



September
22, 2025

What is Early Childhood Special Education?

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AGENDA

What is Early Start?

What is Preschool?

What is Transitional Kindergarten?

Services and Programs

Transitions

Resources





WHAT IS EARLY START?

Babies and Toddlers



Birth to 36 months of age

ELIGIBILITY FOR EARLY START



Infants and toddlers from birth to age 36 months may be eligible for early intervention services through Early Start if, through documented evaluation and assessment, they meet one of the criteria listed below:

- Have a developmental delay of at least 33% in one or more areas of cognitive, communication, social or emotional, adaptive, or physical and motor development including vision and hearing OR
- Have an established risk condition of known etiology, with a high probability of resulting in delayed development OR
- Be considered at high risk of having a substantial developmental disability due to a combination of biomedical risk factors of which are diagnosed by qualified personnel

California Government Code 95014(a)
California Code of Regulations: Title 17, Section 52022



EARLY START

Provided by a Regional Center or Local Education Agency (LEA)

- North Bay Regional Center (NBRC)
- SELPA
- SRCS Early Start DHH Program

Focus is on the child in the home with their family (natural environment)



Plan is called an Individual Family Service Plan (IFSP)



WHAT IS PRESCHOOL?

Preschoolers

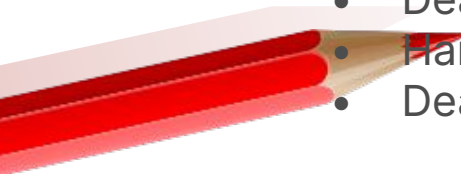


3 to 5 years of age

ELIGIBILITY FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION



For eligible preschoolers demonstrating significant deficits in at least one of thirteen different categories (same as for students in Kindergarten and above)

- Autism
 - Specific Learning Disability
 - Intellectual Disability
 - Other Health Impairment
 - Speech or Language Impairment
 - Emotional Disability
 - Traumatic Brain Injury
 - Visual Impairment
 - Orthopedic Impairment
 - Deafness
 - Hard of Hearing
 - Deaf-Blindness
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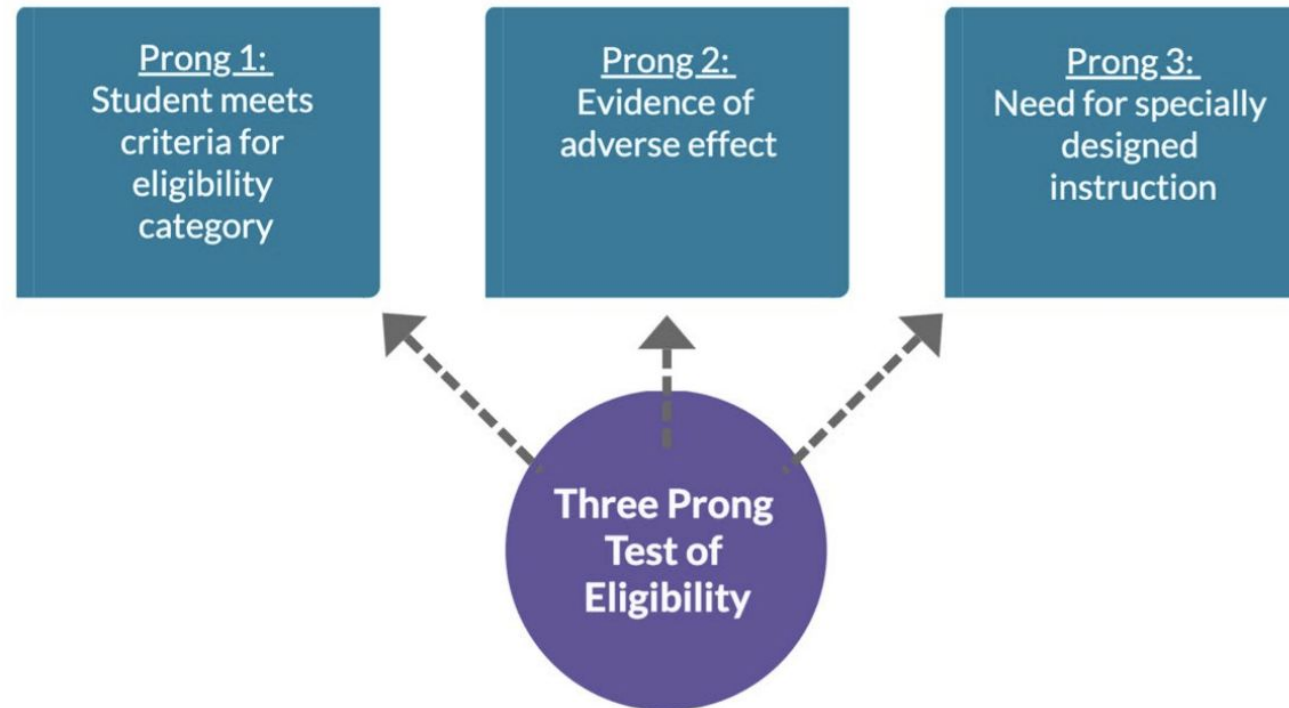
Fourteenth eligibility category of Established Medical Disability (for children up to age 5)

