

# A CHILD CARE PROVIDER'S GUIDE



## TO EARLY INTERVENTION SERVICES IN PENNSYLVANIA

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# WELCOME!

Caring for and educating young children is exciting and challenging at the same time. As a childcare provider you work in partnership with families to offer consistent, loving care for young children. You are one of a child's earliest and most important teachers. You are one of his or her earliest playmates and friends. The way a child views his or her world is influenced by your voice, touch, eyes, and smile.

Some children may need the extra help and support that can be offered through early intervention services. This brochure will describe how the early intervention system works and how you can help young children and their families get the help they need.

## WINDOW OF OPPORTUNITY FOR YOUNG CHILDREN

When you think of a child and how he or she is growing, you notice things like how soon he or she smiles, sits up, rolls over, or how well he or she walks, talks, holds a spoon, and feeds himself or herself. Children learn naturally during this time, by doing, by watching you and other children, and by being taught how to do different things. Because you know the children in your care so well, you might notice that one of them is growing or developing differently than other children of the same age. What you are noticing are changes in different developmental areas. The five primary developmental areas are:

- Ability to move, see, and hear—physical development
- Ability to talk, express needs—language and speech development
- Ability to relate to others—social and emotional development
- Ability to eat, dress, and take care of themselves—self help (or adaptive development)
- Ability to think and learn—cognitive development

While all children grow and change at their own rate, some children can experience delays in their development. Sometimes this can be cause for concern. Early intervention can help.

## WHAT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS ABOUT A CHILD'S DEVELOPMENT?

Talking about a child's growth and development should be a common occurrence between a childcare provider and the family. You should be meeting periodically with parents to share information about their child's progress and participation in your program. If you have questions about a child's growth and development, it is best to discuss your concerns with the child's family. This may be a difficult conference. Some ideas to make the conference more comfortable for both you and the family are:

- Set a special meeting time with the family. Don't try to fit it into a hectic pickup or drop-off time. Hold the meeting in an area that is private and comfortable.
- Recognize that this may be a difficult and emotional conference for the family. Be prepared for a range of emotional responses. Take an active listening role and respect the family's feelings.
- Ask the parents to describe their perceptions of their child's development. Often families will have seen some of the same issues and have some of the same concerns.
- Document your concerns by collecting samples of the child's recent work, showing samples of observations that have occurred over a period of time, and by listing the modifications that you have made to your program to meet the child's needs.
- Do **NOT** try to diagnose the problem or label the child. This is not your role and should only occur after a comprehensive assessment.
- Be prepared with referral information. Provide the family with information about early intervention services and how to access them. Help to make the referral call if needed.

## WHAT IS EARLY INTERVENTION?

Being a child care provider can be especially challenging when you are providing care to a child with, or at risk for, developmental delays. Early intervention in Pennsylvania is a collection of services and supports designed to help families enhance their child's development. Early intervention builds upon the natural learning occurring in those first few years. It is a process that promotes collaboration among parents, childcare providers, early intervention providers, and others who are involved with the child.

With your help, early intervention supports and services can enhance the development of the child in your care by . . .

- Answering your and the family's questions about their child's development;
- Providing you with ideas about the ways you can support and accommodate the child;
- Assisting you to interact with the child through daily routines and activities in the child care program;
- Improving the child's developmental and educational growth;
- Helping children become more independent;
- Preventing the need for more intervention in the future; and
- Helping communities become more aware of the gifts and abilities of all its children.

Early intervention services can include, among others, information on how children develop, early childhood education, therapies which help a child to move his or her body, information designed to help a family enhance their child's growing and learning, and ideas for how a child care provider can help the child at the program.

Early intervention services and supports are provided in a family centered way. **Family centered** means that the child's services and/ or supports are based upon the strengths, concerns, priorities, and resources as identified by the child's family. Services and supports are designed to respect the family's concerns, interests, and values.

## **HOW CAN FAMILIES ACCESS EARLY INTERVENTION SERVICES?**

Families should contact their local early intervention program by calling the CONNECT Helpline at 800/692-7288. Families should request a copy of [A Family's Introduction to Early Intervention in Pennsylvania](#), which includes useful information for families about the early intervention system.

The first step in accessing early intervention services is to determine if the child is eligible.

### **Infants and Toddlers (Birth to three years of age)**

The first step in the process is to gather preliminary information for the evaluation. This information will help determine who the team members should be and the appropriate focus for the evaluation. The evaluation will only occur with the permission of the family.

### **Preschoolers (Three years of age to age of beginners)**

The first step in the process is screening to determine if a more extensive assessment needs to be completed. If the family continues to have concerns regarding the child's development after this initial screening, the family has the right to request a full evaluation. Both the screening and evaluation will occur only with the permission of the family.

