

## **Early Intervention Services in New Jersey** **Frequently Asked Questions**

### **What Should You Do If You Think an Infant or Toddler Is Not Growing or Developing as He or She Should?**

Seek help early. The first three years of life are important, formative years in maximizing a child's future potential. If you suspect that an infant or toddler may be experiencing developmental delays, the referral is made by calling the Regional System Point of Entry toll free number at 1-888-653-4463 and following the menu directions based on the county in which the child (or family) lives.

- If the child lives in Essex, Morris, Sussex, Union, or Warren County, please press 1
- If the child lives in Bergen, Hudson, or Passaic County, please press 2
- If the child lives in Atlantic, Burlington, Camden, Cape May, Cumberland, Gloucester, or Salem County, please press 3
- If the child lives in Hunterdon, Mercer, Middlesex, Monmouth, Ocean, or Somerset County - or if you are not sure which county your child lives in, please press 4 (if no selection is made within 10 seconds, the message will repeat one time)
- (if no selection is made after the message is repeated, the incoming call will be transferred to Mid-Jersey CARES REIC)

A service coordinator will talk with the family about their concerns and obtain referral information with family consent. If a developmental evaluation is needed, the service coordinator will work with the family to schedule a multidisciplinary evaluation of the child's developmental levels and needs. Evaluation and assessment services are provided at public expense with no cost to parents.

### **Who Are Primary Referral Sources?**

The Department of Health and Senior Services has established procedures for use by primary referral sources for referring a child. Primary referral sources include: hospitals, physicians, parents, child care programs, local educational agencies, public health facilities, other social service agencies, and other health care providers.

Primary referral sources in New Jersey must:

- Maintain written documentation that supports the parent's permission to refer or the parent's request that a referral not be made;
- Explain the early intervention services which would be available if the referral were made and the consequences of not accessing those services through the referral process, and state that referral does not commit the parent to participate in the early intervention system (parent consent is required for evaluation and assessment); and
- Maintain follow-up contacts with those families who initially request a referral not be made.

### **Who is Eligible?**

In New Jersey, a child is considered eligible for early intervention services if he or she is under the age of three and has at least a 33% delay or a score of at least 2.0 standard deviations below the mean in one functional developmental area or at least a 25% delay or a score of at least 1.5 standard deviations below the mean in two or more of the developmental areas listed below:

- Physical; including gross motor, fine motor, and sensory (vision and hearing)
- Cognitive
- Communication
- Social or emotional
- Adaptive

Eligibility for early intervention services is determined using clinical opinion, parent report, and standardized evaluation/assessment and criterion referenced measures. The percentages listed above for a developmental delay are calculated on the basis of corrected age for infants born before 38 weeks gestation and applying until 24 months of age. Corrected age is based on 40 weeks term. For infants born at or after 38 weeks of gestation there shall be no correction in age.

### **What is an Evaluation?**

An evaluation is the process of gathering information about the child to see how he or she is developing and is used to determine eligibility for early intervention services. The evaluation is conducted by qualified professionals, in conjunction with the family, and provides information in several developmental areas such as communicating, feeding, behavior, walking/movement, vision, and hearing. The evaluation also assists in defining the types and levels of services needed by the child and family. Written parent consent is needed before the evaluation can begin.

### **What are Early Intervention Services?**

Early intervention services are designed to address a problem or delay in development as early as possible. The services are available for infants and toddlers up to age three. Public and private agencies serve as Early Intervention Program providers (EIPs) and arrange for early intervention practitioners to address the needs of eligible children and their families. Following the evaluation and assessment, an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) is developed to describe the services that are needed by the child and family and how they will be implemented. Services are provided by qualified practitioners in natural environments, settings in which children without special needs ordinarily participate and that are most comfortable and convenient for the family such as: home, a community agency, or child care setting.

Early intervention recognizes and respects the important and central role of the family in their child's life. The purpose of early intervention is to promote the child and family's ability to meet developmental outcomes, chosen by the family and outlined in the Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP).

