



Your Role in Your Child's Early Intervention Team

CADRE, The National Center for Dispute Resolution



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What is Early Intervention?

Early intervention is a federal grant program under Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act [IDEA]. Early intervention is designed to assist families of children from birth until age three with developmental concerns. Early intervention programs in each state determine whether children meet the state's eligibility requirements to receive services. Programs assign early intervention service coordinator as liaisons between the service providers and families of children eligible for services. Program staff, service coordinators, and families work together to determine what the child and family needs and identify services to meet those needs.

Early Intervention: An Unexpected Journey

As a family member whose child participates in early intervention services, you are meeting people offering support, conducting evaluations, assessing needs, and recommending services for your child and family. This resource explains your role as a member of the early intervention team. Positive working relationships are vital in ensuring the early intervention program meets your child's and family's needs.

Guiding Principles of Early Intervention

Early intervention services:



Are family-centered: Your family's priorities for your child are the most important ingredients in creating a unique program for your child and family.



Are provided in natural environments: Services are carried out in the places in the community or home where your child spends most of her time during the day. Incorporating strategies into your child's daily life is best, rather than meeting a setting exclusively for services.



Reflect the culture of the family: Ideas and suggestions include the traditions, customs, and values of your family.



Are written in the language of the family: Reports, recommendations, and outcomes are written in a way that is understandable and makes sense to you.



Developing the Individualized Family Service Plan [IFSP] and Implementing Services

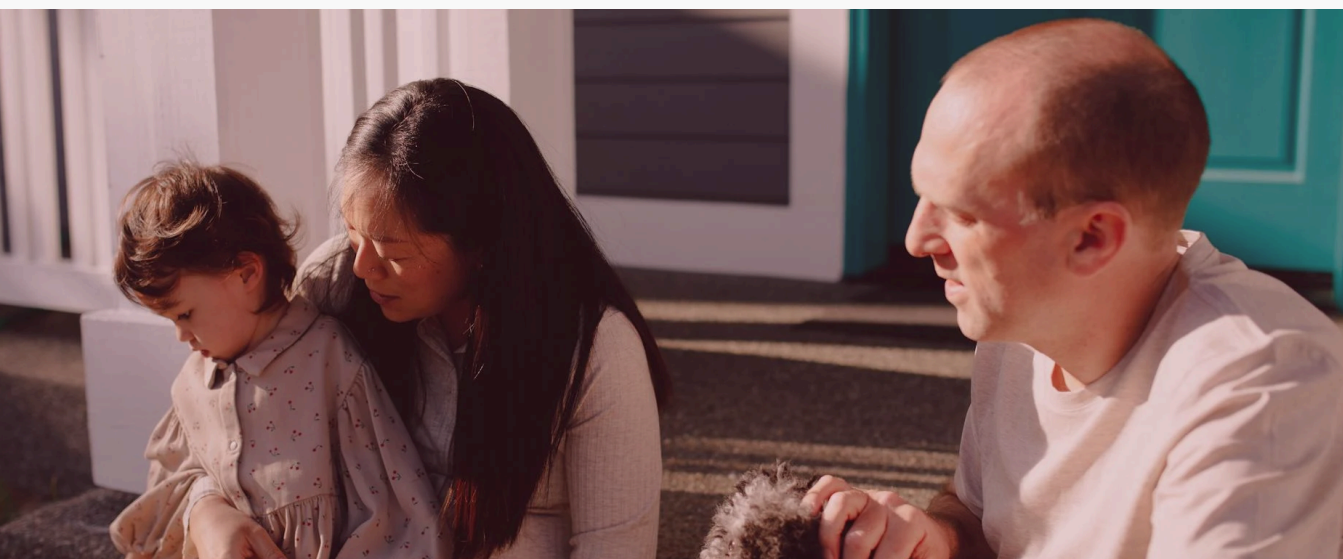
To receive early intervention service, a team must first develop an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP). The team includes service providers, your service coordinator, anyone you want to invite, and you. **You are a critical member of the IFSP team because you know your child best.**

During IFSP team meetings, the team will want to hear your priorities for your child and family. Sharing what and how you want your child to learn and grow is crucial. Although it's tempting to let the professionals make the decisions, the team needs to hear your ideas, concerns, and questions. **Early intervention places you and your family at the center of decision making and your input is an essential part of the process.**

After developing the IFSP and giving your written consent, early interventionists will provide the services on the IFSP to which you agreed. Service providers will meet with you and your child on a scheduled basis in your child's natural environment to provide the agreed-upon services so your child can make progress.

