



A Family Guide To Early Intervention Services In Maryland

Maryland Infants and Toddlers Program



MARYLAND STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Division of Early Intervention and Special Education Services
Maryland Infants and Toddlers Program/Preschool Special Education Services

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Maryland's
Birth
to
K
Early
Childhood
Intervention
& Education
System of Services
For Young Children
With Disabilities
and Their Families



About
This Guide

A Family Guide To Early Intervention Services in Maryland is part of Maryland's Birth to Kindergarten Parent Information Series, a collection of publications designed to support families in the statewide early intervention and education system of services in Maryland.

With this guide, we wish to welcome you into a community dedicated to the enrichment of child development, and to guide you through a process created by parents and professionals to enhance the potential of your child and support your family.

To receive copies of this guide, or others in the series, contact your Local Infants and Toddlers Program. Refer to the back page of this guide for contact information.

Welcome to Maryland's System of Early Intervention Services

A child's early years are full of excitement and change for every parent—a great balancing act between dreams and challenges. From the earliest stages of a child's life, a family can enhance all aspects of their child's development.

While all children grow and develop at their own rate, some infants and toddlers experience delays in their development. This can be cause for concern. Early intervention is a system of services to help address these concerns with supports and services specially designed to meet the unique needs of your child and family. The Maryland Infants and Toddlers Program and your local early intervention system is available to all children under the age of three who may have a developmental delay, a disability, or a special health condition that is likely to lead to non-typical development. **All services are provided at no cost to your family.**

Research shows that early intervention makes a difference! We welcome you and your family to Maryland's early intervention system of services—a community dedicated to the enhancement of your child's potential through family-centered support and practices.

What The Law Says

Recognizing the importance of early intervention, federal and State law guarantees your child's right to early intervention services. In 1986, Congress established *Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)* to reinforce the importance of early intervention services and supports available for infants and toddlers with disabilities, birth to age three, and their families.

In Maryland, the Part C system of IDEA is called the **Maryland Infants and Toddlers Program (MITP)**. This comprehensive statewide program of early intervention services is coordinated by the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE), in collaboration with many interagency partners. Each of Maryland's 24 jurisdictions, as well as the Maryland School for the Blind and Maryland School for the Deaf, implements a local Infants and Toddlers Program, coordinating services provided by education, health care, and social services agencies and private providers.

Please refer to the back of this guide for contact information for each local Infants and Toddlers Program in Maryland.



A Window of Opportunity

Advances in brain research have provided great insight into how the brain continues to grow and develop. It is now clear that a child's early childhood experiences can profoundly influence how their brain will develop and how they will interact with the world around them. The relationships children develop with adults in their lives lay the foundation for emotional development. Children who receive responsive, sensitive care from their parents and other caregivers in the first years of life, enjoy an important head start toward success in their lives. Early intervention helps to open this window of opportunity for your child.

Early intervention services can help you and your family to:

- Identify your child's strengths, interests, and needs
- Support and promote your child's development
- Include your child in your family and community life

Early intervention services can be provided anywhere in the community:

- Your home
- Your childcare center or family childcare home
- Libraries, recreational centers, playgrounds
- Any place parents and children normally spend time

As a parent, you help decide:

- The outcomes of early intervention that are important for your child and family
- The early intervention services that your child and family need
- When and where your child and family will get early intervention services

Teach me.

Teach me to play.
Show me the way.
Help me to walk.
Help me to talk.

Teach me to sing.
Such a wonderful
thing.

Help me to grow
so I will know- all
the love this world
has to give.

Belle Nelson
Age 11

Past participant
in Maryland's Early
Intervention System
of Services

Use This Guide

As you open this window of opportunity for your child, **use this guide to assist you in understanding:**

- How the early intervention system works
- Your legal rights and protections
- The family supports and resources available to you and your family



A Window of Opportunity

Early Childhood Outcomes and School Readiness

An important outcome of early intervention services is to narrow the gap in development that exists between infants, toddlers, and preschoolers with special needs and their same age peers. The IDEA requires that all states measure the effectiveness of early intervention and preschool special education services by reporting on three early childhood outcomes: children have positive social-emotional skills and relationships, children acquire and use knowledge and skills to successfully participate in daily activities, and children use appropriate behaviors to meet their needs, leading to increased independence.

