

New York City Youth and Vision Loss Coalition

Preschool Handbook

NYC Youth and Vision Loss Coalition

Preschool: A Guide for Parents with Children who are Blind and / or Visually Impaired

Ages: 3 to 5 years

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Introduction

This Preschool Handbook is one of five handbooks created by the Youth and Vision Loss Coalition to assist young people and their parents, caregivers, and guardians to better understand blindness and vision loss. This handbook includes supports and services to meet the needs of young children with vision loss or multiple disabilities.

This handbook will help you and your child prepare for Preschool. In accordance with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), state education systems and local school districts must provide equal access to a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) to all children including those with disabilities. This includes Preschool and the new Universal Pre-Kindergarten (UPK) programs in NYC.

How do I know if my child is visually impaired?

The definition of legal blindness federally and in New York State is “having a visual acuity of 20/200 or less in the better or stronger eye with best correction, or a restricted field of vision of 20 degrees or less in the better or stronger eye.” See [New York State Commission for the Blind](#) website.

As a reference, “normal” vision is 20/20 with one hundred eighty degrees of visual field. Therefore, being legally blind does not typically mean that you are in the dark, perceiving only black or nothing at all. Individuals who are legally blind can have range of visual acuity and fields. As each child is unique, it is important to consult an eye care specialist for advice pertaining to your child’s vision and vision loss. If you are still in the “suspect” stage, it is recommended that you contact your pediatrician immediately so that you can have your child’s eyes evaluated as soon as possible. There are many types of visual impairments with a wide variety of causes and identifying your child’s specific situation will help determine what services will best assist her or him.

Some signs that your child may have a vision problem are:

- Holding a book to his/her face closely
- Standing closely in front of the television
- Avoiding tasks that involve looking or reading something
- Eyes that do not move together when following an object
- Eyes that move inward, outward, or are crossed
- Covering or closing an eye to look at something

- Squinting
- Constantly bumping into things or knocking things over.

Some children may just be clumsy, but this can be a sign that there is a visual impairment especially if they walk into walls or furniture in a familiar space such as your home.

If your child was born prematurely, she or he should have received a vision screening at birth. If there is a concern about vision loss, your child's eye development should be tracked by your pediatrician and a more comprehensive examination should be done by an eye care specialist. Additionally, if your child has other disabilities, a comprehensive vision evaluation can assure you and your child by either ruling out vision loss or ensuring that the necessary services and supports are put in place to address the vision loss. According to Healthcare.gov, pediatric vision services are an Essential Health Benefit and should be covered by your health insurance provider: [read more](#).

All children are different

A child who is blind or severely visually impaired will learn differently than a sighted child. Children with visual impairments will use different methods to acquire the information that other children usually learn through observation. You may have noticed this during your child's early years or you may have already had a discussion on the topic with an Early Intervention professional or other professional service provider.

If you suspect your child might have some level of vision loss and you are unable to acquire a diagnosis or prognosis of vision impairment/legal blindness, we suggest you seek additional opinions. Vision loss has many variables and the professionals who evaluate vision loss have many different specialties and their viewpoints can vary. For example, simply because a child can read an eye chart does not mean the child can visually understand or process the information he or she is seeing, as is common with Cortical Visual Impairments (CVI). Additionally, there are children with tunnel vision that can also read the chart but lose all vision outside of a narrow visual field and others who can read the chart when looking at specific angles but cannot if they move their head. Optometrists (OD) or Ophthalmologists (MD) diagnose eye conditions so if you suspect your child has an eye condition, have your child evaluated by an eye care specialist as

soon as possible.

Role as a parent

As a parent, your role is to protect, nurture, and love your child through all stages of life. As a parent of a child with vision loss you also want to be the best advocate you can be. Without full knowledge and understanding as to what is available for children with vision loss, you cannot ensure that all your child's needs are being met. Gaps in service are common. It is extremely important to have your child receive all the services that he or she requires to meet their individual needs. If you have an issue or a concern, do not hesitate to contact the doctor, pediatrician, eye care specialist, teacher or Teacher of Children with Visual Impairment (TVI), social worker, rehabilitation counselor, principal, or other professional immediately, depending on the specific issue.

Remember that children with vision loss learn through play like children without vision loss. But they may learn in a different way compensating for the vision loss with non-visual adaptations. Make sure they have this opportunity and that you become aware of adaptations that can make playtime safe and enjoyable. Included below are some methods and opportunities to help you help your child. The ultimate goal is for your child to become a successful, thriving, independent adult. If you are fearful and hold them back to keep them safe, you may have inadvertently encouraged learned dependence. This may foster an adult with limitations that could have been avoided. There are many blind adults working in every aspect of every field. Successful blind adults report that their parents treated them as equals to their sighted siblings and offered them the opportunity to learn, maintained high expectations, gave them chores and responsibilities and the freedom to grow.