## **WHAT CAN PARENTS EXPECT AT THE MDE?**

The Multidisciplinary Evaluation (MDE) looks at all of the child's areas of concerns as well as others that were indicated by the preliminary information gathered. Your participation is very important as a member of the team for the evaluation.

Ask the family if you can be included as a member of the assessment team. Plan ahead for the assessment by being ready to share information about the child's daily activities, likes and dislikes, abilities, skills and needs.

## **WHO IS ELIGIBLE FOR EARLY INTERVENTION SERVICES – INFANTS AND TODDLERS?**

Following the assessment process, the team determines if the child is eligible for early intervention services. Eligibility is determined by the following definitions.

### **Infants and Toddlers (birth to three years of age) who have:**

- A significant delay in one or more areas of development;
- A specialist's determination that there is a delay even though it doesn't show up on the assessments (called informed clinical opinion)
- Known physical or mental conditions, which have a high probability for developmental delays

Infants and toddlers who are not eligible for early intervention services may still be eligible for tracking services. Infants and toddlers eligible for tracking are:

- Under three and one half (3 1/2) pounds 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.

The Department of Public Welfare (DPW) is responsible for the Commonwealth's Early Intervention Program for eligible infants and toddlers. The County Mental Health/Mental Retardation Programs administer the early intervention programs locally.

## WHO IS ELIGIBLE FOR EARLY INTERVENTION SERVICES - PRESCHOOLERS?

Following the assessment process, the team determines if the child is eligible for early intervention services. Eligibility is determined by the following definitions.

### **Preschoolers (three years of age to age of beginners) who have:**

- A significant delay in one or more areas of development compared to other children of his/her age; OR
- Any of the following physical or mental disabilities: autism/pervasive developmental disorder, serious emotional disturbance, neurological impairment, deafness/hard of hearing, specific learning disability, mental retardation, multiple handicaps, other mental impairment, physical disability, speech impairment or blindness/visual impairment,
- AND, In need of special education and related services.

The Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) is responsible for programs and services for eligible children from age three to the age of beginners. The Bureau of Special Education contracts services through Mutually Agreed Upon Written Arrangements (MAWAs) with Intermediate Units (IUs), School Districts, and other providers.

## HOW IS THE PLAN FOR EARLY INTERVENTION SERVICES DEVELOPED?

A plan is developed for each child who is eligible for early intervention services. The parent, the child care provider (at the parent's request) and other team members develop a written plan detailing the early intervention services or supports that the child and family receive.

The plan for children between birth to three years of age is called the **Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP)**. The IFSP lets the family help decide how early intervention services will help their child and family. It is the family's opportunity to share with others how much help they want and in what form they would like it to occur. The IFSP describes how early intervention services will help the child during typical routines, including child care activities.

The **Individualized Education Plan (IEP)** is the name of the plan used to determine the early intervention supports and services that are needed for children from three to the start of school. It should be based upon the identified needs of the child and must provide services in the setting that meets his or her needs.

The IFSP and IEP include information on the child's strengths and needs related to his or her development, the family's concerns, and the child's strengths and needs identified in recent

evaluations. Among other information, the IFSP or IEP must include a statement of the services to be provided and the setting where the services will occur.

Ask the family for a copy of the IFSP or IEP so that you can support the child's development and learning within the child care program.

## **WHO DEVELOPS THE IFSP OR IEP?**

The family, along with other team members, decides who should be on the team and who should help write the IFSP or IEP. The best IFSP/IEP will reflect the active involvement and planning of all team members. Encourage the family to include you as a member of the team. Help the family to see all the valuable information you can bring to the IFSP/IEP process. As the child's caregiver and educator, you have valuable insight into the child's strengths and have important information on the environment in which the child spends a great deal of time.

You can help develop the IFSP or IEP:

- By identifying the child's unique qualities and strengths, you begin to build a framework on which you can provide him or her with the best opportunities for learning.
- By reviewing the activities that occur in a typical day. Identify the activities in which the child has difficulties participating and those activities that work well.
- By identifying what the child really enjoys doing. Playing with water or sand? Sitting for long periods of time? Building blocks? Listening to music? How can you build on those skills to help other areas of development?
- By identifying the special needs the child has within the child care setting. Think about what the child might need to reach his or her full potential. Adaptive equipment? Feeding or self help skills?
- Be open to working with the family and early intervention staff in developing the IFSP/IEP and in determining the types of services that might be offered at your child care program.

## **WHERE ARE SERVICES DELIVERED?**

Services must be delivered in settings that are consistent with the needs of the child and family. Considerations must be made to reflect the child's best place for learning. This may include services within the child care or other community settings. Whatever the setting, the IFSP or IEP must be based upon the strengths and needs of the child.

