

EDUCATIONAL SUPPORTS FOR CHILDREN UNDER 3

FOR INFANTS AND TODDLERS (AGES BIRTH - 2)

If you are concerned about your child's development or if your child has a disability, you may have your child evaluated free of charge under the Program for Infants and Toddlers with Disabilities (Part C of IDEA).

WHAT IS IDEA?



The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is a United States law ensuring that children with disabilities throughout the nation have access to the services they need. The Program for Infants and Toddlers with Disabilities (Part C of IDEA) is a federal grant program that helps states provide early intervention services for infants and toddlers with disabilities, ages birth through 2 years of age, and their families.

In each state, there is a lead agency that manages these early intervention services. They conduct developmental screenings and evaluations, provided free of charge to families. Early intervention services are meant for children under the age of three and are provided to eligible families free of charge or on a sliding payment scale that is determined by family income.

HOW DO I GET MY CHILD EVALUATED?

Contact the early intervention system in your local community. When you call the agency, explain that you are concerned about your child's development and that you would like to have your child evaluated under IDEA. It is a good idea to write down the names and phone numbers of everyone you talk to as you move through the early intervention process. A service plan for your child will be completed within 45 days of the referral.

The early intervention system will assign a temporary service coordinator to work with you and your child through the screening or evaluation and assessment process. This person will help to arrange a multidisciplinary evaluation of your child. In some states, there may be a preliminary step called a screening to see if there is cause to suspect that a baby or toddler has a disability or developmental delay. If a delay is suspected, a full multidisciplinary evaluation is then conducted to assess a child's physical health, vision, hearing, cognitive development, adaptive functioning (basic skills like feeding, toileting, dressing, social interactions and communication at home, play), motor, sensory processing and communication skills, and social/emotional development. You must provide your written consent before screening and/or evaluation may take place.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF AN EVALUATION?

- **Identification/Referral**: To identify children who need early intervention services.
- **Eligibility**: To determine whether a child has a developmental delay or disability that falls under IDEA definitions.
- **Planning an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP)**: To develop goals and plan services for the child.
- **Measuring progress**: To provide a present level of performance for measuring a child's progress.

WHAT IS A “DEVELOPMENTAL DELAY?”

The exact meaning of the term, and therefore eligibility criteria, varies from state to state. In general, a developmental delay means your child is delayed in one or more areas of his or her development. There are five areas in which development may be affected:

- Cognitive development
- Physical development, including vision and hearing
- Communication development
- Social or emotional development
- Adaptive development



WHAT ARE THE EVALUATION PROCEDURES?

Information will be gathered from a variety of sources about your child's functioning and development. The evaluation looks at your child's strengths and needs. It also includes other information such as medical information, interviews with parents, observations, and informal data.

Assessment of family members may also be conducted to identify the resources, concerns, and priorities of your family related to the development of your child. This family-directed assessment is voluntary; you must approve of it. It is based on information gathered through assessment tools and interviews.

WHICH PROFESSIONALS MIGHT BE INVOLVED THE EVALUATION?

- **Physicians** assess physical and behavioral health status, and refer to specialists (neurologists, geneticists, endocrinologists, etc.) as needed.
- **Audiologists** assess hearing and ear functioning, and refer to Ear, Nose, and Throat (ENT) doctors as needed.
- **Psychologists** assess cognitive development/ability, academic achievement, emotional development, adaptive skills, and behavioral health status.
- **Speech and language pathologists** assess communication and articulation skills.
- **Occupational therapists** assess motor, daily functioning and sensory processing skills.
- **Physical therapists** assess motor skills and functioning.

HOW ARE EVALUATION RESULTS USED?

After your child's evaluation is complete, you will meet with a team of qualified professionals to discuss the results. The people on the team will talk with you about whether your child meets the criteria under IDEA and state policy for having a developmental delay, a diagnosed physical or mental condition, or being at risk for having a substantial delay. The service agency must provide you with a copy of the evaluation report.

If your child is found eligible for special education and related services, the next step is to develop an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP). The IFSP is a written document that, among other things, outlines the early intervention services that your child and family will receive. The goals and objectives the IFSP team develop relate directly to the strengths and needs of the family and child that were identified during the evaluation. It is important for you to understand

the results of the evaluation before beginning to develop an IFSP. The best way to support your child is to support and build upon the individual strengths of your family. The IFSP is a whole family plan with the parents as major contributors in its development. You must give written consent for each service to be provided.

WHAT ARE EARLY INTERVENTION SERVICES?

Early intervention services are tailored to meet your child's individual needs and may include:

- Assistive technology (adaptive devices)
- Audiology or hearing services
- Speech and language services
- Counseling and training for your family
- Medical services
- Nursing services
- Nutrition services
- Occupational therapy
- Physical therapy
- Psychological services

HOW MUCH WILL EARLY INTERVENTION COST?

Under Part C of IDEA, evaluations and assessments, the development and review of the IFSP, and service coordination are provided at no cost to families. Depending on your state's policies, you may have to pay for other services. If they are not free, there is typically a "sliding-scale" fee for early intervention services, meaning the fees are based on what you earn. Some services may be covered by your health insurance or by Medicaid, if you give written consent to use your health care insurance. If you do not give such consent, the system may not limit or deny you or your child services.

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN MY CHILD TURNS THREE?

Once a child reaches the age of three, special education services are provided to eligible children free of charge through the public school system. If a child's third birthday has passed and there are concerns about a developmental delay or disability, contact your local school (even if child isn't enrolled there) and ask how and where to have a child evaluated under IDEA.