Advocacy

Here is a table of laws/mandates you should know when moving forward with your preschooler:

Law/Mandate	Legal Terms
<i>Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)</i>	Federal law entitling children to receive a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) in the least restrictive environment.
<i>Free Appropriate Public Education</i>	<i>Ensures children with disabilities are provided with the least restrictive environment possible; range starts with general education classroom and moves to whatever model works with the individual child</i>
Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973	Provides for the civil rights of people with disabilities by its prohibition of discrimination against qualified individuals with disabilities by any entity receive federal funding; applies to public schools as they all receive federal funding and must make education accessible for children starting in preschool and forward
Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)	Civil rights law that prevents discrimination against people with disabilities; Title II speaks on the individual rights against discriminatory in practices by governmental entities including public education

Your role as an advocate is to know your child’s needs, learn what works, understand the services, and make sure your child gets what she or he needs.

During your child’s early years, you are their voice and primary advocate. Learning about your child’s visual impairment adaptations and technologies that can assist them is critical to their success.

Informal language You can contact professionals at your child’s school or vision rehabilitation agency, a local support group for parents with children with visual impairments or the city or state agency such as the New York State Commission for the Blind (see the list of resources below).

Networking is a very effective means of understanding what is available and what works. Other parents and guardians of children with vision loss are often familiar with the various systems of services. Get to know them and access the information they have to offer from their experiences.

Many of the systems of service can be complex and difficult to navigate while other systems can be complementary and easy to access. When you are confronted with barriers, the NYC Youth and Vision Loss Coalition can help.

What is a 504 Plan?

A 504 Plan for accommodation is developed and written if the student meets eligibility criteria under Section 504 of the 1973 Rehabilitation Act. The plan is a written document describing the types of accommodations and who will execute them so the student will have equal access to school related programs and activities. The accommodations within the plan are developed for the individual student and his/her specific needs. A complete 504 Plan should discuss in- classroom accommodations, and non-academic accommodations if necessary.

Watch a short video on 504 Plans at: [A2Z Educational Advocates](#)

Accommodations give the student with a disability the opportunity to participate equally with non-disabled peers. Accommodations for children with visual impairments can include:

- braille books and other written materials
- books on tape
- large print books
- Braille labels on signs, vending machines, bathrooms, etc.
- note takers and scribes
- appropriate seating to allow for maximum visual contact with the chalkboard/teacher
- assistive technology
- optical scanners (reading machines)
- text enlargers
- voice activated computers
- a prescribed red and white long mobility cane
- training in orientation and mobility both within the school environment and outdoors

Non-Academic Activities

As mentioned earlier, 504 Plans should provide equal access for people with disabilities to programs funded with federal dollars. This includes all school sponsored activities and events including:

- assemblies

- plays including the program
- talent shows
- student government
- clubs
- lunchroom
- playgrounds
- library
- teams

504 Plans must look at all aspects of student life. Plans should address any non- classroom activity the student may want to be involved with. An accommodation may be very simple or may be more complex, based on individual need, but are necessary to provide access as guaranteed by law.

For a student who is blind or has low vision, the less restrictive placement within the general education system under a 504 Plan might work if the child's support system has the ability to manage and mandate all the services defined in the plan. However under the IDEA, the student and parents have more and better defined supports and services that must be accounted for by the IEP. Please see the Youth and Vision Loss General Handbook for more information and resources on the education laws. Also see the [Policy Regulation 65 FR 36586](#) at [AFB.org](#).

If your child has an IEP and the school is not in compliance with the IEP, under IDEA you have a method of recourse. As mentioned above, IDEA provides people with disabilities the right to a free appropriate public education and provides rights to the parents or guardians in their effort to ensure the child's education. This could include such supports as teaching the parents' braille or how to use and navigate the adapted computer system the child uses in school. However, if the service or support is not listed on the IEP it is not considered necessary and will not be provided. If the program or service is listed on the IEP it should be provided and can be insisted upon by the parent or guardian.

If your child is not receiving all of the services and supports outlined in the IEP, the first step is to speak with your child's teacher or principal to come to an agreement. If the provisions of the IEP remain unmet, you may need to take formal action.

Some of your options are:

- Requesting or scheduling another IEP meeting. This is done in writing to the principal or the Committee on Special Education

(CSE) or Committee on Preschool Special Education (CPSE).

If for any reason there is difficulty getting an IEP meeting scheduled there is a process for filing a complaint.

- Filing a state compliance complaint: this is a written notice from a parent or organization to the state education agency describing the violations of IDEA and requesting an investigation.
- Mediation: a voluntary process in which both parties meet with a trained, impartial person who serves as a mediator to resolve the issues.
- A resolution session: a mandatory meeting of parents and other IEP team members to discuss a complaint and its resolution within 15 days of the receipt of a due process complaint.
- A due process hearing: a formal presentation of both parties of a dispute by parents and school district before a hearing officer who will decide the matter and issue findings of fact and conclusion. See the following link for more information:
<http://www.p12.nysed.gov/specialed/publications/policy/parentguide.htm#DueProcess>

Individualized Educational Program (IEP)

The Individualized Education Program (IEP) is tailored to each child's individual needs and goals for the year. It describes in full detail what the child will need, how they will learn and what teachers and service providers will do to enable the child to learn more efficiently. The plan ensures the student will be placed appropriately in special education classes and/or general education classes and how his/her needs will be met.

