

Early Intervention

Early Intervention is a service provided in combination by the state and the federal government. It provides therapy to children ages birth to three years of age. All of the services are provided free of charge. This program is mandated under IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) Part H.

Who qualifies?

Each state sets up its own criteria. However, any child with a diagnosis generally qualifies, if they are showing any amount of developmental delay. If your child does not immediately qualify for early intervention because he is not showing a delay, then set-up an appointment for a re-evaluation. It is not based on income.

How does it work?

Anyone associated with the child, such as the parents, a physician, a nurse, a relative, can call an early intervention program to request services. The general format of events is as follows, however every state and agency is slightly different, so it will depend on the agency you are working with.

Initial contact

It is best that the service coordinator at the early intervention agency speak with the child's primary caregiver (usually the parent) to set up an appointment. An appointment for an interview and/or evaluation is then arranged. Sometimes an interview is done with a service coordinator and the primary caregiver(s) before the child is formally evaluated. Therefore, it is helpful to the agency and to the therapists that you provide information about RTS. Some agencies will have quick access to this information and others will not. Therefore, if you provide the information it will help your child receive the services that he needs.

Evaluation

An evaluating team, of typically two therapists either a speech therapist, a physical therapist, an occupational therapist, or an educator complete what is called an arena evaluation. For children with RTS, you should request for a speech therapist to be at the evaluation, since speech is usually an area that needs assistance to develop. An arena evaluation means the therapists will play with your child and watch what she does and ask you questions about what she does. In order for the therapists to have a complete picture of your child, it is important that you provide information about what your child is able to do. The therapists are evaluating your child to find at what developmental level your child is functioning at, to better help your child achieve her developmental milestones. It is helpful that you provide your input as to how and what your child is doing and what your concerns are. After the evaluation, either the day of the evaluation or at a scheduled meeting, the therapists will explain to you the results of the evaluation and whether or not your child qualifies for services.

Individualized Family Service Plan

An Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) is developed. This document states the parents' goals for their child, it is a good idea to think about what goals you would like your child to achieve in the next six to twelve months and write them down before the meeting. The therapists will also help to express the goals in measurable terms and help direct you in determining appropriate goals for your child. This document is updated every six months and a re-evaluation is completed every year.

Therapy

Your child will receive therapy according to what is stated in the IFSP. If your child is demonstrating gross motor delays, he will be seen by a physical therapist. If your child is demonstrating fine motor delays, he will be seen by an occupational therapist. If your child is demonstrating speech delays, he will be seen by a speech therapist. If your child is demonstrating cognitive delays, a speech therapist or an educator will see him. Your child can be seen by one or more of these therapists according to your child's needs. There is also the transdisciplinary approach, which is a popular approach in Early Intervention programs. The transdisciplinary approach means a therapist will treat your child for more than one need. For example, if your child has gross and fine motor needs a physical therapist might treat your child, not a physical and an occupational therapist. In some cases, this is okay due to the overlap in training of the professionals. However, if you feel your child has very specific needs in one area then a therapist with specialized training in that area should be treating your child. Children with RTS typically have strong speech needs, therefore they should be seen by a speech therapist. In some cases, group therapy is recommended. If your child works well in a group and is learning from his peers then this is an excellent approach. However, some children work better on an individual basis. You and your child's therapist need to determine what is the best approach for your child.

Transition

At age three years, your child is no longer eligible for early intervention services. A transition meeting is set-up with your school district. You should remind your early intervention service coordinator six months before your child's third birthday, that your child will be turning three. Sometimes the service coordinator will set-up the transition meeting with your school district and sometimes this is your responsibility. At the transition meeting, the school district will typically provide their own therapists that will evaluate your child to determine if your child qualifies for therapy services through the school system. It can be helpful if you bring reports from your child's current therapists. Refer to school-based therapy on this web page for further information.

How to contact an agency

The easiest way to find an agency that provides Early Intervention is to have a professional that is working with you and your child give you a contact number. You can also look at the website <http://www.nichcy.org/index.html>, select search for organizations, select state resource sheet, select your state, look for the topic Programs for Infants and Toddlers with Disabilities: Ages Birth through 2 and contact them to find a program near you. You can also look in the telephone book. Look under the government section for Early Intervention or Child and Family Services or Special Education, every telephone book is different. If you call what you think should be early intervention and it is not, ask them if they know of an early intervention program, for children zero-three with special needs, and do they have a contact number. In most states, grants are given to different agencies to provide early intervention. And the common way to find the name of these agencies is to call around until someone knows what you are talking about it. This is very frustrating, so hopefully your primary care physician can give you a contact number or call another primary care physician or look at the suggested website.