

Disability Campaign.org

An Overview of Early Intervention Services



If your child has just been diagnosed with a disability, it can be overwhelming to know how best to help your little one. But you don't have to do it all on your own. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act requires that every U.S. state and territory provide special needs families with "Early Intervention." It's a system of services that helps babies and toddlers with developmental delays. Depending on the child's needs, Early Intervention can include assistive technology, preschool special education, or physical therapy — sometimes free of charge. Not only can Early Intervention help ensure your child is meeting developmental milestones, but it can also connect you with other special needs parents. In this resource we'll go over a general overview of Early Intervention: what it is and how it works to help meet the needs of your child affected by a disability.

What is Early Intervention?

Early Intervention is a system of services provided under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) — Part C. These services help young children who have disabilities, developmental delays, or certain health conditions — helping them meet developmental milestones and ultimately increase their chances for success in school and beyond. Parents and families of children who qualify may also receive services for help and support.

Because these are government services protected under national law, every state and territory are required to provide these services through their own program. Each state obtains grants from the federal government, meaning your child may qualify to receive these services free of charge or at a low cost.

What children or families are eligible for Early Intervention?

Generally, Early Intervention services are available for children from birth to age 3 who have:

- ✓ A developmental delay, meaning your child is not developing like other children when it comes to his or her fine motor, language, social, or thinking skills (for example).
- ✓ A specific health condition that will likely result in a developmental delay — such as a birth defect, genetic disorder, or speech disorder.



While all states are mandated to provide Early Intervention services, the definition of “developmental delays” varies from state to state. To determine how your state defines “developmental delays,” visit the [National Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center \(NECTA Center\)](#) website.

Some states also provide Early Intervention services to families whose children who are *at risk* for developing developmental delays, such as babies with low birth weight or drug exposure while in the womb.

If you are concerned about your child's development, talk to your pediatrician or family medicine doctor. He or she may recommend Early Intervention and request that your family receive a **free evaluation** to determine eligibility. The evaluation is non-invasive: it's just a simple look at your child's basic skills.



If you qualify for these services, a team from your state's Early Intervention program will develop and provide you with an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP), which outlines the developmental goals and types of services your child will receive. It also outlines how and when these services will be provided. The IFSP is designed around your family's unique needs, and is thus developed with the entire family in mind.

Once you start the Early Intervention process and are provided with an IFSP, you will end up with lots of paperwork. It's important to keep records of these documents. Many parents find it helpful to keep a large binder to organize meetings notes, progress reports, and the IFSP.

Types of services provided

The services your child or family will receive depend on your child's specific needs and can be provided in the home, at a medical facility, or in the community. The developmental skills that will be targeted may include:



- Cognitive skills (thinking, learning, problem solving, etc.)
- Communication skills (listening, talking, understanding, etc.)
- Physical skills (crawling, walking, reaching, etc.)
- Self-help or adaptive skills (eating, dressing, etc.)
- Sensory processing skills (adapting to different textures, sounds, smells, etc.)
- Social or emotional skills (playing, feeling safe/secure, interacting with others, etc.)

Your state will connect you with a service coordinator. He or she will help you coordinate appointments with Early Intervention services. These services may include:

- A thorough assessment and screening of developmental milestones
- Access to a social worker
- Home visits
- Medical or nutritional services
- Hearing or vision services
- Speech or language therapy
- Physical or occupational therapy
- Psychological treatment
- Transportation to medical appointments



How long do these services last?

These services are for children who range from birth to age 3 and will be made available to your family during those years so long as your child needs them. But that doesn't mean the help ends at age 3. If needed, many states extend Early Intervention services beyond the third birthday. Also, if your child is over the age of 3 and you are just starting to notice possible developmental delays, you can still receive help. Just make sure to talk to your family doctor or



pediatrician to ensure your child can be evaluated. Given your child's age, that help will no longer be "Early Intervention" services, but rather special education services as mandated by IDEA. If your child is nearing age 3, your services coordinator will schedule an appointment for you and your Early Intervention team to meet and discuss the transition.

Next steps ...

Now that you have a general understanding of what Early Intervention is, who qualifies for it, and for how long these services are provided, the next step is to connect with your local Early Intervention program. You can do so by:

- Asking your child's pediatrician for a referral
- Contacting a pediatrics branch at a nearby hospital
- Visiting the Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center (ECTA Center) [contact-us page](#) for the contact information of your local Early Intervention services coordinator.



Helpful Websites

The National Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center

Definitions of Developmental Delay and Eligibility Requirements by State

http://www.nectac.org/~pdfs/topics/earlyid/partc_elig_table.pdf

The Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center

Contact information for your state's Early Assistance services coordinator

<http://ectacenter.org/contact/ptccoord.asp>

The Center for Parent Information and Resources

A thorough overview of Early Intervention (Also available in Spanish)

<http://www.parentcenterhub.org/ei-overview/>

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P.O. Box 3333, Agoura Hills, CA 91376

www.joniandfriends.org