If your child is placed in a general education classroom with non-disabled peers, it is your responsibility as the parent or guardian, to ensure that your child receives the services and supports listed in their IEP. The IEP outlines services and supports that will assist your child to achieve academic success. The IEP can be a complex document since it is a contract that will require an investment of time to understand its full potential. You can download, read through and ask for assistance in fully

understanding the IEP. Remember if a service is not in the IEP, the school is not required to provide it.

To view or download a sample blank New York State IEP form, visit: [NYS IEP](#).

*Note, this is not a NYC IEP, which is a part of the NYC DOE database system.

The Expanded Core Curriculum (ECC)

The ECC is not currently a mandatory curriculum within the New York City Department of Education. However, it should be provided to all students with vision loss and the components of the ECC training should be listed in your child's IEP as supports and services to be provided to your child. Your advocacy is key to having this included in your child's IEP.

These components are:

1. **Compensatory or functional academic skills:** concept learning, spatial understanding, and speaking and listening skills. With no visual feedback, the child must receive alternative affirmation of their improvement throughout their education.
2. **Orientation and mobility:** learning their everyday environments and learning to travel as independently as possible. Space is a concept learned by viewing the surroundings. Children with low vision or no vision must be taught how to safely and efficiently investigate the space surrounding them. For this, the school should employ the services of a Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialist (COMS). A certified orientation and mobility specialist (COMS) has demonstrated the competencies to teach O&M skills.
3. **Social interaction skills:** methods of interpreting the social interactions: body language, smiling etc. Body language is learned by watching others; therefore, a child with low vision or no vision must be taught how to interpret the tone and language of others and the art of projecting or expressing their feelings and opinions.
4. **Independent living skills:** money management, time management, organization, food preparation, and personal hygiene. These tasks are commonly acquired skills that are observed and then attempted by our children as they grow. Try to remember how you learned to

brush your teeth or pour milk. Children with low vision or no vision must be actively taught these basic skills that sighted children learn through watching and imitating.

5. **Recreation and leisure skills:** The next time you watch a game on television or on the sidelines, close your eyes and think about what you know about the game without seeing the players on the field. Think about how you might explain the players' actions and reactions to the game being played. Children with low vision or no vision must be taught the physical aspects of the game to understand it and to decide whether or not to play. As with Independent living skills (above), games and sports are activities that children without visual impairments observe before they participate. Physical fitness is important for all children and it is very important to discover with your child, the physical activities they enjoy. Adaptations are common and available for children with vision loss to encourage running, sports, jumping rope, swimming, climbing, etc.
6. **Career education:** This area includes learning about basic work skills and careers, exploration of the many jobs successfully done by blind people. Although this is something all children should receive, the IDEA, the Rehabilitation Act under the Workforce Opportunity Investment Act of 2014 provide for these services in and out of the school setting to assist youth with vision loss to understand their options. Career awareness starts in the early years when children are curious about all the jobs that people do.
7. **Use of assistive technology (AT):** This includes learning braille, using a Closed Circuit TV (CCTV), note-taker, magnifier, Smart Pen, etc. These and other assistive devices are your child's access to all other media. Having a mastery of how to use these devices is critical to his or her development and success. Having the opportunity to try out various devices and the ability to select those that meet your child's personal needs means your child will use them more efficiently and effectively over time. The use of these devices must be taught and practiced for greater success.
8. **Sensory efficiency skills:** This includes learning how to use the other senses effectively and learning how to identify, detect, and protect one's belongings and surroundings. With vision loss, knowing how to safely store and find an item is critical. Knowing what a cubby

is and how to find it and one's coat are simple tasks that preschoolers with vision loss can learn. Youth with vision loss must be taught to interpret the environmental cues around them. Do you know the scent of rain or snow? Have you ever noticed the scents of a flower shop you pass by as compared to a fish store, baker, or pizzeria? Children can be taught to identify by scent, sunlight, wind, sound, feel, and taste and verify with using their remaining (residual) vision.

9. **Self-determination:** This includes activities that build self-esteem. A fist-pump of approval or the look of an unstated "no" may be missed by a child with vision loss. Young people learn quickly how to interpret the facial expressions of their parents or other adults. The child with vision loss must learn other means of detecting approval or disapproval.

How do I get special education pre-school services for my child?

Referrals for preschool service can occur in one of two ways, depending on the services being received during the year prior to the child entering preschool.

Some children receive Early Intervention (EI) services provided by the NYS Department of Health (DOH). Other parents might not have had a diagnosis of disability for the child or chose not to seek services from the DOH. At age 3, your child may be eligible for preschool special education services.

Many children who receive EI services are eligible for preschool special education services from the NYC Department of Education once they reach the age of 3. EI and preschool special education are separate programs run by separate city agencies. You must go through a transition process if you want your child to receive preschool special education services after EI ends.

At least 120 calendar days (approximately four months) before your child will become eligible for preschool special education, EI will notify your local [Committee on Preschool Special Education \(CPSE\)](#) office in writing that your child is aging out of EI, unless you object to such notification. This notification is not the same as a referral. It is your responsibility to ensure that your child is referred to the CPSE for an evaluation and IEP meeting.

