# Chapter 8: Child Assessment Eligibility Determination: Ways to Participate

**Introduction:** Children with developmental delays and disabilities can get services and support from a variety of programs and agencies when they are eligible for those services. Children are eligible when they meet the requirements for a program or service and need that service to help with their development, education, or other area of life. Parental participation in the eligibility process is critical because parents know their child’s strengths and needs the best. Being involved in the process and sharing knowledge about your child will help the assessor understand your child and lead to the best decisions about eligibility.

## Definitions:

**Assessment** is a process used to gather information about a child, including their strengths and needs for services or intervention. Assessment can include screening, tests, and observations. Assessments help to identify a child’s functioning with the goal of providing the services and supports the child needs.

**Eligibility** is a determination of whether a child is qualified to get a service or support. Most of the systems that provide services to children with delays or disabilities have their own specific standards for eligibility.

## What Families Should Expect:

Many providers may assess your child to determine their needs and if they qualify for services. Your school district might assess your child for special education eligibility, a physical therapist might assess your child for physical therapy, and a state or county program might assess your child for eligibility for the program. Together, you and the assessors will determine your child’s needs and plan for services and support for your child. Because you know your child the best, you should be an active part of the assessment process. This requires that you share information about your child’s strengths and needs so that the assessment addresses all of your child’s development and needs. The best outcomes occur when you and the professionals are true partners in the assessment process. You should learn about the assessment process and how it will be completed, provide important information about your child, and fully engage in the discussion about the results to get the best services and support for your child.

## What Families Want Their Team Members to Know:

* The assessment process can be hard because it feels like it focuses on what my child can’t do, where my child is delayed, and why my child is not doing things other children can do. You can make this process easier by asking for my input first, asking me about my child’s strengths as well as needs, and telling me how my input will be used in the assessment. I want to know that my input will be a part of the decision-making process.
* I might need help understanding what the assessment results mean for my child. It can help me if you explain the results in a clear and meaningful way. I want to know how the results can help my child’s growth and development, what I can expect will be the next step in my child’s learning and development, and how I can help to support it at home. I want to know that we are working together and on the same page.
* I want you to see my child as I do. I can share important information about how my child is at home and what our family is like. I want to know that you understand my hopes and dreams for my child and that my hopes and dreams help guide the assessment process, eligibility decision, and services provided.

## What Team Members Want Families to Know:

* All team members bring a unique perspective and approach to assessment and eligibility determinations. Team members bring their training, experience, beliefs, and more to the table. Often, our perspective as professionals may be different than the family perspective because we are operating in different environments. This does not mean any one perspective is wrong. Sharing our different perspectives helps broaden the team’s discussion.
* You can help us get the best assessment outcomes by preparing your child for the assessment. This includes helping us understand your child’s daily schedule and when they perform the best and making sure your child comes to the assessment well rested and in the best position to be assessed.
* Emotions can run high when talking about assessment and a child’s needs. It is important to remember that all team members want to do what is right for your child and support your child’s learning and development.

## Family Checklist:

* Do I know my child’s assessment team and how to reach them?
* Do I participate in all assessments about my child?
* Am I prepared to provide important information about my child for an assessment?
* Do I ask questions and understand the assessment?
* Do I ask for clarification if I don’t understand?
* Have I shared any important reports or recommendations about my child’s needs?
* Do I make sure my child is prepared for assessments (well rested, fed, assessed at a good time of day, etc.)?

## Team Member Checklist:

* Do we include parents in every step of the assessment process?
* Do we explain the assessment/eligibility process in meaningful ways?
* Do we ask for parent input at the start and throughout the assessment process?
* Have we asked the parent for any reports or recommendations they have?
* Have we really included the parent’s point of view?
* Do we talk about the child’s strengths?
* Do we balance positive and negative information?

## Resources:

[IDEA: Determination of eligibility](https://sites.ed.gov/idea/regs/b/d/300.306)

[Using Your Knowledge of Your Child to Support Assessment](https://ectacenter.org/~pdfs/decrp/PGF_ASM1_informedclinincal_2018.pdf)

[Understood: Finding Out if Your Child is Eligible for Special Education](https://www.understood.org/en/articles/finding-out-if-your-child-is-eligible-for-special-education)

[Learning Disabilities Association of America: Eligibility: Determining Whether a Child is Eligible for Special Education Services](https://ldaamerica.org/info/eligibility-determining-whether-a-child-is-eligible-for-special-education-services/#:~:text=In%20order%20for%20a%20child%20to%20be%20declared%20eligible%20for,special%20education%20and%20related%20services.)

[Center for Parent Information and Resources (CPIR): Questions often asked by Parents about Special Education Services (information included about eligibility and a parent’s right to participate in making that decision)](https://www.parentcenterhub.org/lg1/), (English)

[Center for Parent Information and Resources (CPIR): Questions often asked by Parents about Special Education Services (information included about eligibility and a parent’s right to participate in making that decision), (Spanish)](https://www.parentcenterhub.org/lg1sp/)

[ECTA Center: Partnering with Your Child’s Assessment Team Members](https://ectacenter.org/~pdfs/decrp/PGF_ASM2_partneringassessment_2018.pdf)