Developmental intervention helps families and early intervention practitioners implement child-focused services through a team approach that facilitates development within natural settings and activities and in the context of meaningful relationships. EIP practitioners, service coordinators, families, and designated community agencies can work together as a team to meet the child and family's needs and support each child's growth and development.

Children eligible for early intervention receive developmental intervention to address developmental delays. They may or may not also be receiving discipline-specific therapy (ies) and family support services. Developmental intervention will be provided at the intensity and frequency determined by the IFSP team, which always includes family members. Discipline-specific therapies and family support services are incorporated into IFSPs based on the child and family's assessment information.

Developmental intervention includes (but is not limited to) these types of activities:

- promoting a positive parent-child relationship as the core of intervention efforts;
- identifying activities and daily routines which can be utilized as learning opportunities for the child;
- working directly with the child and any other persons identified by the family;
- sharing knowledge of child development with families;

- teaching the family to design learning environments and materials to promote the child's acquisition of a variety of skills;
- networking with and providing consultation to community providers and friends that the family chooses;
- monitoring progress toward meeting developmental outcomes; and
- coordinating the intervention activities that are provided within the NJEIS team.

The purpose of discipline-specific therapy is to meet a specific therapy objective which will enhance the child/family's ability to meet a larger developmental outcome that the family has consented to include in the IFSP. The need for discipline-specific therapy is determined by an evaluation or assessment by a therapist from the area of concern. The frequency and intensity of the therapy are determined by the entire IFSP team which considers what is needed to meet the outcomes and how the services will fit into the family's daily routines.

Early intervention practitioners are assigned by the EIP agency based on the knowledge, skills, and expertise needed to meet the developmental outcomes on the IFSP. The IFSP team decides whether the early intervention services will be provided individually, in groups or utilizing a consultative model of intervention.

The IFSP can include one or a combination of any of the following services:

- **Assessment** - Ongoing procedures to identify the child's strengths and developmental needs, as well as the family's concerns, priorities, resources.
- **Assistive Technology** - Provision of equipment, including adaptive assistive devices, which have been designed or altered for special use by children with developmental delays or disabilities.
- **Audiology Services** - Testing of the child's hearing and referral for further services, as needed.
- **Developmental Intervention** - Designing learning activities that promote the child's acquisition of skills in a variety of developmental areas.
- **Family Training and Counseling** - Guidance for the family, such as help from trained personnel in understanding the special needs of the child and enhancing the child's development.
- **Health Services** - Assistance to enable a child to benefit from other early intervention services, including: clean intermittent catheterization, tracheotomy care, tube feeding, the changing of dressings or colostomy collection bags, and consultation with service providers concerning special health care needs.
- **Medical Services** - Diagnostic or evaluation services by a licensed physician to determine a child's developmental status and the need for early intervention services. The early intervention system does not pay for other medical services.
- **Nursing Services** - Assistance to enable a child to benefit from early intervention services, including: health status assessments and nursing care to prevent health problems or to improve functioning.
- **Nutrition** - Individual assessment, development, and monitoring of plans to address the child's nutritional needs.
- **Occupational Therapy** - Services to assist children to learn skills needed for play and daily living; designing and providing assistive devices.
- **Physical Therapy** - Services to identify and help prevent or reduce movement problems.
- **Psychological Services** - Assessment and psychological counseling for children, parents, and family. Consultation on child development, child behavior, parent training, and educational services.

- **Service Coordination** - Assistance in obtaining the services needed by the child and family, providing information about early intervention services, and finding other needed resources in the community.
- **Social Work Services** - Assessment of the child in the home and family environment. Individual and family group counseling and activities to build social skills.
- **Speech/Language Pathology** - Identification, referral, and provision of services to assist children to understand and respond to communication.
- **Transportation** - Transportation services that are necessary to enable a child and family to receive early intervention services.
- **Vision Services** - Evaluation and assessment of vision, referral for medical or other professional services necessary for the habilitation or rehabilitation of visual functions, communication skills training, orientation and mobility training, visual training, independent living skills training, and additional training necessary to activate visual abilities.

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

The IFSP is both a plan and a process. The plan is a written document that identifies the outcomes, services and supports needed for the child and family.

