

The goal of Early Intervention is to provide quality early support and services to enhance the capacity of families to meet the developmental and health-related needs of children birth to age three who have delays or disabilities. Early Intervention can help young children acquire the skills they need to grow into happy and healthy members of the community.

How can a child and family become involved with Early Intervention?

Just as how a primary care physician connects a patient to a specialist, a physician can also give information to a family about Early Intervention Services and assist them in making a referral. The process is simple, because anyone—physicians, caregivers, teachers, parents, and friends—can make a referral, with the family’s consent. The referral phone numbers can be found on our Web site at http://www.firstsigns.org/pages/referral_process/early_intervention_a.html.

What happens at the time of a referral call?

Although this may vary from state to state, typically a service coordinator will obtain basic information about the child and describe the Early Intervention Services and resources available to children and their families. The service coordinators will work with the family to determine whether a multidisciplinary evaluation of the child’s developmental levels is needed. This evaluation will focus on specific developmental skills, including cognitive, language, motor, social, emotional, behavioral, and self-help. Evaluation and assessment services are provided at public expense with no cost to parents.

What services are provided?

Although this can vary from state to state, a network of professionals may offer services including: screening and assessment; family training, counseling, and home visits; speech therapy; occupational therapy; psychological services; audiology services; vision services; social work services; and transportation. In some states, they are provided at no cost to the family. And in some states, they are provided at minimal cost.

Following the evaluation and assessment, an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) will be developed if the child is eligible for Early Intervention Services. This plan will describe the services that are needed by the child and family and how they will be provided. Early Intervention Services are designed to use developmentally appropriate activities in natural learning environments that meet children’s changing needs and promote functional skills, development, and learning. Some examples of Early Intervention Services include occupational therapy, physical therapy, speech and language therapy, special instruction, nutritional services, and family training.

As the child approaches three years of age, the Early Intervention Service coordinator will assist children and families with the transition from Early Intervention to a preschool program and/or other support services that the child and family may need.

Where and how are services provided?

An Early Intervention team, consisting of early childhood professionals from public and private agencies, serves the child and family in natural environments (i.e., settings that are most comfortable and convenient for the family). These environments may include the family’s home, childcare settings, play

groups, or local community activities. Serving children in natural environments helps them to participate more easily in their everyday activities and with their peers.

The frequency of services is determined by outcome goals that are developed by the team, which is led by the family. Every effort is made to communicate with families in their chosen language.

Who pays for Early Intervention?

Federal law requires that specific services be provided at public expense to children and families who are eligible. These include:

- Child Find/Referral
- Evaluation/Assessment
- Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) Development and Review
- Procedural Safeguards (Family Rights)
- Service Coordination

Depending upon the state in which the family resides, the family may have to assume some, all, or none of the costs for other Early Intervention Services, depending on the resources available and the parents’ ability to pay. Medicaid or private insurance may be accessed as payment sources.

Whom should I contact?

For a state listing of Early Intervention programs, please see our Web site at www.firstsigns.org. For more information on the Early Intervention Program for Infants and Toddlers with Disabilities, check out the National Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center (NECTAC) Web site at www.nectac.org.