[Code of Federal Regulations \(IDEA\) 300.8](#)

ELIGIBILITY FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION

Does the pupil demonstrate difficulty to such an extent that it adversely affects his/her educational performance?

Does the student require special education services to meet his/her educational needs?



SPED FOR PRESCHOOL



An early education program for individuals with exceptional needs between the ages of three and five, inclusive, shall include specially designed services to meet the unique needs of preschool children and their families. To meet this purpose, the program focus is on the young child and his or her family and shall include both individual and small group services which shall be available in a variety of typical age-appropriate environments for young children, including the home, and shall include opportunities for active parent involvement.



California Education Code 56441.2


SPED FOR PRESCHOOL



Preschool Special Education services are designed to:

- (a) Significantly reduce the potential impact of any disabling conditions.
- (b) Produce substantial gains in physical development, cognitive development, language and speech development, psychosocial development, and self-help skills development.
- (c) Help prevent the development of secondary disabling conditions.
- (d) Reduce family stresses.
- (e) Reduce societal dependency and institutionalization.
- (f) Reduce the need for special class placement in special education programs once a child reaches school age.
- (g) Save substantial costs to society and our schools.

[California Education Code 56441](#)



WHAT IS TRANSITIONAL KINDERGARTEN?

Transitional Kindergartener



4 years of age

Age Eligibility & Choices

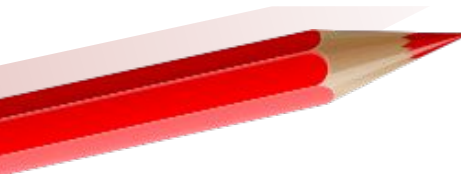


Phased expansion of Transitional Kindergarten (TK) started in 2022-2023 school year

Age eligibility for Transitional Kindergarten (TK):

- Any child turning 4 years of age by September 1st of that school year


Universal Pre-Kindergarten (UPK) Choices:

- 
- Child Care (Center-Based or Family Care)
 - Subsidized Care (CSPP, Head Start)
 - Private Preschool
 - Transitional Kindergarten

Guide to Universal PreKindergarten (UPK)

FINDING THE BEST EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM FOR YOUR 4-YEAR-OLD

UNIVERSAL PREKINDERGARTEN OPTIONS FOR A 4-YEAR-OLD

Setting Type	Definition	Age Requirements	Student-Teacher Ratios
Center-Based Care	Includes community-based and private preschool programs. Some programs may accept subsidized vouchers. Curriculum varies by program and may include specializations like language immersion, Montessori, nature-focused, or other.	Ages vary by program	Minimum of 1 adult to 12 children, but may vary by program
Family Child Care and Family, Friend or Neighbor Care	Licensed family child care is offered in a home-based setting. Family, friend, or neighbor care is provided in the child's or child care provider's home by a person who is a relative, friend, neighbor, or other license-exempt provider. Some providers may accept subsidized vouchers. Curriculum varies by provider. Families may choose this type of care for linguistic or cultural reasons, or for flexibility in scheduling, and transportation reasons.	Ages vary by provider	Minimum of 1 adult to 8 children, but may vary by program
Subsidized Care	Includes CA State Preschool Program (CSPP) and Head Start. Programs offer part-and full-day services for eligible families. Families may qualify based on income, disability or for other reasons. Provides a curriculum that is developmentally, culturally, and linguistically appropriate for the children served.	Children ages 2 years and 9 months through 5 years	CSPP: 1 adult to 8 children Head Start: 1 adult to 10 children
Transitional Kindergarten (TK)*	First year of a two-year kindergarten experience that is developmentally informed, based on the California Preschool Learning Foundations, and uses a modified kindergarten curriculum.	 <p>2023-24: Turns 5 between Sept. 2 and Apr. 2 2024-25: Turns 5 between Sept. 2 and June 2 2025-26: Turns 4 by Sept. 1</p>	2023-24: 1 adult to 12 children 2024-25: 1 adult to 12 children 2025-26: 1 adult to 10 children