The process is ongoing assessment to gather, share, and exchange information between the family and the early intervention practitioners to help parents make informed choices about early intervention services and other needed services for the child and family.

Following the evaluation and assessment process, the IFSP is developed at a meeting with the family, the service coordinator, at least one member of the evaluation team, and anyone else the family wishes to include. In order for the child to receive services, the parent must consent to the IFSP and can withdraw their consent at any time. Parents can also say no to some services and still get the services that they agree to and feel they need the most. The plan is reviewed every six months, or more frequently as appropriate, to make sure it continues to meet the needs of the child and family. At least once a year, parents must participate in an annual IFSP meeting to review their child's outcomes and IFSP services for any changes needed. The meeting will be held at a time and location that is convenient to the family and in the language or other mode of communication used by the parent if not proficient in English and if it is feasible to do so.

### **What is contained in the IFSP?**

Every IFSP will have a statement about the child's functioning levels of development based on the evaluation and assessment. This includes areas of sight, hearing, health, thinking skills, self-help skills, ability for expression, social or emotional growth, and movement. Based on parents' priorities, concerns, resources, and desired outcomes for their child and family, the needed services will be documented. The frequency, location, provider, and duration of these services and exactly how the costs will be covered will also be included. Written parent consent is necessary before any services can be provided.

Other services that are not required to be provided through the early intervention system may also be noted in the IFSP. The service coordinator, also identified in the IFSP, will help find resources to meet those needs.

### **Transition**

An important part of early intervention services is assisting children and families to leave early intervention at the correct time and in the most helpful way possible. This process is called transition. When a child is two years old, transition information will be offered to the parents to begin planning for services and supports that might be needed when the child turns three. As a

child approaches three years of age, the service coordinator will help with transition from early intervention to a preschool program and/or other support services that the child and family may need.

### **What are the Costs of the Services?**

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

- Child find/referral
- Evaluation/assessment
- Service coordination
- IFSP development and review
- Procedural safeguards (family rights)

Beyond these required services, a family may have to assume some or all of the costs, depending on the resources available and the parents' ability to pay. Medicaid or private insurance can be designated payers. The payment for some services may be based on a sliding fee scale that determines the cost by a family's income and size.

### **What are Family Rights?**

Early intervention law provides family rights that guarantee early intervention services are provided in a voluntary, nondiscriminatory manner. They assure that families understand the early intervention system and what is being offered to them and their child. Family rights include:

- The right to consent to evaluation and assessment;
- The right to be involved with the decisions made concerning their child;
- The right to have all information explained to them in their primary language or other mode of communication if the parent is not proficient in English and if it is feasible to do so;
- The right to an initial meeting to develop an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) within 45 days of the date the parent consents for the referral if the child is found eligible for the NJEIS;
- The right to be informed before any meetings are held or any changes are made to the IFSP;
- The right to consent to the IFSP;
- The right to say no to some services and to choose only the services wanted;
- The right to the early intervention services identified as needed on the IFSP;
- The right to referral, evaluation and assessment, IFSP development and review, service coordination, and protection of family rights at no cost. Parents may be charged for other services but an inability to pay will not prevent the child from receiving help;
- The right to ask to change service coordinators;
- The right to have all information about the child kept confidential;
- The right to review the child and family's early intervention record at any time; and
- The right to conflict resolution procedures to settle any disagreement over the services related to the child and the family.

### **What is Dispute Resolution?**

If parents have a concern that cannot be resolved in discussions with the child's Early Intervention Program (EIP) provider agency, early intervention practitioners and service coordinator, parents have the right to use dispute resolution procedures to work out their concerns. The service coordinator is responsible to give parents information about these procedures at the time of referral. Conflict resolutions procedures include Complaint Investigation, Mediation and Impartial Administrative Hearing.

More information on family rights or how to file a complaint is available at <http://nj.gov/health/fhs/eis/procsafeguards.shtml> or by contacting the:

NJEIS Procedural Safeguards Office  
New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services  
P.O. Box 364  
Trenton, NJ 08625-0364  
Toll free: (877) 258-6585  
Fax: (609) 292-0296