How can a child and family become involved with Early Intervention?

Just as a primary care provider connects a patient to a specialist, a physician can also give information to a family about the value of Early Intervention services and assist them in obtaining information about making a referral. The process is simple, because anyone—physicians, caregivers, teachers, parents, and friends—can partner with the family to get information about a referral to Early Intervention.

What happens at the time of a referral call?

A service coordinator (for children under age 3) or other professional (for children over age 3) will obtain basic information about the child and family, and describe the Early Intervention services and resources available to children and their families. The service coordinators or other professionals will work with the family to determine who should be involved in the multidisciplinary evaluation of the child’s developmental levels and conduct a voluntary family assessment. This evaluation will focus on specific developmental skills, including adaptive, cognitive, communicative, physical, and social/emotional.

What should I do if a child is not developing as he or she should?

Refer the child to Early Intervention for further developmental assessment as soon as possible. The first three years of life are critical to a child’s future potential. Timely intervention can improve the prospects—and the quality of life—for many children who are considered at risk for cognitive, physical, sensory, social, or emotional developmental delays. In some cases, effective intervention can ameliorate or greatly improve conditions once thought to be virtually untreatable, such as autism. Well-implemented programs can improve a child’s future development and lessen the impact a developmental disorder has on the family. It can lead a child to greater independence, better participation in the community, and a more productive and fulfilling life.

What is Early Intervention?

Early Intervention is a statewide program, available locally, that provides quality support and services to enhance the capacity of families to meet the developmental needs of children from birth to age five who have delays or disabilities. More important, Early Intervention can help young children acquire the skills they need to grow into happy and healthy members of the community by building upon the natural learning occurring in the first few years of life. The Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare (DPW) is designated by the state as the lead agency for this family centered program (also known as Part C) from birth to three years of age. At age three, the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) is the lead agency for children 3-21 years of age under the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). This program is also known as the Preschool program under Part B.
What services are provided?
If the child is eligible for Early Intervention services, depending on their age, an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) or an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) is developed upon completion of the evaluation. This plan will describe the supports and services that are needed by the child and family and how they will be provided. Early Intervention services are designed to use developmentally appropriate activities that meet children’s changing needs and promote functional skills, development, and learning. Some examples of Early Intervention services include family training, occupational therapy, physical therapy, speech and language therapy, or special instruction. The child’s services and/or supports are based upon the strengths and needs, concerns, priorities, and resources as identified by the child’s family and they are designed to respect the family’s concerns, interests, values, and priorities.

Who pays for Early Intervention?
Early Intervention services and supports for eligible children and their families are provided at no cost to the family. These services are written on the IFSP or IEP and include: identification, evaluation, ongoing assessment, and the services recommended by the team, which includes the family.

Whom should I contact?
To get information about referring a child under the age of three for an evaluation or to receive information about birth to three Early Intervention services, contact the CONNECT Information and Referral number at (800) 692-7288 (in PA). To get information about referring a child over the age of three for an evaluation or to receive information about preschool Early Intervention services, contact Consultline at (800) 879-2301 (in PA).