You can either submit the referral letter to the CPSE in writing or give consent for your EI service coordinator to refer your child. You should make sure the referral to CPSE happens at least three to four months before your child's third birthday so your child does not experience a gap in services: [read more](#).

EI services are scheduled to end on a child's third birthday. If the CPSE holds an IEP meeting before your child's third birthday and finds your child eligible for preschool special education services, you can choose to extend your child's EI services as follows:

- If your child's third birthday is between January 1 and August 31: your child can continue receiving EI services until August 31.
- If your child's third birthday is between September 1 and December 31: your child can continue EI services until December 31.

For more information on transitioning from Early Intervention to preschool, visit the NYS Department of Health transition webpage: [read more](#).

Getting preschool special education services

There are four steps in the preschool special education process.

- 1. Referral:** Write a letter to your local Committee on Preschool Special Education (CPSE) to ask for preschool special education evaluation. This letter is called a "referral."

For more information on districts including CPSE phone numbers, see the [NYC DOE webpage](#).

- 2. Evaluation:** Once you send the referral letter, the CPSE will send you a list of evaluation agencies so that you can schedule an evaluation of your child. The evaluation is provided at no cost to you. The evaluation will examine your child's areas of strength, areas of developmental delays, and educational needs. The CPSE will also assign your child's case to a CPSE administrator who will be your contact person.

During preschool, eligibility for special education services is based on a child's delay in one of the areas of functioning (cognitive, language and communicative, adaptive, socio-emotional, or motor

development), and every preschooler receiving special education services is classified as a “preschool student with a disability.”

- 3. Development of the IEP:** After the evaluation is completed, the CPSE administrator will schedule a meeting with you to determine whether your child is eligible for preschool special education services. If your child is eligible, the team will create an educational plan, called an Individualized Education Program (IEP), which states the special education services that your child has the right to receive to meet your child’s needs. The team will decide whether your child needs a special education class, instruction from a special education teacher, related services, or another type of program. For IEP Training visit the [NYC DOE](#).

The team at your child’s preschool IEP meeting must include:

- You, the parent;
- The CPSE administrator, who will lead the meeting;
- At least one special education teacher or related service provider (after your child begins receiving preschool special education services, at least one of the special education teachers or service providers who works with *your child* must participate in your child’s IEP meetings);
- At least one general education teacher if general education is being considered for your child (if your child participates in a general education public preschool class, such as Universal Pre-K, EarlyLearn NYC, or Head Start, *at least one of your child’s teachers* must participate in your child’s IEP meetings);
- A representative of the agency that did the evaluation, or someone who can interpret the results of the evaluation;
- Your child’s Early Intervention service coordinator if your child is transitioning from EI (at your request);
- An interpreter, if your preferred language is not English.

You can also invite any other people to participate in the IEP meeting in person or by telephone. For example, you can invite a staff member from your child’s preschool, a friend, family member, advocate, Early Intervention service provider, or doctor. [read more](#).

- 4. Starting IEP Services:** After the team develops your child’s IEP, your CPSE administrator is responsible for starting all the services that are recommended on the IEP. The IEP is a legal document and

your child has a right to receive all of the services on it. This includes finding a special education class for your child if his or her IEP recommends one and finding therapists or specialists to provide any related services on your child's IEP.

For more information on preschool read the [Advocates for Children's Guide to Preschool Special Education Services](#) (2014).

Transition

Who is involved, what to expect and available resources.

According to the NYS DOH, when your child turns three years old, the Early Intervention Ongoing Service Coordinator will assist you with transitioning your child to preschool. They will make sure you have all the necessary information you may need as well as a list of schools within your neighborhood that can best serve your child. Below are some tips for preparing your child and family for the transition from the home or the Early Intervention program to preschool special education services:

- Learn what transition is and why it is important for your child and family.
- Learn the differences between an Individual Family Service Plan (IFSP) and an Individual Education Program (IEP)
- Make sure your child's previous IFSP and progress reports from Early Intervention include all the necessary information to help your child transition from EI to preschool
- Find out what you need to know and what skills you need to develop to make sure that you can help your child get the most out of preschool special education services. Do you need a class on how to use a CCTV, an adapted computer program, or other assistive technology that your child may use? Will your training be paid through the school?
- Call your local Early Childhood Direction Center (ECDC). The ECDCs are funded by the New York State Department of Education to help parents and children get preschool special education services: [read more](#).

Some questions for parents to think about in making the transition are:

- What new information is needed about your child's vision impairment or other disabilities and the assistive technology he/she uses?
- What skills will your child need to learn to function in this new setting? Does your child need a cane to navigate throughout the school? Is there a COMS on staff? Does the school offer braille? What other skills can your child with vision loss learn during the school day?
- Are there adaptive equipment needs such as closed circuit televisions (CCTVs), or modifications needed at the location(s) where your child will be getting preschool special education services? Who will make the adaptations? Will there be a TVI on staff?
- Can and will the preschool meet the blindness-specific service needs?
- Does the school offer adaptations for non-visual learning?