The chart below gives information on the preschool programs that may be available in your community.

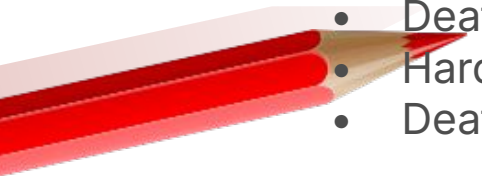
Name	California State Preschool Program (CSPP)	Head Start	Private Pay Preschool	Transitional Kindergarten (TK)
Age	3- and 4-year-olds	3- and 4-year-olds	3- and 4-year-olds	4-year-olds, depending on birthday
What it is	Preschool program funded by the State of California	Federally-funded preschool program	Preschool and childcare programs	Part of the public elementary school system that takes place the year before Kindergarten
Schedules	Part-day and full-day options determined by providers	Part-day and full-day options determined by providers	Part-day and full-day options determined by individual preschool providers	Part-day and full-day options determined by providers
Cost	Free or low-cost, depending on families' income and other factors	Free, depending on families' income and other factors	Fees determined by individual preschool providers. Some families may be eligible for state subsidized vouchers to cover the costs of care.	Free to everyone, regardless of income

ELIGIBILITY FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION



For eligible TKers and Kindergarteners demonstrating significant deficits in at least one of thirteen different categories:

- Autism
- Specific Learning Disability
- Intellectual Disability
- Other Health Impairment
- Speech or Language Impairment
- Emotional Disability
- Traumatic Brain Injury
- Visual Impairment
- Orthopedic Impairment
- Deafness
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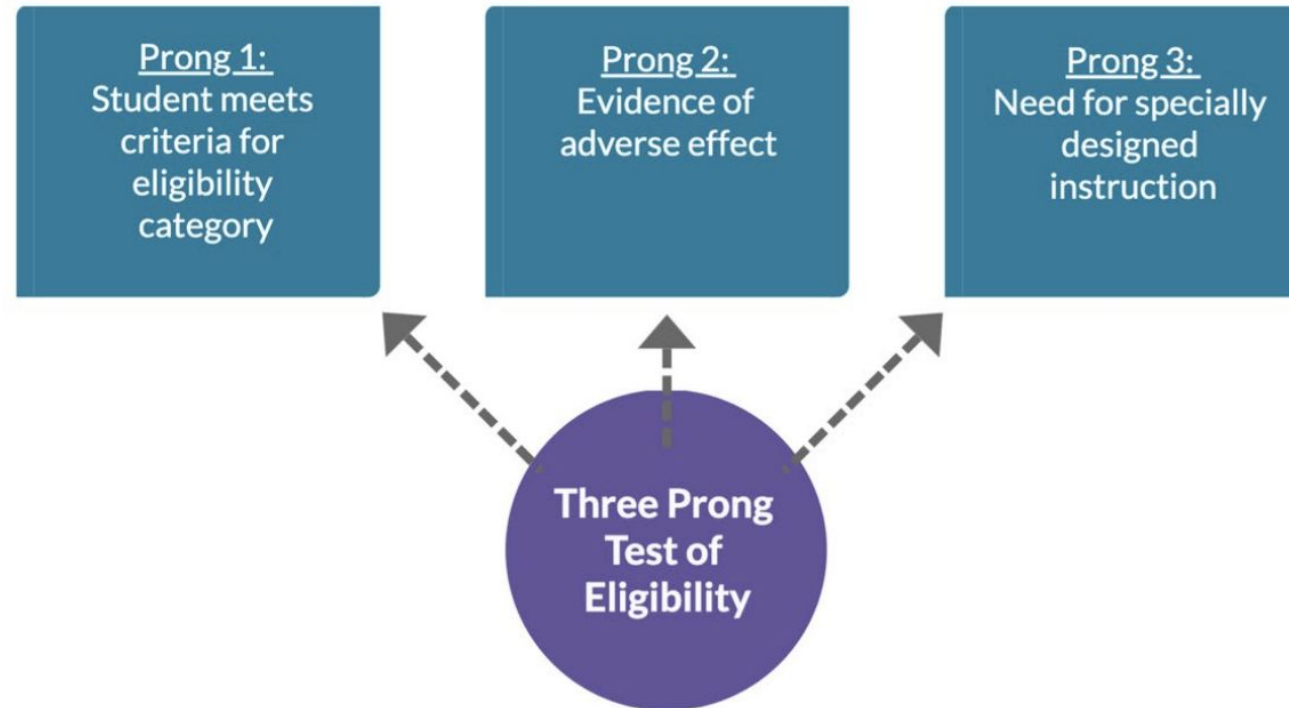