We know that if children make developmental progress in these three child outcomes, they will be ready for school and ready to take the next step in all of their environments. The three broad early childhood outcomes are comprehensive, functional, and look at development as an integrated process.

The 3 Early Childhood Outcomes For School Readiness

	Early Childhood Outcome 1	Early Childhood Outcome 2	Early Childhood Outcome 3
	Children have positive social relationships <i>This involves skills such as:</i> • Relating with adults • Relating with other children • For older children, following group rules	Children acquire and use knowledge and skills <i>This involves skills such as:</i> • Thinking, reasoning, remembering • Problem-solving • Using symbols and language • Understanding physical and social worlds	Children use appropriate behavior to meet their needs <i>This involves skills such as:</i> • Taking care of basic needs • Getting from place to place and using tools • Contributing to own health and safety

The ultimate goal for all children is to be full and active participants in their homes, schools, and communities now and in the future. Early intervention services build on natural learning occurring during the early years of life. The supports and services provided can help you to help your child make powerful connections by taking advantage of opportunities presented through daily routines and activities both at home as well as within an early childhood program.



Critical Components of an Early Intervention System

Referral and Eligibility

Your child and family may be eligible for early intervention services if your child is under three years of age and has at least one of the following:

- A delay of 25 percent or more in development; or
- Is developing in a way that is considered “atypical” for most children his or her age; or
- A diagnosed condition that is likely to affect development, such as a genetic disorder, deafness or blindness.

The first step in determining eligibility for early intervention services is a referral made to the local Infants and Toddlers Program. When an infant or toddler is suspected of having a disability, developmental delay, or special health care need, he or she may be referred to the local Infants and Toddlers Program by parents, a health or education provider, child care or social service provider, or a staff person from the NICU or hospital, just to name a few. Your child may have received a developmental screening at the doctor’s office or through your child care provider that recommended a referral to your local Infants and Toddlers Program.

Once a referral is made to the local Infants and Toddlers Program, the intake process begins through conversation and information gathering about your child and family. Then, with your consent, the local Infants and Toddlers Program arranges for a service coordinator to schedule a screening or to schedule an evaluation **at no cost to the family** to determine if your child and family are eligible for services.

Your family will always be a part of the **evaluation to determine your child’s eligibility**. Qualified persons will determine your child’s eligibility for early intervention services based on a variety of evaluation tools and multiple sources of information, including input from you.

Child & Family Assessment

If your child is found eligible, your local Infants and Toddlers Program has 45 days from the date of your child’s referral to complete a functional child and family assessment and develop an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP).

Understanding how your child is participating in the natural daily routines and activities that are important and necessary to your family is critical to plan the most effective supports and services. Your early intervention team will learn about your child’s functional skills and behaviors through talking with you and other caregivers and by making observations during typical daily activities. The purpose is to identify your child’s strengths and needs, as well as your resources, priorities, and concerns to determine child and family outcomes and then develop your plan for supports and services. You may share as much or as little as you are comfortable with the team during the assessment process.

Family Tips:

- Provide functional information about how your child relates and interacts with others, learns and participates in activities, and uses appropriate behavior to meet his/her needs across a variety of settings.
- Share the priorities and concerns your family has about your child’s development.
- Participate in all assessment activities. You may choose a time and location that are convenient for you.
- Ask questions so that you may understand the process and the program. Your service coordinator and local program providers know that these services are new to most families. They can help answer your questions.



Critical Components of an Early Intervention System

Individualized Family Service Plan

Once your child and family assessment is complete, you will continue to develop **a plan** for addressing the identified needs. The Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) is the foundation for providing services and supports to meet the unique needs of your child and family.

The IFSP document is developed by a multidisciplinary IFSP team, including your service coordinator and early intervention providers, and an expert on your child—**you!** You are an important member of the IFSP team. No one knows your child better or better understands the needs of your family.