During the sessions with the service providers, there are opportunities to share information, ask questions, and learn more about your child's progress. The service providers will offer specific activities you and your family can do in between sessions. They will be able to address issues you may wish to discuss. **Effective communication is the key to meeting the needs of your child and family.**

An IFSP meeting is not usually held only once. Additional IFSP meetings can be held periodically after the initial IFSP to discuss your child's progress toward achieving the goals identified in the IFSP document and to make any necessary changes.





Tips for Preparing for the IFSP Meeting

Take Notes

Have a place where you can jot down notes or questions that occur to you between meetings and service delivery sessions. It can be easy to forget something when you attend a review with several people; a memory aid will be helpful when you meet.

Clarify

Ask for clarification when needed. Tell staff if they use terms or initials that you do not understand. Make sure they clearly explain what they propose so that you can make informed decisions.

Seek Support

Ask a partner, friend, or advocate to accompany you to the meeting if you want. Another person can listen to and discuss what occurred with you after the meeting. Feel free to take notes during the visits to help you recall valuable information.

Share Expectations

Disclose cultural traditions or expectations that are unique to your family. Which languages are spoken at home? Who will be present for the sessions? How should the service provider address family members? Who should receive information? Are there considerations for how communication will occur during the sessions and who will be involved in decisions?

Speak Up

Know that it is acceptable to ask questions, request additional information, and express unease about your child's IFSP. The team needs to know if you disagree with a proposed course of action or something occurring with your child's program. You can ask for assistance from your state lead agency to resolve disagreements at no cost to you.

Engage in Self-care

Recognize that meetings can be stressful. Talking about your child's development with a new group of people may mention questions that have been concerning you for a long time. Let the team know if you need to take a break during the meeting. Be open about the emotional impact this experience is having on your family. You are not alone.

Remember that this is an individualized family service plan. Ask about resources that can assist your family such as counseling services, parent support groups, and organizations that provide parent education and advocacy. Every parent should be told about their state's Parent Training and Information Center [PTIC].

To find more information, go to: www.parentcenterhub.org.



You are Your Child's Advocate

Early intervention assumes you know your child best and your opinions matter. As a parent, you observe and interact with your child in a variety of settings and situations giving you critical insight into what works and has not worked well in the past. Sharing these experiences and communicating your concerns helps identify priorities that will drive services for your child.



Example 1:

Your son does not use words to communicate. Your top priority is for him to learn how to talk. He may not yet use words to express himself, but you know how to interpret his sounds, gestures, and physical movements. This information is important for the team to learn. You can provide them with examples of what and how he communicates and your interpretation of what he means. You can let the team know that you too want him to develop language skills, but you want to build on the skills he already has. "Developing verbal language skills" may become the priority. In this scenario everyone respects your wishes for your child.

Because of the information you shared, the staff could suggest a system of communication known to work well with other children that starts with gestures and leads to verbal communication. "Pairing gestures with verbal language" may become a strategy included in the IFSP. A special instructor or speech pathologist may be assigned to become the service provider to work with you on achieving this outcome. Speech therapy or special instruction with a specific frequency, duration and intensity may then become the service to meet the priority that you helped identify.



Example 2:

You report that your daughter is a fussy eater. You encourage her to eat healthy foods, but she often refuses the foods you offer. You may be frustrated by her resistance to eating. Your health care provider has given you suggestions, but the problem has continued.

Based on the child's evaluation, the service providers recommend at the IFSP meeting that the development of gross motor skills that lead to walking should be the primary emphasis of your child's IFSP. As your daughter's advocate, you can share your concerns about the recommended priority.

For example, you could say, "I understand why you are recommending that we focus on helping her to learn to walk. I agree that it is important. However, I think right now helping her feed herself is the first goal. How about if we spend the first four to six weeks on feeding and then move on to walking?"



Your input is critical as you work with your IFSP team to identify outcomes for your child.



Tips for Communicating with Service Providers

Work with the service provider to make a plan for the session. For example:

Start with a follow-up from the previous session. Let the service provider know about any accomplishments and challenges you and your child have had since you last met with the provider. You could talk about notes in your journal on what your child has been doing, share items or documentation you have collected, or show a video of an event.