Code of Federal Regulations (IDEA) 300.8

ELIGIBILITY FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION

Does the pupil demonstrate difficulty to such an extent that it adversely affects his/her educational performance?

Does the student require special education services to meet his/her educational needs?





SERVICES

Services



Services are similar to those for older students, but are usually more intensive due to children's young age

Must also include:

- Consultation with/assistance to parents to seek and coordinate other services in the community
- Related services for parents - including counseling and training
- Support of play, social interactions, pre-academics, and other areas of child development
- Developmentally appropriate methods, materials/equipment, and facilities
- Working towards attainment of PS/TK Learning Foundations
- Completion of Desired Results Developmental Profile (DRDP) - twice per year (Statewide Assessment)

Appropriate Settings



Appropriate settings for these services include any of the following:

- (a) The regular public or private nonsectarian preschool program
- (b) The child development center or family day care home
- (c) The child's regular environment that may include the home
- (d) A special site where preschool programs for both children with disabilities and children who are not disabled are located close to each other and have an opportunity to share resources and programming
- (e) A special education preschool program with children who are not disabled attending and participating for all or part of the program
- (f) A public school setting which provides an age-appropriate environment, materials, and services, as defined by the superintendent

*****The appropriate setting is determined by the IEP team.***

PS/TK LEARNING FOUNDATIONS



California Preschool/Transitional Kindergarten Learning Foundations:

- Approaches to Learning
- Social and Emotional Development
- Foundational Language Development
- English Language Development
- Mathematics
- Science
- Physical Development
- Health
- Visual and Performing Arts



California Department of Education, 2024

KEY SKILLS FOR KINDERGARTEN





According to teachers, building the following skills will help children be successful in Kindergarten:

- Use the toilet, wash hands, dress, eat, and blow their nose independently
- Stay focused and pay attention for moderate periods of time
- Ask for help when needed
- Hold a pencil, use a crayon, and cut with scissors
- Carry and unzip a backpack, as well as place items inside and take them out
- Open and close lunch containers and eat lunch independently
- Have some experience separating from parents or guardians

Many of these skills are taught and practiced in PS and TK and continue to strengthen in kindergarten.

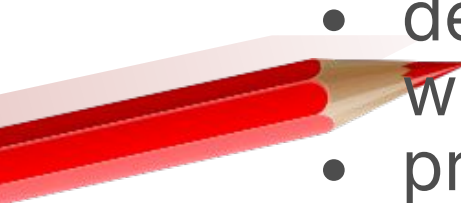


PROGRAMS



Programs are designed to address the student's needs, meet the student's goals, and provide the student with their designated services

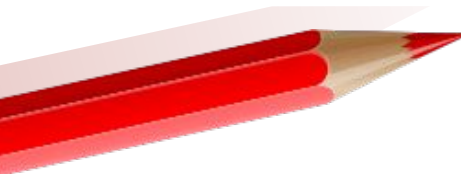
Programs should:

- be developmentally appropriate
 - be play-based
 - designed with structure and routine, but have flexibility within that structure
 - provide intentional teaching of skills and concepts from the learning foundations
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EARLY START

Provided by a Regional Center or Local Education Agency (LEA):

- North Bay Regional Center (NBRC)
 - SELPA
 - SRCS Early Start DHH Program
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PRESCHOOL & TK

Provided by the child's school district of residence or by a regional consortium.

