

What Is MTSS?

Your child's school mentioned MTSS, tiers, or interventions. Here's what that actually means — and what it doesn't.

The short version

MTSS stands for **Multi-Tiered System of Supports**. It's how a school notices when a student needs more help, gives that help, and checks whether it's working.

That's it. It isn't a program your child was placed in. It's how the whole school is organized.

The three tiers

Tier 1 — every student. The regular classroom instruction all children receive. Most students do well with Tier 1 alone.

Tier 2 — some students. Extra practice in a specific skill, usually in a small group, a few times a week, on top of regular instruction — not instead of it.

Tier 3 — a few students. More intensive, often one-on-one or in a very small group, for students who need more than Tier 2 provides.

A student can move between tiers in either direction. That's the system working.

MTSS isn't only about reading and math

Schools use the same tiered approach for three kinds of support:

Academic. Reading, writing, or math — a specific skill, practiced with a specific method.

Behavior. Following routines, staying regulated, handling conflict. Often a brief daily check-in with a trusted adult, or a simple goal sheet.

Social-emotional. Anxiety, friendships, coping, confidence. Usually short-term work with a counselor, one-on-one or in a small group.

Your child might receive support in one area or more than one, and support in one area doesn't imply anything about the others.

Behavior support at Tier 2 is support, not discipline. If your child is in a behavior intervention, the school is teaching a skill — not managing a consequence.

IF YOUR CHILD IS RECEIVING TIER 2 OR TIER 3 SUPPORT

It means the school spotted something specific and decided to act early rather than wait. It is **not**:

- ✗ Special education, or a step toward it
- ✗ A diagnosis or a label
- ✗ Something that goes on a permanent record
- ✗ A judgment about your child's ability

Most students who receive Tier 2 support return to Tier 1.

What to expect from the school

The school should tell you **before** support begins, not after. There should be a specific goal, written in numbers. Someone measures progress regularly — often weekly. The team reviews that data on a set schedule and decides whether to continue, adjust, or stop. And you should hear about plan changes before they happen.

If any of that isn't happening, it's reasonable to ask why.

Questions worth asking at your child's meeting

- ? What specific skill are we working on?

? What's the goal, and by when?

? How often, and for how long?

? Who is delivering the support?
- ? How will you measure whether it's working?

? When will we look at the data again?

? What happens if it isn't working?

? What can I do at home that would actually help?

You don't need all eight. The last one is the most useful.

What helps at home

Ask the school what the intervention targets, then ask what supports that specific skill. Generic advice — read more, practice math facts — may not match what your child is actually working on.

Keep the routine steady. Attendance matters more than almost anything else. And tell your child what's happening in plain terms: they're getting extra practice in one thing, and it's temporary.

ONE LAST THING

Being in Tier 2 doesn't mean your child is behind forever. It means someone noticed early. That's the point of the whole system.

QUESTIONS ABOUT YOUR CHILD'S SUPPORT?

Contact _____ at _____

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