As required by law, the IFSP document puts in writing:

- Your child's strengths and needs.
- Your family's priorities.
- The outcomes you wish to achieve, timelines for achieving results, and details on how success toward outcomes will be measured.
- The services that your child and family will receive and where these services will be provided.

The IFSP is more than just a written document. The IFSP represents a *working partnership* between you and the local Infants and Toddlers team, and helps to provide answers for questions you may have about your child's development.

To help your family better understand the IFSP process, **Maryland's Birth To K Parent Information Series includes *A Family Guide to Understanding the Individualized Family Service Plan.***

You may request a copy from your local Infants and Toddlers Program.

Services

Early intervention services are designed to support your family's capacity to enhance your child's potential at each stage of growth and development. The services are tailored to meet the unique needs of each child and family within the context of your daily routines and activities.

Examples of early intervention services include:

Special Instruction
Speech and Language Services
Physical Therapy
Occupational Therapy
Hearing and Vision Screenings/Services
Social Work
Family Counseling
Nursing Care
Nutrition Counseling

Other services may also be available based on the unique needs of your child and family. You and your early intervention team will identify the services most appropriate to meet the outcomes on your IFSP. These decisions should be based on information gathered through the assessment process, including the natural supports and resources you already have.

Services are coordinated and delivered by your local Infants and Toddlers Program with support from various agencies in your jurisdiction. These agencies may include your local school system, local department of health and social services, Maryland School for the Blind, Maryland School for the Deaf, and other private and community-based providers and partners.

All early intervention services are provided at no cost to your family. Of course, none of the services may begin without your permission. Your family should understand all of the services and options presented to you so that you can make an informed decision.



Critical Components of an Early Intervention System

An Ongoing Process to Review the IFSP

According to the law, once the necessary services are determined, and the IFSP is written and agreed upon, early intervention services must begin **within 30 days**. The IFSP should be flexible in order to meet the ever-changing needs and priorities of your family. The IFSP should be reviewed at least every six months, or whenever your child has achieved an outcome as documented on the IFSP, or you identify a new area of need. **You may request a review of the IFSP with your service coordinator at any time.**

What One Family Says

Our first experience with the Infants and Toddlers Program (ITP) happened soon after our first newborn son came home from the hospital. As new parents with a baby already exhibiting atypical development, we were nothing less than overwhelmed. Rather than joining infant play groups, we started researching support groups for parents of children with disabilities. Our son was referred to our local ITP. The ITP team came to our family and provided us with solutions after one simple phone call. Through the program, our son was evaluated by a team of professionals. Soon after the initial assessment, we began receiving therapeutic and family-focused interventions. The ITP taught us how to interact with our son in a way that supported his overall development. His once absent smile began to spread across his face when he recognized his family and surroundings.

When our third child was born with Down Syndrome, our prior experience with the ITP eliminated many fears. While medical staff cautiously delivered the diagnosis, we found ourselves experiencing an overwhelming sense of relief because we knew we had the ITP available to help us meet our daughter's needs. Once again, the ITP team came into our lives to share their talents with us. Our daughter's needs were very different from those of her older brother, but the individualized therapies and supports suited her perfectly. The ITP staff even took into consideration our typically-developing middle daughter. With their assistance, she learned how to bond with her brother and sister. She learned how to play and interact with them, to recognize their similarities, and to accept their differences.

Without the ITP, we're not sure how we could have grown to become the strong family team we are today. ITP services are a tremendous resource to families in preparing them to care for and raise their children with delays or life-long disabilities. We are forever grateful to the many professionals who have joined us on this journey.

*-Michele Hart and Robert Bristown
Baltimore County, Maryland*



Your Rights and Protections

Federal and state laws provide many protections for children and families. These rights help assure that your early intervention services are provided in a voluntary, nondiscriminatory manner, at no cost to your family. Maryland summarizes these rights in its Parental Rights and Procedural Safeguards Notice.