Examples of a regional consortium:

- Rincon Valley Partnership
 - West County Consortium
 - South County Consortium
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INCLUSIVE PROGRAMS

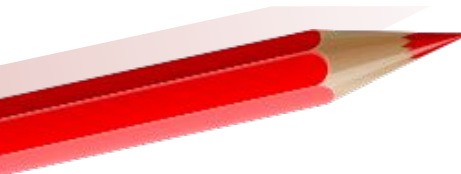


- General Education should always be the first consideration for any student
- The students are provided their education in the general education environment with the Special Education support and services that they need
- For preschool, the district may partner with community preschool programs (i.e. NBCC, Head Start, 4Cs)
- For TK, the district offers placement in a general education TK classroom
- Itinerant service providers typically provide support in the classroom settings (SPED Teacher, SLP, OT, APE Teacher, etc.)

BENEFITS OF ECSE



Some benefits of Early Childhood Special Education:

- Early intervention reduces the need for long-term intervention
 - Opportunity to begin building a relationship with your child's school district well before they become "school-aged"
 - Fosters a lifelong love of learning
 - Promotes greater academic success and a strong foundation for life
 - Promotes a strong family unit and thus a healthier community
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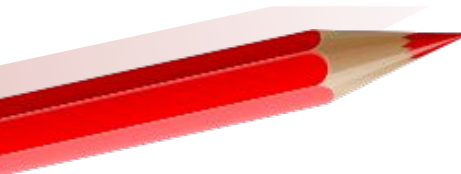



REFERRALS

SONOMA COUNTY REFERRAL GUIDE

Sonoma County Referral Guide

- Created in partnership with the Early Education Division, SCOE Teaching & Learning
- For preschool referrals, always start with your elementary district of residence



SONOMA COUNTY SELPA **Where to Refer a Child in Sonoma County**

If you have concerns about a child's development and would like to refer them for assessment, this resource provides guidance on how to refer. Services are free/low cost depending on your eligibility. Immigration status is not required.

WARM LINE P: 707-755-5113 **Warm Line of Sonoma County** Referral form [here](#)

Families looking for services may begin by contacting the warm line. This line is a partnership between NBRC and ELI and is specifically for families with children ages 0-3 who may have developmental delays, a diagnosed syndrome, or who were born prematurely and are seeking support, therapy services and other resources.

Child is under 3 years

North Bay Regional Center Early Start (0-3) P: 707-755-5113 E: intake@nbrc.net Provides developmental evaluations and support to children under 3 years old who live in Sonoma County and have developmental delays or are at-risk for a developmental disability. Diagnosis, psychological, speech-language and social evaluations. Services provided to the baby and family may include: vision services, audiological services, adaptive technology, occupational therapy, physical therapy, service coordination, special instruction, home visits and developmental programs, transportation, and speech therapy. Click here for the website	Sonoma SELPA Early Start (0-3) P: 707-524-2763 E: bhayne@sonomaselpa.org The Early Start Infant Toddler Program provides assessment and intervention services to children from birth through three years of age with vision or orthopedic impairments. Click here for the website	Santa Rosa City Schools DHH Early Start Program P: 707-890-3825 x5 The DHH Early Start Program offers services for families in Sonoma County with a child from birth to 3 years of age, who has been identified with hearing loss. We help parents to understand their child's hearing loss and various educational and communication options available, while providing service to the child. Click here for the website
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Early Learning Institute (0-3) P: 707-591-0170 | E: eli@earlylearninginstitute.com | Referral form [here](#)

Early Start is the name used for developmental services and supports for young children 0-3 years of age. If you have questions or concerns about your young one's development, a simple phone call is all it takes to start getting answers. You do not need a referral from anyone else, just you... and you know your child best. We can help you find the services you need for your child, birth to 5 years of age. Intake is free and if your child doesn't qualify for Early Start, every effort will be made to find services and supports that fit your needs.
[Click here for the website](#)

