

Disclosing Your Child's Needs

As the time to register their child for school approaches, parents of children with additional needs may question whether or not to inform the school about their child's needs and wonder about how much information to share. Sometimes parents want to see how their child will do before talking to the school or may not fully understand why the school needs to know as soon as possible about any additional needs their child has.

Why should I disclose my child's needs?

Every child is unique and deserves the best possible start the school system can provide. In order to ensure a positive beginning to your child's school journey, the school will need as complete an understanding as possible of your child's strengths and needs. This information allows you and the school to work together to meet your child's needs and to ensure he or she has positive school experiences right from the start.

The school board develops support plans for children with additional needs long before the start of the school year. These support plans are based on information received from all schools. The school board can only plan support for the children it has received information about.

When should I tell the school about my child's needs?

The school is your first point of contact and it is best to inform staff of your child's additional needs as soon as you register your child. The school will need time to review documents you provide, contact agencies involved with your child and inform the school board about your child's needs. The transition into school is a big step for your child so the sooner the school can have the information that will guide that transition, the better.

What type of information might be important to share with the school?

Any information that you feel is important for the teacher or staff to know such as:

- Any medical diagnoses your child has received;
- If your child was born prematurely and received care because of this;
- Services your child has received or currently receives. For example: Occupational Therapy, Physiotherapy, Speech and Language Services, behavioural intervention, etc.;
- Any concerns you have in terms of your child's development.

Does an agency require my permission before it can share information about my child with the school or school board?

Yes, an agency can only share information about your child with your written consent, referred to as 'consent to disclose'. The agency may request your consent to disclose six or maybe even nine months before your child is supposed to start school so that the best possible transition plan can be developed for your child.



If an agency asks for consent to share information with the school, do I have to give it?

Parents have the final say about whether or not to give consent to an agency to share information with the school or school board. Some parents prefer to provide their own copies of assessments and reports to the school when they register their child. Other parents feel more comfortable having staff from the agency that is involved with their child talk to the school to make sure the school receives the most pertinent information. Whether you consent to an agency sharing information with the school or choose to do it yourself, what is essential is that the school receives the information to allow it to plan as smooth a transition as possible for your child.

Won't my child be "labelled" if I tell the school about any difficulties he or she may be having?

Parents often fear their child will be "labelled" if they tell the school about any difficulties or challenges their child is having. Nothing could be further from the truth. By disclosing this important information, you are allowing a number of positive things to happen:

- Focus on your child's development – by disclosing, the school knows your child's strengths and needs, and is able to plan for your child's ongoing positive development
- Collaboration – disclosing allows you, community agencies, and school staff to work together to ensure your child's success
- Effective transition planning – sharing information about your child's different needs allows a more personalized transition plan to be created; the plan can specify how and when the transition will take place and who is responsible for each step of the process
- Ongoing planning – disclosing your child's and family's needs provides a mechanism that allows the school to respond to changes in your child's needs.

Parents can take comfort in knowing that the team's goal is to help their child experience as smooth a transition to school as possible. The best way of working towards this goal is early disclosure.