When deciding how the IFSP and IEP are to be implemented:

- Options must be carefully considered.
- Services should be delivered in settings that meet the needs of the child and family.

- Children birth to three, services should be provided to the extent appropriate in the types of settings in which infants and toddlers without disabilities would participate (**Natural Environments**).
- Children three and older must be educated to the maximum extent appropriate with children who are not disabled (**Least Restrictive Environment**).
- The length and frequency of early intervention services are based on individual needs as identified by the IFSP/IEP team.

## HOW DOES THE CHILD MOVE FROM THE INFANT/TODDLER TO THE PRESCHOOL PROGRAM?

### Transitions for The Child and Family

Transitions occur in our lives all the time and in many different ways. You may change your job or move to a new home. Children may join or leave your childcare program. While receiving early intervention services, the child in your care and his/her family may experience transitions too.

### Planning for a transition allows for a smooth transfer from one service to another.

Transition in early intervention services means movement from one program to another, such as:

- From the home to a child care program;
- From an infant or toddler at home early intervention service to a preschool program;
- From a toddler playgroup to a preschool program; or
- From a preschool program to kindergarten or 1<sup>st</sup> grade.

Decisions regarding the child's services and family supports are made with the family's permission. You may be able to assist the family and other team members because you know the child well. Ask the parent if you can be involved. Planning meetings will take place in the year prior to the child's third birthday to discuss options and the transition process. No change should be made in the IFSP without the family's consent and involvement of the sending and receiving agencies. These decisions are part of the team process.

When the child turns three years of age, responsibility for funding early intervention services changes from the Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare to the Pennsylvania Department of Education. This transition on the third birthday may involve only a change in who pays for the child's early intervention services and not necessarily a change in program, services, or placement.

During the year before the child is eligible for kindergarten or 1<sup>st</sup> grade, the early intervention program will hold a transition meeting to discuss options for the child. This transition meeting must occur before the end of February. Kindergarten age and school age children are the responsibility of the local school district of residence. Ask the family if you might be part of the team discussing the transition to kindergarten or 1<sup>st</sup> grade. Your knowledge of the child's progress and development is important.

# EARLY INTERVENTION: THE LAW IN PENNSYLVANIA

## Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEA)

### Part C:

- Gives rights to eligible children and their families at birth until the child's third birthday;
- Administered by the Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare;
- Eligibility for early intervention services determined by the evaluation process;
- Services for eligible infants and toddlers are developed and written into an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) by a team, of which the parents are important team members; and
- Services should be delivered in a natural environment for the child and family.

### Part B, Section 619:

- Gives rights to eligible young children and their families from the child's third birthday to age of beginner (start of first grade);
- Administered by the Pennsylvania Department of Education;
- Eligibility determined by an evaluation from an evaluation team (MDT). Parents are equal partners on the team;
- Services for eligible young children are written into an Individualized Education Program (IEP); and
- The setting in which services are delivered must be the least restrictive.

### Act 212: The Early Intervention Services System Act of 1990

- Assures eligible young children (birth until the age of beginners) and their families early intervention services and programs;
- Assures appropriate services under public supervision and is designed to meet the developmental needs of eligible children; and
- Assures services specifically designed to address the needs of the family to enhance their child's development.

### Local Interagency Coordinating Councils (LICC)

Established by Act 212, these local councils provide for representation from families, childcare providers, county administration, intermediate units, school districts, early intervention providers, Head Start, service coordinators, health agencies, and other community members. While each LICC is different, their overall goal is to enhance local early intervention services and supports through collaboration. There's an LICC that represents your county. Your LICC may be accessed by contacting your local early intervention program. Child care providers are very important to the LICC—please consider getting to know more about them.

## GLOSSARY

**Act 212:** the Early Intervention Services System Act of 1990 that provided for Early intervention services for eligible children in Pennsylvania.

**Adaptive skills (functional skills):** those skills used in daily living such as eating, dressing, and toileting.

**Advocacy:** Assuring that the services which are appropriate for the child are received. Because of your knowledge of the child, you may be one of the child's best advocates.

**Age of beginners:** the minimum age that a child can attend first grade in his or her own school district.

**Assessment:** a process that helps find the child's unique strengths and needs.

**Assistive Technology Services:** services that directly assist a child with a disability in the selection, acquisition, or use of an assistive technology device.

**Cognitive:** the ability to learn, understand, and to solve problems.

**Developmental delay:** being behind other children of the same age in achieving cognitive, adaptive, physical, and/or social skills.

**Due process:** the procedure which guarantees a person's right to disagree, refuse, change, or permit recommended educational services.

