# Chapter 5: Understanding the Evaluation Process

**Introduction:**Evaluations help determine why your child is struggling and how best to help. They also determine if your child is eligible for services and supports in school and other settings. Having your child evaluated can be a confusing and emotional process, but learning about and understanding the process can help you be an effective partner in your child’s evaluations.

## Definitions:

* **Evaluation:** Anevaluation is usually the first step in determining what will help a child learn and develop. Evaluations happen before a child is identified for special education and other services, and the child may be required to be re-evaluated to continue to receive services. Evaluation involves gathering information from different sources about a child’s functioning and development in all areas of suspected need and includes information from the parent. The evaluation may look at communication, speech-language skills, cognitive, behavioral, physical, and developmental factors, and any other area of concern. All the information gathered by the evaluation is used to determine the child’s educational and service needs.
* **Family:**Families provide support, love, care, and a sense of belonging by providing social, emotional, physical, and other support to each other. Family includes parents, brothers, sisters, children, grandparents, aunts, uncles, foster parents, and others who share responsibility and support for each other.
* **Professional:** A professional is a member of a profession with special experience and expertise in their practice area. A professional is someone whose job requires special education, training, and skill and who is subject to standards and ethics in their field.
* **Team:** A team is a group of diverse individuals working together for a common purpose. The individuals on a team should have common goals and objectives and work together toward achieving those goals.

## What Families Should Expect:

* Evaluations measure your child’s ability or performance. The evaluation provides a snapshot of your child’s performance on the day(s) your child was tested. The evaluation will consist of observations and other measures, including information you share about your child. Your participation in the evaluation process is important so that the evaluator and your child’s team get the best information about your child’s abilities and needs. Make sure you share important information about your child during the evaluation process because the information will be used to plan for services and support.
* You should fully understand any evaluation process your child goes through. Many evaluations will require your informed consent. Before you provide consent, you will be provided with information about which evaluations will be chosen, how they will be carried out, what will be required of you and your child, who will be doing the evaluation, and how the results will be used.
* You might disagree with the results of an evaluation. Share these concerns with the team and ask about other options for your child.

## What Families Want Their Team Members to Know:

* This may be the first time I have been through an evaluation. The process and terms are very familiar to you but not to me. Please take all the time necessary to help me understand the process. I will be able to give you better information and feedback if I understand the purpose and process of the evaluation.
* I have a busy and hectic life trying to care for my family and a child who needs extra help. Please schedule the evaluation meetings at a time that works for me. Scheduling meetings during a time when I am not busy makes it easier for me to focus on the work at hand and not worry about other things that I should be doing.
* My child does better at certain times of the day. Please ask me what days and times will work best for my child. The results may better reflect my child’s skills if the evaluation is done during days and times that are better for my child.
* While I understand it’s important to discuss what my child can’t do, it’s equally important to discuss what they can do. Please see my child as a whole person. Talking about what my child can’t do is discouraging and will only reflect one aspect of my child’s skills.

## What Team Members Want Families to Know:

* Even though it might feel like the evaluation’s focus is on what your child cannot do, we evaluate your child to develop a plan that supports your child’s development, learning, and growth.
* The team needs to know the information you have about your child’s development, including what your child can do at home and your concerns and hopes for your child. With this information, we can make the best plan to help your child.
* You can help us get the best evaluation of your child when you fully understand the process we use. Please ask questions and let us know if you need a better explanation of any step in the evaluation process.
* The results of the evaluation are based on your child’s unique responses during specific moments in time. These results are based on your child’s responses during these times and our observations. If they do not fully describe your child, let us know, and we will make sure to reflect this in the evaluation results.

## Family Checklist:

* Have I shared important information about my child’s development with the evaluation team?
* Have I asked the evaluation team for any supports I need to participate (e.g., interpreter, translations, further explanation, in-person meeting, hard copy of materials, time/day of meeting)?
* Have I shared my goals for my child’s development and future?
* Have I completed any tasks the evaluation process requires of me?

## Team Member Checklist:

* How will we share evaluation results with the family in a culturally sensitive and thoughtful way?
* What can we say or do to encourage parents to ask questions?
* Do we provide ongoing information to families that demystify the process and tell them what comes next?
* How does our process encourage parents to share information about their family and child?
* What steps do we take to help parents feel engaged and are a part of the process?
* Do we have evaluation team members with diverse backgrounds and perspectives?

## Resources:

[Ohio Coalition for the Education of Children with Disabilities](https://www.ocecd.org/)

[Disability Rights Ohio](https://www.disabilityrightsohio.org/)

[Individuals with Disabilities Education Act](https://sites.ed.gov/idea/)

[Ohio Coalition for the Education of Children with Disabilities: Sample letter requesting evaluation](https://www.ocecd.org/Downloads/REQUESTING%20%20AN%20%20INITIAL%20%20EVALUATION%208%202015.pdf)

[Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities: Ohio Early Intervention Families Section](https://ohioearlyintervention.org/families)

[Ohio Parent Mentors: Special Education Evaluation Process](https://parentmentor.osu.edu/the-special-education-evaluation-process-2/)

[Parent Center Hub: Evaluating a school-age child for disability (English)](https://www.parentcenterhub.org/evaluation/)

[Parent Center Hub: Evaluating a school-age child for disability (Spanish)](https://www.parentcenterhub.org/evaluacion/)

[The Ohio Department of Education: Evaluation Roadmap for Families of Children 3-21](https://education.ohio.gov/getattachment/Topics/Special-Education/Families-of-Students-with-Disabilities/Sections/Section-1/Evaluation-Roadmap.pdf.aspx?lang=en-US)