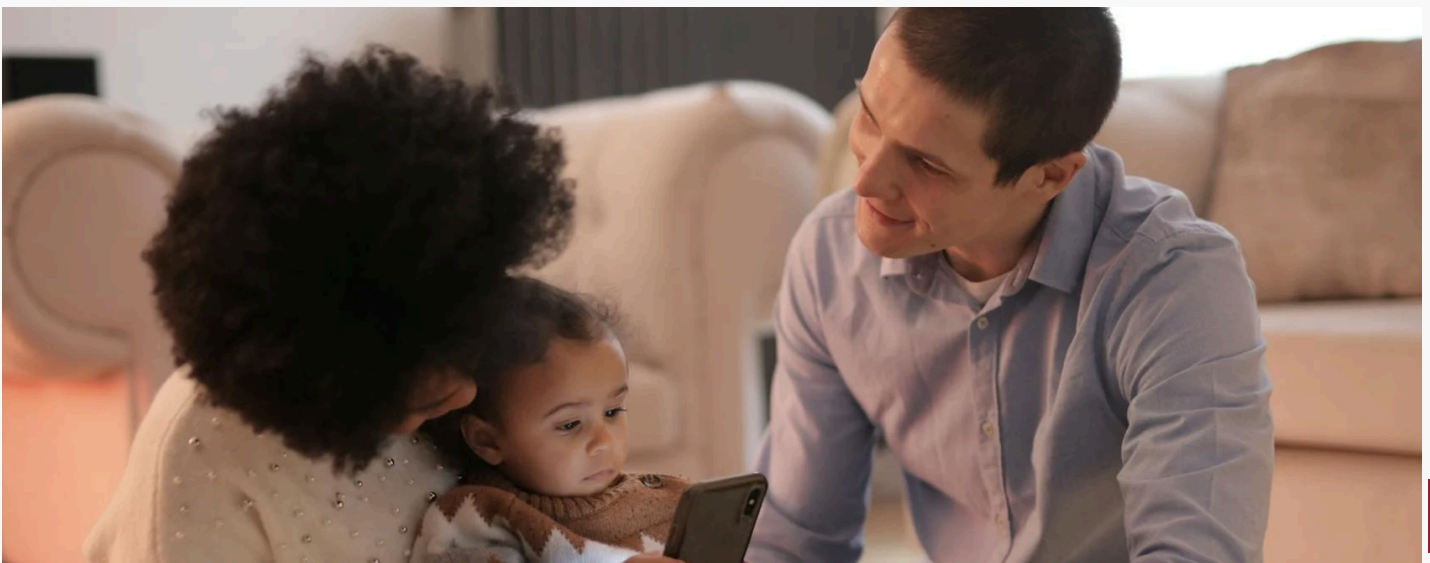
Decide together on the focus for this session.

Brainstorm ideas about continuing the existing strategies and activities or introducing new ones. Determine what daily activities would be helpful to practice the new skills.

Encourage the service provider to demonstrate activities or coach you in how to apply them, if needed.

Summarize your understanding of any recommendations and follow-up activities. Ask questions to make sure you understand the plan.

Clarify how things will be arranged for the next visit.





Providing Services: Conversations with Service Providers

Every time you meet with your service provider offers an opportunity to talk about your child's progress and share any new issues you've identified since the previous session.



Example 1:

During a home visit, the early intervention service provider noted your daughter is having a tough time focusing on adults. While observing her, you both notice she is distracted by the many brightly colored toys in the living room where the sessions are held. The service provider suggests removing some of the toys to reduce the distraction. You respond by saying, **“The toys in the room were not a problem for my older children but I can see that they may be distracting for her. I can put some of the toys in her room or closet and then see if she is more focused when we meet again.”** At the next session you report that you followed the advice and your daughter's attention to adults has improved. You express appreciation for the suggestion by telling the service provider, **“That simple idea really made a big difference in her ability to focus when we're in the living room. Thank you!”**



Everyone appreciates positive feedback.



Example 2:

For the past two months, sessions with the early intervention service provider occurred in the late afternoons. You are not seeing the progress that you had hoped to see at this point and think it could be because your son is tired and less attentive in the afternoons. You would like to change the time for sessions to earlier in the day, hopefully before lunch. Also, you want to explore if different activities might be tried to improve his progress. You may say something like, **“I’m hoping we can talk about Jaime’s progress, and I have some ideas for what might make the sessions more effective. I’ve noticed that he is more attentive and much easier to work with in the mornings. Perhaps we could change his schedule to make the most of his best learning times? Also, I’m wondering if we might explore other activities to help him with using a spoon. I’m not seeing the progress that I was expecting.”**



Final Thoughts

The planning and implementation of services for young children requires creativity and flexibility. The IFSP team can determine priorities, but it is you and your child who guide the process. A strong partnership between family members and service providers is essential to the success of the early intervention journey.



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