Among the rights outlined in *Parental Rights: Maryland Procedural Safeguards Notice*, you have a right to:

- Consent to evaluation, assessment and provision of services.
- Receive notice of your rights and actions proposed by the early intervention or special education system.
- Review your child's early intervention or special education record and request amendments.
- Keep your child's and family's personal information confidential, as required.
- File a State complaint.
- Play an active role in the special education or early intervention process as a valued member of the IFSP/IEP team.

A copy of *Maryland's Parental Rights and Procedural Safeguards Notice* will be provided to you at least once a year from your local Infants and Toddlers Program. However, you may request a copy at any time. And to help you further understand your rights and protections, Maryland's Birth To K Parent Information Series includes a guide called, ***Parental Rights: A Companion Guide to the Maryland Procedural Safeguards Notice***. Request a copy from your local Infants and Toddlers Program. Your service coordinator may also provide information and guidance.

Transition Time

Transitioning from your local Infants and Toddlers Program is a process. Your local Infants and Toddlers Program will support you to develop a **transition plan** to meet the needs of your child and family. Part of the planning process involves considering if your child has needs that require services beyond age 3.

If your child may need services beyond age 3, your child will be evaluated to see if he or she is eligible for preschool special education services under *Part B of the IDEA*. As part of Maryland's birth to kindergarten system of services, if your child is found eligible for *Part B* services, your family will be presented with options. These options include the opportunity to continue services under an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) or move to an Individualized Education Program (IEP). Services provided under an extended IFSP or an IEP will reflect the individual needs of your child and family and may be delivered in a range of early childhood community-based and school-based settings.

To help you better understand the transition process, Maryland's Birth To K Parent Information Series includes ***A Family Guide to Next Steps: When Your Child in Early Intervention Turns Three***, as well as ***A Family Guide to Early Childhood Transition in Maryland: Birth to Kindergarten***. You may request a copy of each guide from your local Infants and Toddlers Program.



10 Things Every Parent Should Know

1. Early intervention services and supports are available through the Maryland Infants and Toddlers Program and delivered through **24 local Infants and Toddlers Programs**. Services are provided to families of eligible infants and toddlers.
2. The Maryland Infants and Toddlers Program is not a medical program that “treats” your child but rather a “coaching” model that supports families. While you may not be a trained specialist, you are your child’s most important teacher. **You and your early intervention team will work together** to support and enhance the development of your child. Together, you will develop and implement strategies to use throughout your daily activities. Your team of professionals will learn about your child from you and will share with you what they know about child development and specific techniques to promote development.
3. **You are your child’s best advocate.** The relationship you develop with your early intervention team will be an important relationship for both you and your child. Clearly communicate what you think your child needs. Be sure to speak with your service coordinator often and collaborate with your entire team.
4. Local Infants and Toddlers Programs are staffed with qualified professionals who must meet Maryland’s personnel standards. **Providers are carefully screened** before they are hired and are closely supervised by local program administrators and participating agencies.
5. You and your IFSP team will create an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP). **Your child’s IFSP will not resemble anyone else’s.** It is unique and based on the needs of your child and family. It may also look different from what is offered in other states.
6. Your doctor or specialist may suggest a certain number of hours of therapy or services for your child. Local Infants and Toddlers Programs use a coaching model supported by research to work with children and families. This allows for **intervention to happen throughout the child’s day** rather than only in a clinical or therapy setting that is used by many private therapists and agencies.
7. Early intervention services are family-centered. This means that the needs of your whole family are as important as the needs of your child. Your early intervention **services will be provided in your child’s natural environment**, where he or she lives, learns and plays within those naturally occurring activities. You will work with your early intervention team to identify the most appropriate services to meet the needs of your child and family.
8. **There is no charge to families for early intervention services.** Under State and federal law, all services delivered by a local Infants and Toddlers Program in Maryland must be provided at no cost, regardless of the family’s income, availability of insurance, or employment status. There is never a “wait list” for services. Your local program is supported by several funding sources, including local, State, and federal dollars.
9. **Maryland has a strong Family Support Services (FSS) network** that includes parents of children with disabilities as well as professionals who can assist parents as they travel through the world of early intervention and beyond. Ask for the name of your local family support coordinator for additional support and resources, including the opportunity to connect with other families who have received similar early intervention services.
10. Never forget that as a parent, you and your child have certain rights under State and federal law. Each state must provide parents with a list of their rights. During the development of your IFSP, you will receive a copy of the document, **Parental Rights: Maryland Procedural Safeguards Notice**. There are other resources in this *Parent Information Series* to help you understand your rights.



