



Early Intervention Services

Why might early intervention (EI) help?

Children learn by watching, imitating, and playing with others. Young children with symptoms of autism spectrum disorders (ASDs) often lack some of these developmental skills, and they need to learn them. The goal of EI is to help young children gain developmental skills and to teach families some specific skills to meet their child's unique needs. It is important to get help for your child as soon as possible. The earlier a child gets into 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 that helps states run a complete, statewide program of EI services. These services are for children with disabilities from birth until their third birthday and their families. Early intervention services are also required for families of military personnel living abroad and for residents of US territories.

How can we find out if our child can receive EI services?

All states have an EI program. There is a difference between diagnosis and eligibility. Your child does not have to have a diagnosis of developmental delay or ASD to be eligible for EI services. However, in some states you may have access to more specialized services if your child is formally diagnosed with an ASD. Eligibility differs from state to state. How your state defines developmental delay will determine what EI services, if any, your child can get through the state's EI program. For example, in some states, children at risk for delays because of a medical diagnosis may be eligible for intervention even before developmental delays appear. You should contact your child's pediatrician, state health department, or local school district to get contact numbers for your state's EI program to determine if your child is eligible. In addition, the National Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center has a list of EI program coordinators for each state. You can find this list on its Web site at www.nectac.org.

Who can refer a child to EI services?

Anyone, including a physician, parent, or child care provider, can refer a child to EI services. Referrals can be made without a diagnosis. This means they do not have to know the reason for your child's developmental difficulties, just that there is an issue. Your state's EI program will evaluate or test your child free of charge to find out if she qualifies to get into the program. The earlier a child gets into EI, the better the outcome can be.

What services are provided through an EI program?

A team of several types of specialists will test your child to find out what services he needs. The team will write an Individualized Family Service Program (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. Your child will receive services in a place he knows, such as home or child care, when possible.

What is an IFSP?

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 the child. Throughout the IFSP process, family members and service providers should work as a team to 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
- Steps to help the child and family with changing over to school services at age 3 years if the child still has developmental needs requiring preschool therapy or instruction (ie, transitioning)

How do we 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 (Child Find: www.childfindidea.org)
- Testing children in areas of concern on screening to determine what services should be provided
- Coordinating services
- Developing, reviewing, and evaluating the IFSP

Reference

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):124–127

Resources

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

National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities:
www.nichcy.org

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

Parent Advocacy Coalition for Educational Rights (PACER) Center: www.pacer.org

The recommendations in this publication do not indicate an exclusive course of treatment or serve as a standard of medical care. Variations, taking into account individual circumstances, may be appropriate. Original document included as part of *Autism: Caring for Children With Autism Spectrum Disorders: A Resource Toolkit for Clinicians*, 2nd Edition. Copyright © 2013 American Academy of Pediatrics. All Rights Reserved. The American Academy of Pediatrics does not review or endorse any modifications made to this document and in no event shall the AAP be liable for any such changes.

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