The importance of social skills on learning and its effects on self-esteem

Social skills are an important part of your child's development. By age 3, your child should be engaged with other children whether in a structured environment or a playgroup setting. Children who are sighted tend to learn concepts and good habits through incidental (often unconscious) learning or the action of seeing others perform a variety of task or daily activities such as eating, creating personal space between themselves and others while speaking, and movement. Children with vision loss learn these skills and behaviors through description, discussion, and tactile hand over hand demonstration and practicing. They must be consciously taught these behaviors by parents, certified orientation and mobility specialists (COMS), and Teachers of Children with Visual Impairment (TVI). Children with vision loss, like other children, need to interact with their peers, blind or sighted, with and without disabilities, to gain confidence and independence while playing. There are preschool programs within New York City that offer students with vision loss a full range of services in a classroom setting. These programs receive funding from the New York City Department of Education so there is no cost to you or your family.

The following programs are specifically designed to work with preschool

toddlers with vision loss:

[Helen Keller Services for the Blind](#) offers a full day preschool program for children ages 3 to 5 years with vision loss. Additionally, this program provides services to children with vision loss and multiple disabilities. Children work with occupational therapists, physical therapists and speech therapists.

[The New York Institute of Special Education](#) located in the Bronx, New York, is a private, nonprofit school that offers programs for children who are blind and visually impaired, emotionally and learning disabled, and developmentally delayed preschoolers.

[Lavelle School for the Blind](#)

Students in these integrated classrooms are prepared to enter kindergarten at age 5. Preschool students with multiple disabilities are enrolled in smaller classrooms to receive more intensive services. Many of these students with multiple disabilities can continue in the Life Skills Unit at the Lavelle School.

All preschool students participate in a full day preschool education program with a primary focus on reading readiness skills (for print or braille), communication skills (including use of augmentative communication devices and computers), cultivating creativity and imagination, as well as making friends through play.

Students may receive speech therapy, occupational therapy, physical therapy, orientation and mobility training, and/or counseling, as per their IEP.

Who will be working with your child?

Within the programs and community-based services listed above, there can be a wide range of professionals working with your child depending on your child's needs and disability (ies).

Some of the professionals may be:

Teacher of Children with Visual Impairment (TVI): TVI's provide educational services to students of all ages and ability levels who are learning academic skills as well as skills needed for success outside of the classroom. It is important that teachers plan effective instruction and develop a clear understanding of the complex issues facing students with

vision loss and their parents. These complex issues have an impact on students' development as well as on educational programming: [read more](#).

According to the NYC Department of Education, Education Vision Services (EVS), the Teacher of Children with Visual Impairment (TVI) provides instruction in braille, assistive technology, and compensatory techniques. The services EVS provides are called vision education or vision instruction, not to be confused with vision therapy, vision training, or behavioral optometry that is provided by optometrists (OD). [read more](#).

Occupational Therapist (OT): New York State Licensed Occupational Therapy (OT) practitioners work as members of a comprehensive rehabilitation team to address the development of gross and fine motor abilities, spatial awareness, and Activities of Daily Living (ADLs) such as feeding, toileting, dressing, and engaging in play for children with all types of disabilities. They work with Teachers of children with Visual Impairment (TVIs), certified orientation and mobility specialists (COMS) and other professionals to ensure that a child with disabilities is able to participate fully in the classroom. The occupational therapy practitioner may also assist in the child's transition into adult life. [read more](#).

Vision Rehabilitation Therapist (VRT): A Certified Vision Rehabilitation Therapist (CVRT) provides many services similar to those provided by the OT; however, the training and therapy they provide have a concentrated emphasis on mitigating the visual deficiency. They are specialists working only with children and adults with vision loss and multiple disabilities including vision loss. They are frequently involved in the expanded core curriculum. [read more](#).

Physical Therapists (PT): NYS Licensed Physical Therapists (PT) provides treatment or management of physical disability, malfunction, or pain by exercise, massage, hydrotherapy, etc., without the use of medicines, surgery, or radiation. [read more](#)

Speech Therapists: NYS Licensed Speech Therapists provide treatment to improve the speech of children who have difficulty in learning to speak (because of partial deafness or brain damage for example), or to help restore the power of speech to adults who have partially or totally lost it through accident or illness. [read more](#)

Orientation and Mobility Specialist (O&M): Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialists (COMS) are an important and integral part of the

curriculum in the comprehensive delivery of services for children with vision loss in the school setting. The COMS serves as a member of the multidisciplinary team in developing and implementing individualized education programs for children with visual impairments. Mobility is the process of moving safely, efficiently, and gracefully within one's environment. The goal of O&M instruction is to enable children who are blind or have low vision to learn safe and purposeful travel in all types of indoor and outdoor environments using prescribed aids. To reach this goal, O&M instruction must begin at the earliest possible age. [read more.](#)

According to the NYS DOE, O&M training is designed to improve the student's grasp of spatial and environmental concepts and use of information received by the senses for negotiating travel. The use of prescribed low vision aids from a low vision optometrist or ophthalmologist and/or the prescribed long cane from a certified orientation and mobility specialist are used to supplement visual travel skills for navigating familiar and unfamiliar environment. Older children interested in training with a dog guide must first learn safe, independent travel. [read more.](#)