Glossary of Terms

Words and Phrases You'll Hear In Early Intervention

Assessment: Ongoing procedures used by qualified professionals throughout a child's early intervention experience to identify the child's unique needs, the family's resources, concerns and priorities related to their child's development, and the nature and extent of services required to meet these needs.

Child Advocate: A parent or professional, paid or unpaid, who acts on behalf of a child and family to protect their rights and interests and ensure their access to services for which they are eligible.

Child Outcome Summary (COS): The process used in Maryland for measuring child outcomes to meet federal accountability reporting requirements for all children receiving services through an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) or a preschool Individualized Education Program (IEP).

Early Intervention: A collection of services provided by public and private agencies and designed by law to support eligible children and their families in enhancing a child's potential for growth and development from birth to age three.

Early Intervention Record: Any personally identifiable information about a child or family generated by the early intervention system that pertains to evaluation and assessment, development of the IFSP, and delivery of early intervention services.

Evaluation: Procedures used by qualified professionals to determine a child's initial and continuing eligibility for early intervention services, consistent with the definition of infants and toddlers with disabilities.

Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP): The written plan for providing early intervention and other services to eligible children and families that:

- Includes services necessary to enhance the development of the child *and* the family's capacity to meet their child's needs; *and*
- Is developed by the family and appropriate professionals working together; *and*
- Is based on a multidisciplinary evaluation and assessment of the child and family, as required by law.

Infants and Toddlers with Disabilities: Children from birth to age three who are determined eligible for early intervention services because they:

- Are experiencing a developmental delay of at least 25 percent, as measured and verified by appropriate methods, in one or more of the following areas: cognitive, physical (fine/gross motor, sensory), communication, social and emotional, adaptive; *or*
- Exhibit atypical development or behavior in at least one of the above areas, demonstrated by abnormal quality or function that interferes with current development and is likely to result in subsequent delay, even when diagnostic procedures do not indicate a delay of 25 percent; *or*
- Have a diagnosed physical or mental condition that puts them at risk for developmental delay.

Children over the age of three are eligible until the beginning of the school year following the child's fourth birthday if they previously received early intervention services *and* were found eligible for preschool special education and related services (COMAR 13A.13.01.03B(29)(b)).



Glossary of Terms

More Words and Phrases You'll Hear In Early Intervention

Interim Service Coordinator: The individual who may be designated at the single point of entry to assist the referred child and family through the initial evaluation/assessment and IFSP process.

Multidisciplinary IFSP Team: The involvement of the parent *and* two or more individuals from separate professions in the provision of integrated and coordinated services. One of these individuals must be the service coordinator.

Native Language: The language or mode of communication that is normally used by the parent of an eligible child.

Natural Environments: Home and community settings that are natural or typical for an infant or toddler of the same age without disabilities.

Parent: A biological or adoptive parent, guardian, acting parent, including grandparent, or surrogate parent; this term does not include the State if the child is a ward of the State.

Periodic Review: A review of the IFSP conducted every six months, more frequently as conditions warrant, or at the family's request.

Service Coordinator: The individual selected by an early intervention team and designated in an IFSP to coordinate and facilitate early intervention services

and support the family through the IFSP process. This person must demonstrate an understanding of the laws and nature of the process.

Service Provider: An individual who works for a public or private agency designated to provide early intervention services for an eligible child and the child's family, in accordance with an approved IFSP.

Single Point of Entry: The local contact point designated to accept referrals from sources who suspect developmental delay in an infant or toddler.





