

Early Intervention Services

Basic Information for Parents

The birth of a child is an exciting, life-changing event. A beautiful new baby comes to your house, family, and neighborhood. It is a time for joy and celebration. Family members look at the new child and wonder: Will he be a football star, will she be a famous musician, will he discover the cure for cancer, will she become President of the United States!

But what happens when this new child has a disability? What if there are health problems? What if there are questions about the special needs this child may have? What happens now, and who can help?

In fact, there are many supports for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers with disabilities. If you are concerned about your child's development or suspect that your child may have special needs, this Parent Conference Handout can help. It's designed to help you get started learning what your child may need and finding professionals and other families who can help along the way.

Emotional support is, of course, also important. Finding the resources in your community is a first step to building up family strength and to helping you become confident in your ability to provide for your special child's needs. The professionals and families you contact will introduce you to many possibilities.

Part A. Early Intervention Services (Children Birth Through Two Years Old)

"Babies are such a nice way to start people." —Don Herald

What are early intervention services?

Broadly speaking, early intervention services are special services for eligible infants and toddlers and their families. These services are designed to identify and meet children's needs in five developmental areas. These areas are:

- physical development
- cognitive development
- communication
- social or emotional development
- adaptive development

Early intervention services are an effective way to address the needs of infants and toddlers who have developmental delays or disabilities. The services are made available through a federal law known as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). IDEA provides states and territories with specific requirements for providing early intervention services to infants and

toddlers with special needs. In turn, each state and territory develops its own policies for carrying out IDEA and its requirements.

Under IDEA, a complete evaluation of the child is necessary to decide whether he or she is eligible for early intervention services.

My child seems to be developing much slower than other children. Would he/she be eligible for early intervention services?

It is possible that your child may be eligible for early intervention, but more investigation is necessary to determine that. Some children develop more slowly than others or develop in ways that seem different from other children. This can cause parents to worry. If you think that your child is not developing at the same pace or in the same way as most children his or her age, it is often a good idea to talk first to your child's pediatrician. Explain your concerns. Tell the doctor what you have observed with your child. Your child may have a disability or what is known as a developmental delay, or he or she may be at risk of having a disability or delay.

Developmental delay is a term that means an infant or child is developing slower than normal in one or more areas. For example, he or she may not be sitting up (or walking or talking) when most children of that age are. The term at risk means that a child's development may be delayed unless he or she receives early intervention services.

IDEA describes broadly who is eligible for early intervention services. This includes a child with a diagnosed physical or mental condition with a high probability of resulting in developmental delay. It also includes a child experiencing a developmental delay. At the State's discretion, at-risk infants and toddlers may also be eligible for services.

So, if you are concerned about your child's development, you will need to have your child evaluated to find out if he or she is eligible for early intervention services. This evaluation is provided at no cost to you. There are many people who can help you with this.

Where do I go for help?

There are a number of ways you can find help for your child. Since you are reading this Parent Conference Handout, we recommend that you either contact your state education department, department of social services located in your county or call NICHCY (1.800.695.0285) to find a local agency to assist you with your concerns.

How else might you find out about early intervention services in your community? Here are two ways:

- Ask your child's pediatrician to put you in touch with the early intervention system in your community or region
- Contact the Pediatrics branch in a local hospital and ask where you should call to find out about early intervention services in your area

It is very important to write down the names and phone numbers of everyone you talk to. You can use the following sample:

Sample Record-keeping Worksheet
Problem/Topic:
Name of person or agency you talked to: Name of your contact person (may be same as above):
Date you called: Phone #
Results of discussion:
Action taken (if any):
Person not helpful on this topic, but may be helpful regarding (list topics/areas/issues):

Having this information available will be helpful to you later on.

What do I say to the early intervention contact person?

Explain that you are concerned about your child's development. Say that you think your child may need early intervention services. Explain that you would like to have your child evaluated under IDEA. Write down any information the contact person gives you.

The person may refer you to what is known as Child Find. One of Child Find's purposes is to identify children who need early intervention services. Child Find operates in every state and conducts screenings to identify children who may need early intervention services. These screenings are provided free of charge.

Each state has one agency that is in charge of the early intervention system for infants and toddlers with special needs. This agency is known as the lead agency. It may be the state education agency or another agency, such as the health department. Each state decides which agency will serve as the lead agency.