Bus Company: Schools under the Department of Education must provide transportation for children residing in New York City who are in the special education program. Transportation can include a yellow school bus or public transportation with a MetroCard and is determined by each child's Individual Education Program (IEP). Transportation is provided from the child's home to school and back home. To have the child dropped off at a different location than where they are picked up, a Request to Change a Special Education Student's After School Drop-off Location form must be completed and approved. The drop-off location must be within the child's home borough. [read more.](#)

Transition from preschool to kindergarten, the Turning

5 Process

The "Turning 5 Process" is a major milestone for you and your child. At this point in the education process, your child will be transitioning from Preschool to Kindergarten. You and your child will have to prepare for a number of changes. Similar to preschool, you will have to attend a meeting with the principal, school staff, and others on the IEP team from the school you have selected to complete the IEP. During this meeting, the decision as to whether your child will attend a community school, specialized school

or one of the [District 75](#) Schools is made. Generally, children with more than one disability listed within the IEP, will be placed in a specialized school within District 75 or a specialized school for blind children or children with multiple disabilities.

After this evaluation, if your child does not qualify under one of the Department of Education classifications as a student who can benefit from Special Education services, your child will be declassified and placed into a general education class. He or she can continue to receive support services as necessary, including any assistive technology that your child may need as listed in the IEP.

If you have any concerns with the decision, you can request a hearing or mediation. As of January 2014, the application process has become easier. Parents can now apply for Kindergarten via an online application through the NYC DOE. [read more.](#)

The Kindergarten Individual Education Program (IEP)

When a child is preparing for Kindergarten, the IEP changes as a result of the classifications process described above. The categories should be listed under the paragraph about the IDEA law. Under IDEA, a child is qualified for Special Education services and supports if they have one or more of the following disabilities:

1. Autism
2. Deafness
3. Deaf-Blindness
4. Emotional Disturbance
5. Hearing Impairment
6. Learning Disability
7. Intellectual Disability
8. Multiple Disabilities
9. Orthopedic Impairment
10. Other Health Impairment
11. Speech or Language Impairment
12. Traumatic Brain Injury
13. Visual Impairment

The new IEP will describe the long- and short-term goals for the child's education and will change accordingly throughout: see the Youth and

Vision Loss School- Age handbook for the details on the K – 12 IEP.

In creating this new Kindergarten IEP, the NYC Department of Education may choose not to perform an evaluation since they are only required every three years. You and your child's new school should have prior progress reports from the preschool for the IEP review and only reevaluate if necessary. If you would like your child to have a new evaluation, you can request one by writing to the [Committee on Special Education](#). You will be allotted one new evaluation per year. Should you disagree with the Department of Education's evaluation, you can request that they pay for an independent evaluation or, you can pay for a private evaluation. If you request an Independent evaluation, you can send a written request to the DOE representative in charge of your child's transition or the CSE chairperson. The DOE can accept the request and pay for another evaluation or they can deny the request. If the DOE rejects the request, they will request an impartial hearing to prove their findings were appropriate. If the request is accepted by the DOE, you will receive an authorization form with an approved dollar amount. It then becomes your responsibility to find an evaluator to assess your child. You are required to share the results with the NYC Department of Education. Finally, private evaluations can be arranged and paid for by the parent. These results do not have to be shared with the NYC Department of Education. However, if you choose to share them with the NYC DOE, they must consider these results but they are not required to solely use the results.

Kindergarten Placement – What You Need to Know

The placement process for kindergarten depends on whether your child's kindergarten IEP recommends a community school program, special school for blind children or children with multiple disabilities, or a specialized school (District 75) program.

As a result of the Department of Education's special education reform, all community (zoned/neighborhood) schools are expected to serve the vast majority of students with disabilities. Parents of all students entering kindergarten, *including parents of students with disabilities*, should participate in the Kindergarten Admissions Process to reserve a seat in a community school. Families are encouraged to visit and apply to all schools of interest including zoned and non-zoned schools. If your child's kindergarten IEP recommends a community school program (e.g., general

education, Integrated Co-Teaching (ICT) classroom, or special class in a *community school*), your child's placement will most likely be the school that admits your child through the Kindergarten Admissions Process.

If you do not participate in the Kindergarten Admissions Process, your child will most likely be placed in his/her zoned school or in another school in your district. Your child will *not* receive a school placement based on the type of class recommended on your child's IEP because all community schools are expected to serve their zoned students and any non-zoned students admitted through the Kindergarten Admissions Process except for students recommended for specialized programs in community schools (like the ASD Nest/Horizon programs, bilingual programs, or wheelchair accessible programs) and specialized school (District 75) programs or special school for blind children. If the school that admits your child says that it cannot implement your child's kindergarten IEP (e.g., does not plan to have the class or services recommended), the school should schedule a meeting with you in the spring before your child is to start kindergarten to discuss whether or not it can offer a different set of *appropriate* classes/services that meet your child's needs. If the school states that it cannot implement your child's IEP, you should contact the school's [Children First Network](#) (CFN).

