



NASET's Parent Teacher Conference Handout

What is Early Intervention?

Introduction

It is crucial to assist parents in understanding what services are available if they have developmental concerns about their child ages birth to three. Early intervention services are designed to address the developmental needs of eligible infants and toddlers with disabilities, ages birth to the third birthday, and their families. Early intervention is authorized by Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

Early intervention is a system of services that *helps babies and toddlers with developmental delays or disabilities*. Early intervention focuses on helping eligible babies and toddlers learn the basic and brand-new skills that typically develop during the first three years of life, such as:

- *physical* (reaching, rolling, crawling, and walking);
- *cognitive* (thinking, learning, solving problems);
- *communication* (talking, listening, understanding);
- *social/emotional* (playing, feeling secure and happy); and
- *self-help* (eating, dressing).

Examples of early intervention services | If an infant or toddler has a disability or a developmental delay in one or more of these developmental areas, that child will likely be eligible for early intervention services. Those services will be tailored to meet the child's individual needs and may include:

- Assistive technology (devices a child might need)

- Audiology or hearing services
- Speech and language services
- Counseling and training for a family
- Medical services
- Nursing services
- Nutrition services
- Occupational therapy
- Physical therapy
- Psychological services

Services may also be provided to address the **needs and priorities of the child's family**.

Family-directed services are meant to help family members understand the special needs of their child and how to enhance his or her development.

Authorized by law | Early intervention is available in every state and territory of the United States. The [Individuals with Disabilities Education Act](#) (IDEA) requires it—Part C of IDEA, to be precise. That's why you'll sometimes hear early intervention referred to as **Part C**.

Who's eligible for early intervention?

Early intervention is intended for infants and toddlers who have a **developmental delay or disability**. Eligibility is determined by evaluating the child (with parents' consent) to see if the little one does, in fact, have a delay in development or a disability. Eligible children can receive early intervention services from birth through the third birthday (and sometimes beyond).

For some children, from birth | Sometimes it is known from the moment a child is born that early intervention services will be essential in helping the child grow and develop. Often this is so for children who are diagnosed at birth with a specific condition or who experience significant prematurity, very low birth weight, illness, or surgery soon after being born. Even before heading home from the hospital, this child's parents may be given a **referral** to their local early intervention office.

For others, because of delays in development | Some children have a relatively routine entry into the world, but may develop more slowly than others, experience set backs, or develop in

ways that seem very different from other children. For these children, a visit with a developmental pediatrician and a thorough evaluation may lead to an early intervention referral.

Parents don't have to wait for a referral to early intervention, however. If you're concerned about your child's development, you may contact your local program directly and ask to have your child evaluated. That evaluation is provided free of charge. If you're not sure how to locate the early intervention program in your community—keep reading. We give that information a bit further down the page.

However, a child comes to be referred, evaluated, and determined eligible, early intervention services provide vital support so that children with developmental needs can thrive and grow.