**DPW:** Department of Public Welfare, which is responsible for the provision of early intervention services birth to three years of age.

**Early Intervention:** a collection of services and supports for eligible children from birth to age of beginners to provide stimulation and education.

**ER:** Evaluation Report

**FAPE:** free appropriate public education guaranteed by Public Law 94-142, at no expense to the parents and family.

**Goals:** broad, general target areas of development written by the IFSP or IEP team.

**ICC:** the State Interagency Coordinating Council is an advisory group made up of parents and professionals to advise the Governor and the Departments about early intervention issues in Pennsylvania. There are both state and local-level ICCs.

**IDEA:** Federal early intervention legislation revised in 2004 called the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act.

**IEP:** Individualized Education Plan developed by parents and staff for eligible children from their 3rd birthday to 21 years of age.

**IFSP:** Individualized Family Service Plan developed by parents and staff for eligible children birth to 3rd birthday.

**Inclusion:** to have the opportunity to successfully participate in all of the activities available in a community.

**Language and speech development:** the ability to talk, express needs, and or communicate.

**LICC:** Local Interagency Coordinating Council made up of parents and professionals to coordinate and plan for early intervention services in the local community.

**LRE:** Least Restrictive Environment required by IDEA providing that to the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities are educated with children that are non-disabled.

**MDE:** the Multidisciplinary Evaluation performed by the Multidisciplinary Team.

**MDT:** the Multidisciplinary Team is comprised of the child's parents and professionals from various disciplines responsible for evaluating and reevaluating children thought to be eligible for early intervention services.

**MH/MR:** County programs responsible for the provision of early intervention services from birth to the child's third birthday.

**MAWA:** Mutually Agreed Upon Written Arrangement, designate who has the contract with the state to provide early intervention services in your local area for children three through five years of age.

**PDE:** Pennsylvania Department of Education, which is responsible for the provision of services for children three to age of beginners.

**Physical skills:** the ability to move, see, and hear.

**Social and emotional development:** the ability to interact with others.

**Screening:** a process to determine if a more extensive assessment needs to be completed.

**Service Coordinator (case manager):** the individual assigned to coordinate the planning and delivery of early intervention services to children.

**Special Education:** Specially designed instruction.

**Transition:** the process of moving from one early intervention service to another as the unique needs of the child changes

**Transition year:** the year from July 1st to June 30th of the year that an eligible toddler turns three. This is the time when responsibility for services change from PA Department of Public Welfare to PA Department of Education.

## **WHERE TO GO FOR MORE INFORMATION**

### **CONNECT INFORMATION SERVICES**

150 South Progress Avenue  
Harrisburg, PA 17109  
800-692-7288

Will assist in locating local, state, and national associations for individuals with disabilities, local services, and information.

### **EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION LINKAGE SYSTEM (ECELS)**

Rose Tree Corporate Center II  
1400 North Providence Road, Suite 3004  
Media, PA 19063  
800-24-ECELS

[www.ecels-healthychildcarepa.org](http://www.ecels-healthychildcarepa.org)

A statewide project to improve children's health and safety by linking health professionals with staff of early childhood programs.

### **PARENT TO PARENT OF PENNSYLVANIA**

6340 Flank Drive, Suite 600  
Harrisburg, PA 17109  
717-540-4722 or  
800-986-4550

[www.parenttoparent.org](http://www.parenttoparent.org)

Parent to Parent of Pennsylvania is a network created by families for families of children and adults with special needs.

### **PARENT EDUCATION NETWORK**

2107 Industrial Highway  
York, PA 17402  
800-522-5827 (V/TTY)  
800-441-5028 (Spanish)  
717-600-0100 (V/TTY)

[www.parentednet.org](http://www.parentednet.org)

A federally funded project providing information and support to parents of children with disabilities throughout Pennsylvania.

### **PENNSYLVANIA PATHWAYS**

3823 West 12th Street  
Erie, PA 16505-3301  
800-492-5107 or 814/836-9625

[www.papathways.org](http://www.papathways.org)

Pennsylvania Pathways provides training opportunities for all licensed and registered childcare providers in Pennsylvania. Go to their website for an online training calendar.

## PHONE NUMBERS TO CALL FOR HELP OR INFORMATION

To find the phone number for your local early intervention services, contact **CONNECT EARLY INTERVENTION HELPLINE** by phone at **1-800-692-7288**.

Persons who are deaf, hard of hearing, or speech impaired may access all voice numbers through the PA Relay Service at 800-654-5984. Persons without TDD needing to access TDD numbers can also access the PA Relay Service at 800-654-5988.

Other phone numbers that are helpful: