idea/regs/b/e/300.506>

<https://sites.ed.gov/idea/regs/b/e>

<https://sites.ed.gov/idea/regs/b/a>

Referral and Eligibility Determination Process: Part C



Age Zero through Under Three

Parent/Guardian makes referral to the Local Regional Center or LEA for Soley Low-Incidence Disability



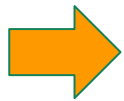
An Evaluation for Eligibility Takes Place within 45 Days of Referral Date



Outcomes: A Meeting is Held with Parent/Guardian

- If a child is eligible, an IFSP is developed and services and supports begin if family consents.
- If a child is not eligible, recommendations, resources, and community supports may be provided.

Referral and Eligibility Determination Process: Part B



Ages Three to 21

Parent/Guardian refers to residence school district

- Request for special education evaluation must be made in writing
- Child does not need to be enrolled in school district at time of request
- School district must respond to written request within 15 days (with exception school breaks over two weeks)



An Evaluation for Eligibility Within 60 days of Consent

- 60 days does not include school breaks over two weeks.



Outcomes: An Eligibility Meeting is Held with Parent/Guardian

- If child is eligible, an IEP is developed and services and supports begin if family consents. Services are provided by the school district.
- If the child is not eligible, recommendations, resources, and community supports may be provided.

What to Expect After A Referral is Made



After parent consent is provided:

- Assessments and services are free and voluntary
- Assessments include interviews, rating scales, observations, and play-based activities

How early child care providers can help:

- Provide contact information for Regional Centers and school districts
- Help families understand next steps
- Encourage timely follow-through
- Collaborate with evaluators if invited
- Share written observations and complete any forms presented by evaluators
- Connect families with their county's Family Empowerment Center (FEC) or Family Resource Center (FRC), which can provide no-cost support to parents/guardians navigating both the IFSP and IEP processes. Contact information for each county's FEC can be found on the Seeds of Partnership website at:
https://www.seedsofpartnership.org/FEC_contacts.html

Case Study



Practice the Child Find Process

Child: Mateo

- Age: two years three months
- Enrolled in your general education preschool program
- Main concerns: nonverbal; communicates through gestures and leading adults by the hand
- Provider Observations:
 - understands simple directions
 - limited eye contact
 - prefers parallel play
 - sensitive to loud noises
 - strong fine motor skills
 - enjoys routines
- Family Input: communicates mainly through pointing or sounds; occasional frustration when not understood
- Context: Parents curious about speech development; no prior evaluations

Key Steps

- **screening**
- **family engagement**
- **documentation**
- **referral pathways**
- **follow-up planning**



Resources

Resources

- The CDC developmental roadmap brochure can be accessed here:
https://www.cdc.gov/act-early/media/pdfs/CDC-LTSAE-Brochure-Eng_FNL2-2021-508.pdf
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). “Developmental Milestones.”
<https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/actearly/milestones/index.html>
- American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA). “Communication Milestones.” <https://www.asha.org/public/developmental-milestones>
- Local Regional Centers can be identified by county at the Department of Developmental Services website:
<https://www.dds.ca.gov/rc/lookup-rs-by-county/>

Questions



CALECSE
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Communities of Practice: Join the Conversation

Discuss and Discover.
Share and Strengthen.
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Find CalECSE's full schedule of CoPs at:
<https://www.calecse.org/news-resources/communities-of-practice>



Join a regional, job-alike, or statewide Community of Practice (CoP) to share ideas, solve problems of practice, exchange successful strategies and tools, and strengthen early childhood special education across California.

If you are interested in joining a CoP, please complete this form by scanning the QR code below or filling out this google form

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSf2mTRqNCNqmfQp_1UzwO7hQvJqJUrlgGkoG0-qqUBXMYqAwA/viewform?usp=preview



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Please help us improve our practice and complete the zoom survey following this session.



After doing so, you will be entered into a raffle to win a free registration to **CaIECSE's 5th Annual Symposium** to be held at Paradise Point in San Diego October 19–20, 2027.



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Thank you—we appreciate you taking time to be here with us today. Please find our full line-up of no-cost trainings at:

<https://www.calecse.org/news-resources/calecse-training-calendar>



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