

Early Intervention Supports and Services: Facts for Families

ALL families of young children eligible for Early Intervention should have quality evidence based supports and services. The purpose of Early Intervention (EI) is to provide family members, caregivers and early education practitioners with supports and resources to enhance children's learning and development.

Early Intervention guiding principles include:

1. Children learn from everyday interactions with familiar people, places, experiences, and routines. Early Intervention can help families recognize how they do this.

This means that: Young children learn best when they are taught everyday life skills like eating, playing, moving, and communicating. For example, Katie "talks" when she calls out to her mom each morning that she is awake, chooses her clothes as she gets dressed for childcare, has breakfast with her big sister Kendra, and helps her mom pack favorite toys and snacks in the diaper bag. These everyday routines provide many opportunities to label favorite (and a few not so favorite) actions, objects, and emotions. Katie's mom plays "What's that?" or "I see..." games in the car-ride home, picking places and objects that are familiar and important for Katie and Kendra. When going to bed at night, Katie and Kendra tell their mom stories or find pictures in their books. There are many benefits to this approach. Research shows that learning is most effective when it is functional and meaningful. When using her words gets Katie more juice or a favorite book, or makes her mom laugh, she is learning how powerful talking can be. Teaching in everyday routines offers more opportunities for practice than traditional therapy. Katie can talk to her mom, sister, and caregivers or early education practitioners throughout the day. She is also learning more than talking. Teaching and learning in daily routines encourages participation, negotiating, problem solving, exploring, and describing concepts such as colors, sizes, and shapes.

2. Early Intervention supports and services are individualized for each child and family.

This means that: The plan developed for each child and family will reflect their unique activities, values, and community participation. Services and supports should match the family's priorities and concerns, and will vary from family to family, and should change as priorities and concerns change. There are many ways for families to receive services and supports. Location, frequency, or type of service or support is not based on the child's age or type of disability. The outcomes identified by the family and the child's team will guide the choices of services and supports necessary to accomplish them. Friends, neighbors, early education practitioners, play groups, churches, libraries, and other community supports enhance the quality of every family's life. Services using natural routines and activities support and encourage families to find and strengthen natural supports outside the Early Intervention system. These supports, established when the child is young, are likely to remain throughout the child's school years and into adulthood.

Early Intervention can be provided at home, in childcare, in private or public preschools, Early Head Start and Head Start, or combinations of these that the family and the team determine are the most appropriate for the child's progress. Services and supports also change as needed. For example, when Katie first enrolled in EI, her teacher provided weekly home visits. When Katie's mom returned to work and Katie enrolled in Early Head Start, they began meeting bi-weekly at the childcare center. This



allowed the Early Intervention provider to problem-solve with Katie's childcare teacher and her mom about routines, strategies and goals, and to develop a coordinated program. Katie and her mom celebrated when the team agreed she did not need any further services.

3. Outcomes and intervention plans reflect the family's priorities for their child, and the interests of their child.

This means that: Natural learning opportunities increase the child's opportunities for engagement, independence, and participation with family and friends. For example, Tenisia's parents know how much he enjoys playing with his friends at the community pre-kindergarten program. His favorite activities on the playground are the sand box and swings. In the classroom, he spends every free moment with the blocks. Tenisia will try anything that his friends do, and he never lets his cerebral palsy slow him down. His family and team believe Tenisia can enhance his fine and gross motor skills while also gaining valuable social, communication, and play skills. His physical therapist (PT) and teacher help him stretch, flex, and strengthen his leg and arm muscles during his favorite activities. The PT joins him and his friends on the playground, often starting a game of ball or tag, setting up an obstacle course, or leading a conga dance group. Tenisia also helps the teacher pass out and clean up snack to get extra practice carrying objects and releasing them without spilling. Tenisia's mom and dad take him to the YMCA for gymnastics in the winter and swimming in the summer. He never complains about his therapy because it is fun and includes his family and friends.

4. The Early Intervention team consults with the family and identified caregivers or early education practitioners to ensure supports and services are coordinated and comprehensive.

This means that: Early Intervention team members work with family members, caregivers, and early education practitioners to help the child grow and learn throughout the day. As a parent, you know that you and other caregivers or early education practitioners have many more opportunities for teaching and learning during typical routines and activities with children than a team member will during a scheduled visit. The team will work with you to enhance your child's development. Your Early Intervention team members will work with you as consultants. They will brainstorm ideas and help you identify natural learning opportunities that fit with your time schedule, your preferences, and your child's interests. They will help you identify what you are already doing that is helping your child learn, and suggest other strategies that research shows are helpful for children with special needs. They will show you how to use the strategies, and take time for you to practice together so you feel comfortable.

For example, Stacy, Katie's Early Intervention teacher, spends time brainstorming with Katie's mom about meaningful words for Katie to practice in the routines, and what her mom can do to encourage Katie's participation. Katie's mom and Stacy show Kendra how she can help Katie when they play. Tenisia attends Pre-K everyday and his PT comes there twice each week. She checks his equipment and consults with his teacher about ways to encourage him to participate and how to adapt activities so that he can join in. She also communicates with his parents about home exercises and any concerns they have.

Early Intervention should not *complicate* your family's life; it should *complement* your family life as it supports you and your child.