If you are certain that your child will need to be in a class in a specialized school (District 75) or special school for blind children because of her or his significant needs, you may decide not to participate in the Kindergarten Admissions Process. If you are not certain, you may want to participate in the [Kindergarten Admissions](#) process to ensure that you have a choice in your child's placement.

If your child's kindergarten IEP recommends a special class within District 75, the DOE will send you a letter with the school selected for your child. The placement will be based on the type of class recommended on your child's kindergarten IEP. You may provide preferred schools during the IEP meeting, and the DOE representative should submit your preferences to the placement officer: [read more](#).

To view a list of NYS approved Private, Special Act, State-Operated and State- Supported Schools in New York State visit:

<http://www.p12.nysed.gov/specialed/privateschools/home.html>

Assistive Technology (AT)

Assistive technology refers to any tool that allows an individual to function beyond his or her limits. Singers use microphones to project their voices throughout a theater because their unassisted voice would be strained or may not reach to the last row. People who use glasses are using assistive technology to enhance their vision. Babies push a box out in front to facilitate their inability to balance so this is a low-tech device. People with low vision or no vision have been using assistive technology (AT) as soon as it is invented to access what they cannot see. New and improved AT is constantly being introduced in this modern fast paced world of technology.

It is important to consider both old and new tools. AT is generally grouped as “low tech” and “high tech.” But in all cases, the tools listed below are meant to help your child with vision loss achieve his/her goals, both personal and academic.

Low Tech

These are typically not computer-related and are meant to help blind and visually impaired children write, take notes, and read books and other hard copy documents. These include slates, styluses and braille writers (if braille is part of the child’s reading tool kit). They also include hand magnifiers, 20/20 pens (for thicker lines when writing), and standard digital voice recorders. Also included are tactual and/or large print lettering on items, high contrast (black on white) and audio such as a talking watch or talking timer.

High Tech

These tools make use of digital technology. They can include a wide variety of battery operated and/or plug in devices such as computers, mobile devices, smart phones, and tablets (including commercial off the shelf and proprietary, made specifically for blind note-takers). Additionally, for inaccessible mainstream devices there are many hardware and software add-ons that change the devices into accessible high tech. Some of the technologies are speech output, screen- magnification, refreshable braille displays and braille embossers, Optical Character Recognition (OCR) or scanning technology, and video magnifiers.

The majority of people who are blind or have some level of vision loss use technology to mitigate their vision loss and enhance their ability to function as well as their sighted peers. Learning about the technology will serve you well as a parent because your child will be learning and using

technology in one form or another throughout her or his life. The American Foundation for the Blind offers a free on-line publication entitled [Access World](#) that reviews and evaluates technology and provides information on the newest and most up to date items.

AFB also provides a guide to buying toys especially useful for children with vision loss www.afb.org. Children with disabilities, like all children, want the newest, fastest and most popular gadgets and toys.

- Understand the functionality of the devices you are considering.
- Plan on learning how to assist your child with a new device before they begin using it.
- ***Technology is fun so learn and embrace it along with your child, as it can be the tool for their success.***

While your child is in school, it is the job of the TVI to evaluate him or her for assistive technology. The student should have her or his tech needs met through the Department of Education (DOE) and/or their special school. It is important to make sure that assistive tech is clearly stated on the IEP. Make sure that any recommendations made by the TVI, including parent training, are added to that document. Talk with them about exactly how your child will be using technology and be sure that the technology can travel home with your child.

Additional Services and Resources

Although we have done our due diligence to provide the latest information and resources available, we cannot guarantee the accuracy of the information.

Therefore, whenever possible, we have made every attempt to include a webpage or URL address providing you with access to the source of the information. As you find updated or more accurate information, please let us know so that we can update the handbook. -

Government Agencies:

Below are Government agencies that provide the funding for the community services.

New York State Commission for the Blind (NYSCB)

www.ocfs.state.ny.us/main/cbvh/

- **Manhattan**
80 Maiden Lane 23rd
Floor New York, NY
10038 Telephone: 212-
825-5710
Serves: Bronx, Brooklyn, Manhattan, Staten Island (VR only)

- **Hempstead**
50 Clinton Street, Suite 208
Hempstead, NY 11550
Telephone: 516-564-4311
Fax: 516-292-7448
Serves: Nassau, Suffolk, Queens (VR and Independent Living Only)

- **Harlem**
163 West 125th Street, Room 209
New York, NY 10027
Telephone: 212-961-
4440
Serves: Manhattan and the Bronx

- **Queens
Outstation**
Telephone: 718-557-8871

Department of Labor (DOL)

<http://www.labor.ny.gov/home/>

New York City Department of Health (NYCDOH): www.nyc.gov/health

New York City Department of Education (NYCDOE):

<http://schools.nyc.gov/default.htm>

New York State Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS)

<http://ocfs.ny.gov/main/default.asp>

New York State Office of Mental Health (OMH)

Customer Relations toll-free at 1-800- 597-8481 or visit
<http://www.omh.ny.gov/index.html>.