Child is over 3 years

School District: (Individual Education Program - IEP) <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Contact the Special Education Department at your resident school district office. Request an evaluation in the area(s) of concern or a full comprehensive evaluation.• Click on the link for a list of all school districts in the county or contact Sonoma County Office of Education for help at 707-524-2600 Click here for the website	North Bay Regional Center (3+ years) P: 833-264-4335 Intake@nbrc-et Children over 5 years of age must have a developmental disability (e.g., autism, cerebral palsy, intellectual disability, epilepsy, etc.) and at least 3 areas of significant functional limitation. If a child is 4 years of age or younger they may qualify for provisional eligibility if there are significant functional limitations in at least 2 areas of development. Click here for the website
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Any age: Medical

- You can ask your Pediatrician for a referral for any of the following evaluations: Speech & Language, Occupational Therapy, Physical Therapy, Hearing & Vision and Behavioral/Social & Emotional Concerns.
- **Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD):** Ask your pediatrician for a referral for an autism evaluation. Services through medical for home and/or school may be available to children with and without autism diagnosis.
- **Sonoma County Behavioral Health Division:** Services for seriously emotionally disturbed (SED) children and youth to age 18. Services are geographically based to provide access to all Sonoma County residents and include: assessment, case management, crisis intervention and stabilization, psychiatric evaluation, medication monitoring, therapy, and rehabilitation services. For more information, call 707-565-6900 or visit the [website here](#).
- **California Children's Services (CCS):** If your child has a catastrophic or serious medical condition that meets program eligibility criteria, this program may be able to provide financial assistance for medical services and coordinate health care services. In general, CCS covers medical conditions that are physically disabling or require medical, surgical, or rehabilitative services based on state regulations. Services include physical and occupational therapy, financial assistance, case management and access to specialized medical care. Your child must be under 21 years of age, family income must meet certain eligibility guidelines and only certain conditions are covered. For more information, call 707-565-4500 or visit the [website here](#).



TRANSITION FROM EARLY START TO PRESCHOOL

(Part C to Part B)

TRANSITION TO PRESCHOOL



California Code of Regulations 52112

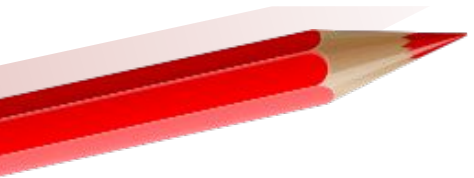
- Early Start program invites LEA to transition meeting (TIFSP) approx. six months before child's third birthday
- The LEA must participate in transition planning for toddlers served in early start programs who may be eligible for preschool programming
- Early Start program delivers referral to LEA 90 days before child's third birthday
- Must be coordination between the family, current team, and the future school/program
- Transition planning and activities must take place
- Law requires assessment by the LEA when there is an Early Start referral

TRANSITION TO PRESCHOOL



California Education Code 56426.9

- If the child is eligible for preschool special education services, the IEP must be developed and a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) must be offered prior to the child's third birthday



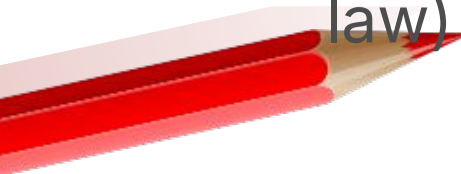


TRANSITION FROM PS TO TK/KINDER

TRANSITION TO TK OR KINDER



California Education Code 56445

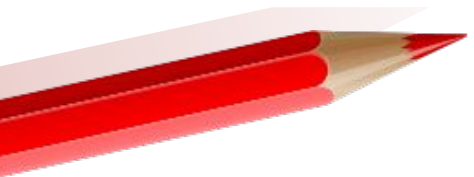
- Assessment is required at this transition to determine if the child is still eligible for and in need of special education services
 - Must be coordination between the family, current team, and future school/program
 - Transition planning and activities must take place
 - Child's progress must be monitored through 1st grade (required by law)
- 

TRANSITION TO TK/KINDERGARTEN



California Education Code 56441.1

- As the preschool child approaches the age to enter an elementary school environment, the child's preparation shall be geared toward a readiness for kindergarten and later school success.





