

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.



In collaboration with

*Early Intervention Technical Assistance
Pennsylvania Training and Technical Assistance Network
Department of Public Welfare, Department of Education*

The Pennsylvania First Signs® program

is endorsed by

*American Academy of Pediatrics/Pennsylvania Chapter
Pennsylvania Academy of Family Physician
Pennsylvania Medical Society
Pennsylvania Society of Physician Assistants*

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A Pediatric Practitioner's Guide

Referring a Child to Early Intervention In Pennsylvania

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 five¹ 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.

Who is eligible for Early Intervention?

In Pennsylvania, a child is eligible for Early Intervention services if he or she is under the age of five and has a significant delay in one or more areas of development:²

- Adaptive**—self-help skills, such as dressing or feeding
- Cognitive**—thinking skills, including the ability to absorb, process, and understand information
- Communicative**—receptive and expressive language, including understanding what is being said, following directions, and making needs known
- Physical**—gross motor, fine motor, vision and hearing, motor planning, and sensory integration (i.e., the ability of the central nervous system to receive, process, and learn from sensations, such as touch, movement, sight, sound, smell, and the pull of gravity, in order to develop skills)
- Social and Emotional**—interacting with children, adults, and the environment

A child under three with a diagnosed known condition may also be eligible for services if there is a high probability of developmental delay.

A child under three who is determined not eligible for Early Intervention services may still be eligible for follow-up tracking. Children eligible for this service are:

- Under three- and one-half pounds at birth weight
- Cared for in neonatal intensive care units
- Born to chemically dependent mothers
- Seriously abused or neglected
- Confirmed to have dangerous levels of lead poisoning

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.

As the child approaches three years of age, the Early Intervention service coordinator will assist children and families with the transition from Early Intervention to a preschool program and/or other support services that the child and family may need.

Where and how are services provided?

A team, consisting of Early Intervention specialists, provides services and supports to the child to help them to participate more easily in everyday routines and activities. For children under three, this may include natural environments such as the home, childcare setting, play group, neighborhood library or playground, or anywhere that is part of the family's routine. For children over three, services and supports may be offered in a childcare center, nursery school, specialized classroom, or the

home (or any combination). The frequency of services is based on the child's individual needs and is determined by the team, which includes the family. Every effort is made to communicate with families in their chosen language, using interpreters when necessary.

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).

¹Or the "age of beginners" in Pennsylvania – the age at which a child can enter their local public school.

²Children who are old enough for the Preschool program under Part B must also have a need for specialized instruction.