**American Academy of Pediatrics**

**FAMILY** HANDOUTS Autism

# Early Intervention Services

## Why might early intervention (EI) help?

Children learn by watching, imitating, and playing with others. Young children with signs of autism spectrum disorder (ASD) often do not have some of these skills, and they need to learn them. The goal of early intervention (EI) is to help young children gain skills and to teach families some specific ways to meet their child's needs. It is important to get help for your child as soon as possible. The earlier a child begins EI, the better the outcome can be.

## What is the EI Program?

The EI Program for Infants and Toddlers with Disabilities (Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) is a federal grant program for states. Early intervention services are for children with disabilities from birth until their third birthday, as well as for their families. Early intervention services are also available for military families living abroad and for residents of US territories.

## How can I find out if my child can receive EI services?

All states have an EI program. There is a difference between diagnosis and eligibility. Your child does not need a diagnosis of a developmental delay or ASD to qualify for EI services. However, in some states you may have access to special services if your child is diagnosed with ASD. Eligibility is different from state to state, because states define developmental delay in different ways. As a result, states also give different services to children. What your state calls a developmental delay will decide which EI services, if any, your child can receive. For example, in some states, children at risk for delays because of a medical diagnosis may be eligible for intervention even before delays appear. You should contact your child's pediatrician, state health department, or local school district to get phone numbers for your state's EI program to see if your child is eligible. The **National Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center** has a list of EI program coordinators for each state. You can find this list at www.nectac.org.

## Who can refer a child for EI services?

Anyone, including a doctor, parent, or child care provider, can refer a child for EI services. Referrals can be made without a diagnosis. This means the person referring does not have to know the reason for your child's developmental difficulties, just see that there is an issue. Your state's EI program will evaluate or test your child for free to find out if your child qualifies for the program.

## What services are provided through an EI program?

A team of several types of specialists will test your child to find out what services are needed. The team will write an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) to help work toward the best outcomes. The state EI program will also assign a service coordinator to work with your family to help coordinate services. When possible, your child will receive services in a place your child knows, such as home or child care.

## What is an Individualized Family Service Plan?

An IFSP guides EI for children with disabilities and their families. It explains the services needed to improve a child's development and to help the family support that growth. Throughout the IFSP process, family members and service providers should work as a team. They should plan, carry out, and assess services to meet the child's and family's needs.

An IFSP must include

- The child's current developmental levels
- Family strengths and needs
- Ways to improve the child's development
- Key outcomes expected
- Specific services that the child and family will receive
- Goal dates for starting and ending services
- Name of the service coordinator in charge of helping the family carry out the plan

## What is an Individualized Family Service Plan? (*continued*)

- Steps to help the child and family with changing over to school services at age 3 years. This is only if the child still has developmental needs requiring preschool therapy or instruction (ie, transitioning)

## Do I have to pay for EI services?

Payment for EI services varies by state. Some states give services at no charge to parents or caregivers. Other states bill insurance or charge for services depending on the family's income. Some services will be given even if a family cannot pay. All states must give at least some services free of charge, including

- Looking for (screening) young children who have developmental and behavioral problems
- Testing children in areas of concern to see what services should be given
- Coordinating services
- Making, reviewing, and evaluating the IFSP

## Resources

American Academy of Pediatrics Committee on Children With Disabilities. The pediatrician's role in development and implementation of an Individual Education Plan (IEP) and/or an Individual Family Service Plan (IFSP). *Pediatrics.* 1999; 104(1, pt 1):124–127

American Academy of Pediatrics HealthyChildren.org:
**www.HealthyChildren.org**

National Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center:
**www.nectac.org**

Parent Advocacy Coalition for Educational Rights Center:
**www.pacer.org**

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