**New York State Office for People with Developmental Disabilities
(OPWDD)**

<http://www.opwdd.ny.gov/>

Social Security Administration (SSA)

<http://www.ssa.gov/>

1-800-772-1213 (TTY 1-800-325-0778)

www.socialsecurity.gov

http://www.ssa.gov/disability/disability_starter_kits_child_eng.htm

NYC Vision Rehabilitation Service Providers

**Catholic Guild for the
Blind** 1011 First Avenue,
6th Floor New York, NY
10022

T: 212-371-1011

<http://www.archny.org/departments/index.cfm?i=895>

Helen Keller Services for the Blind

57 Willoughby Street
Brooklyn, NY 11201

T: 718-522-2122

F: 718-935-9463

E-Mail: info@helenkeller.org

<http://www.helenkeller.org>

Lighthouse Guild International

15 West 65th
Street New York,

NY 10023 T:
212-769-6200
Toll Free: 800-284-4422
info@guildhealth.org

VISIONS/ Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired

500 Greenwich St., 3rd
Flr. New York, NY
10013
T: 212-625-1616
Toll Free: 888-245-8333
F: 212-219-4078
E-Mail:
info@visionsvc.org
www.visionsvc.org
www.blindline.org

NYC Youth and Vision Loss Coalition
Attendees/Supporters

American Council of the Blind of New York
(ACBNY) 104 Tilrose Avenue
Malverne, NY 11565
800-522-3303
www.acbny.org

Art Beyond Sight/ Education for the Blind
589 Broadway, 3rd Floor
New York, NY 10012 212-334-
8720
www.artbeyondsight.org

Brooklyn Center for Independence of the Disabled (BCID)
27 Smith Street, 2nd Floor
Brooklyn, NY 11201
718-998-3000

www.bcid.org

Bronx Independent Living Services
4419 Third Avenue
Bronx, NY 10457
718-515-2800

www.bils.org

Catholic Guild for the Blind
1011 First Avenue, 6th Floor
New York, NY 10022
212-371-1011

www.catholiccharitiesny.org

Children's Vision Coalition
119 Washington Ave, 2nd Floor
Albany, NY 12210
877-672-2020

www.cvcny.ny

City Access New York
1207 Castleton Avenue
Staten Island, NY 10310
718-285-6548

www.cityaccessny.org

Dominican College
470 Western Hwy
Orangeburg, NY 10962
845-359-7800

www.dc.edu

Harlem Independent Living Center
289 St. Nicholas Avenue, Suite 21

New York, NY 10027
212-222-7122
www.hilc.org

Helen Keller International
352 Park Avenue, 12th Floor
New York, NY 10010
212-532-0544
www.hki.org

Helen Keller Services for the Blind
57 Willoughby Street
Brooklyn, NY 11201
718-522-2122
www.helenkeller.org

Hunter College
695 Park Avenue
New York, NY 10065 212-772-
4000
www.hunter.cuny.edu

IncludeNYC
116 E. 16th Street, 5th Floor
New York, NY 10003
212-677-4650
www.includenyc.org

JP Morgan Chase
277 Park Avenue
New York, NY 10017 212-270-
6000
www.jpmorganchase.com

Lavelle Fund for the Blind
307 West 38th Street, Suite 2010

New York, NY 10018
www.lavellefund.org

Lavelle School for the Blind
3830 Paulding Avenue
Bronx, NY 10469
www.lavelleschool.org

Metropolitan Museum of Art
1000 5th Avenue
New York, NY 10028 212-535-
7710
www.metmuseum.org

Modest Community Services
88 New Dorp Plaza, Suite 306
Staten Island, NY 10306
718-516-5444
www.modestservices.org

National Federation of the Blind New York (NFBNY)
471 63rd Street
Brooklyn, NY 11220
718-567-7821
www.nfbny.org

New York Deaf Blind Collaborative (NYDBC)
Queens College
65-30 Kissena Blvd, KP 325
Queens, NY 11565
718-997-4856
www.qc.cuny.edu

NY Institute for Special Education
999 Pelham Pkwy

Bronx, NY 10469
718-519-7000
www.nyise.org

Parents of Blind Children of NY
(POBCNY)
471 63rd Street
Brooklyn, NY 11220
718-567-7821
www.Pobcny.blogspot.com

Parent to Parent NY, Inc.
S.I. Special Education Parent Center
Institute for Basic Research
1050 Forest Hill Road
Staten Island, NY 10314
718-494-4872
Fax: 718-494-4805
www.parenttoparentnyinc.org

Readers Digest Partners for Sight
100 South Bedford Road
Mount Kisco, NY 10549 800-
877-5293
www.partnersforsight.org

SUNY College of Optometry
33 W. 42nd Street
New York, NY 10036 212-938-
4000
www.sunyopt.edu

The New York Community Trust
909 3rd Avenue

New York, NY 10022 212-686-0010

www.nycommunitytrust.org

VISIONS/ Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired

500 Greenwich St., 3rd Flr.

New York, NY 10013 212-

625-1616

www.visionsvcb.org