Maryland Family Support Services

At any point during your journey, you may need the support of individuals who know about special resources, can share valuable information, or have life experiences similar to yours. In Maryland, families receiving early intervention services can find support through their local **Family Support Services**. These services are typically staffed by a parent of a child with a disability, and offer information on community services, referrals to local support and advocacy groups, and opportunities for families to network and share ideas and experiences with other families. In addition, as families transition to next steps, family support services are also available. They can guide and support families as they move through the transition process from age 3 to kindergarten.

Your local Family Support Services are just a call away. Ask your local Infants and Toddlers Program or Preschool Program for contact information or go online to: <http://marylandpublicschools.org/programs/Documents/Special-Ed/FSDR/FSS/FSSDirectory.pdf>.

Resources for Families

Maryland Learning Links

Visit Maryland Learning Links online at: www.MarylandLearningLinks.org. Here you will find a variety of resources for families and caregivers of children with disabilities birth through age 21.

Maryland's Birth To Kindergarten Parent Information Series

Maryland's Birth To Kindergarten Parent Information Series is a collection of publications designed to assist families as they participate in the statewide early intervention and education system of services for children with disabilities from birth to kindergarten. Each publication is available from your Local Infants and Toddlers Program, Local School System and on the Maryland State Department of Education website: <http://www.marylandpublicschools.org/programs/Pages/Special-Education/info.aspx>.

The series includes the following guides:

- **A Family Guide to Early Intervention Services**
- *Parental Rights: A Companion Guide to the Maryland Procedural Safeguards Notice*
- *The IFSP: A Family Guide To Understanding the Individualized Family Service Plan*
- *A Family Guide to Next Steps: When Your Child in Early Intervention Turns Three*
- *A Family Guide to Preschool Special Education Services*
- *A Family Guide to Early Childhood Transitions: Birth to Kindergarten*

More Resources for Families

For additional information, contact your:

Local Infants and Toddlers Programs

Allegany County	301-759-2415
Anne Arundel County	410-222-6911
Baltimore City	410-396-1666
Baltimore County	410-809-2169
Calvert County	410-414-7034
Caroline County	410-479-3246
Carroll County	410-876-4437, ext. 2277
Cecil County	410-996-5444
Charles County	301-609-6808
Dorchester County	410-221-1111, ext. 1024
Frederick County	301-600-1612
Garrett County	301-533-0240
Harford County	410-638-3823
Howard County	410-313-7017
Kent County	410-778-7164
Montgomery County	240-777-3997
Prince George's County	301-925-6627
Queen Anne's County	443-758-0720, ext. 4458
Somerset County	410-651-1616, ext. 239
St. Mary's County	301-475-5511, ext. 32223
Talbot County	410-820-0319
Washington County	301-766-8217
Wicomico County	410-677-5250
Worcester County	410-632-5033
Maryland School for the Blind	410-444-5000
Maryland School for the Deaf	410-480-4545

Online Resources from the Division of Early Intervention and Special Education Services

Maryland Learning Links offers information and resources related to Early Intervention and Special Education in Maryland. Whether you are a parent, teacher or provider, you are sure to benefit from the site's comprehensive and user-friendly blend of knowledge and real-world practice, all of it built on the belief that every child can learn and achieve both inside and outside the classroom. *Maryland Learning Links* was developed and produced by the Maryland State Department of Education, Division of Early Intervention and Special Education Services, in collaboration with the Johns Hopkins University, Center for Technology in Education (<https://marylandlearninglinks.org/birth-to-kindergarten/>).

Maryland Public Schools. The Maryland State Department of Education, *Division of Early Intervention and Special Education Services* provides leadership, support, and accountability for results to local school systems, public agencies, and stakeholders through a seamless system of coordinated services to children and students with disabilities, birth through 21, and their families (<http://marylandpublicschools.org/programs/Pages/Special-Education/index.aspx>).

A Spanish translation of this guide is available online at **Maryland Public Schools** (<http://marylandpublicschools.org/programs/Pages/Special-Education/info.aspx>).

Additional Information

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