RESOURCES

CALECSE

- [CaIECSE Main Page](http://calecse.org)
calecse.org
- [Parent Resources](#)
- [Parent Outreach and Support
Compilation of Resources for
Family Support](#)



CALECSE

California Early Childhood
Special Education Network

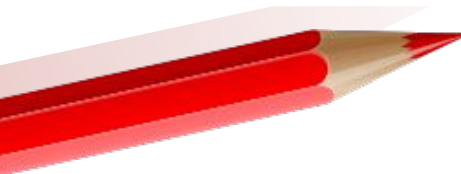

Building Strong Parent-Child Bonds Through Daily Routines

Simple ways to turn everyday moments into meaningful connection

DAILY ROUTINE	INTERACTION STRATEGY	WHY IT BUILDS CONNECTION
Morning wake-up	Use a calm voice, eye contact, and a gentle touch or hug (if accepted)	Starts the day with emotional warmth and physical connection
Getting dressed	Let your child choose between two options (e.g., red shirt or blue shirt)	Builds independence and shows respect for their preferences
Mealtimes	Sit together, model simple conversation (e.g., "I love this juice!"), and offer shared food	Creates a natural setting for social cues and joyful sharing
Transitions (home to school, room to room)	Use a short song, silly voice, or hand game as a "transition ritual"	Makes transitions predictable and enjoyable rather than stressful
After school check-in	Ask one simple, open-ended question (e.g., "What was your favorite part?") and listen	Builds a habit of reflection and emotional expression
Bath time	Use bubbles, songs, or water play to create interaction (e.g., "Can you pop this bubble?")	Makes routine playful, reducing resistance and encouraging bonding
Storytime	Let your child turn the pages or point to pictures; respond to their focus with comments	Encourages shared attention and reciprocal interaction
Dinner clean-up	Involve your child in small tasks like wiping the table or carrying a plate	Builds a sense of teamwork and contribution to family life
Bedtime routine	Create a predictable sequence with soft lighting, quiet time, and a favorite saying	Ends the day with emotional safety and a shared ritual
Weekend routines	Plan a recurring "just us" activity, like walking, drawing, or baking together	Creates consistent space for connection and shared joy

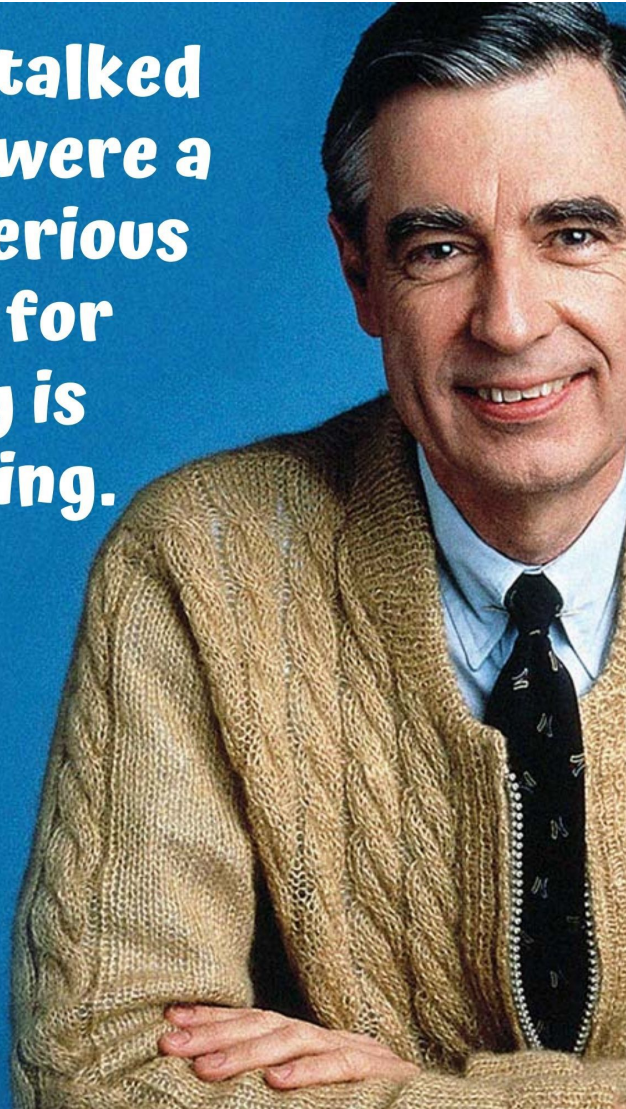


FINAL THOUGHT



**Play is often talked
about as if it were a
relief from serious
learning. But for
children, play is
serious learning.
Play is really
the work of
childhood.**

~Fred Rogers



THANK YOU



QUESTIONS?