



# Basics of the Early Intervention Process under Part C of IDEA

April 2022

Center for Parent Information and Resources

<https://www.parentcenterhub.org/>

Early intervention is designed to help infants and toddlers with developmental delays or diagnosed disabilities. The EI program is available in every State and is coordinated by the State's lead agency.

The lead agency must ensure that all infants and toddlers with disabilities in the State who may have a developmental delay or a diagnosed disability are identified and evaluated. This agency conducts public awareness and child find activities throughout the State to let residents know that early intervention services are available to help eligible infants and toddlers with disabilities.

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Steps 1-2 look at how an infant or toddler is identified as having a disability and in need of early intervention services, including the evaluation process and the determination of the child's eligibility.

**An infant or toddler may have a developmental delay or disability.**

**Concerned, someone refers child to Part C.**



**The infant or toddler is evaluated to determine eligibility.**

- 1 Hospital staff, physicians, healthcare providers, childcare providers, and parents are the people most likely to interact with and observe newborn children, infants, and toddlers on a regular basis. Any of these individuals may notice that an infant or toddler possibly has a developmental delay or a diagnosed condition that may result in developmental delays such that early intervention services can help. It's important to act and connect the child and family with the early intervention system. But how?

Each State has a **referral system** to ensure that infants and toddlers suspected of having a developmental delay or disability can easily be referred to the early intervention (EI) system. There are two main ways that children are connected with EI:

- *Primary referral sources* such as physicians and hospitals and other programs refer the child to the EI program through the State's referral system.
- *Parents* can contact the EI program directly (which is sometimes called *child find* in the State) and ask that their infant or toddler be evaluated.

- 2 Parental consent is needed before the child may be evaluated. Once the parents give their consent, the child is evaluated in five major developmental areas to see: (a) if he or she meets the State's definition of delay or disability, and (b) to determine the child's eligibility for EI services. The five developmental areas are:

- cognitive development
- physical development, including vision and hearing
- communication development
- social or emotional development
- adaptive development

In-depth assessments are conducted to determine the child's unique needs and the EI services appropriate to address those needs. With approval of the family members involved, assessments of family members are also conducted to identify the resources, concerns, and priorities of the family related to the development of the child.

**The evaluation and assessment process must be completed within 45 days** of the child being referred to the EI program. The initial meeting to write an *Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP)* for an eligible child and family (see *Step 3*) must also be held within those 45 days.

Based on the results of administering all evaluation procedures, the qualified personnel who conduct the evaluation determine if the infant or toddler is eligible for EI services.

- If *yes* (the child is eligible), a meeting is scheduled to develop an IFSP.
- If *no* (the child is found *not* eligible), parents are informed in writing of that determination and their right to dispute it (called *prior written notice*).

Step 3 looks at what happens immediately *after* an infant or toddler is determined eligible for EI services.

**Initial IFSP meeting is held, & the initial IFSP is written.** 3

Once the infant or toddler is found eligible for EI, a meeting is held with the parent to identify appropriate services and develop an **IFSP** for the child. Parents receive notice of the initial IFSP meeting and other information in a document called the *prior written notice*. They also receive written information about their parental rights, which is called the *procedural safeguards notice*. The meeting to develop the IFSP must be conducted in the family's native language or other mode of communication (e.g., sign language), unless it is clearly not feasible to do so.

The group that develops the IFSP is known as the **IFSP Team**. This team includes the child's parents, advocates or other family members as requested by the parents, the service coordinator assigned to the family, individuals involved in the child's evaluation, and, as appropriate, the individuals who will provide the EI services to the child. The IFSP must include certain information, such as:

- the current levels of developmental functioning of the child;
- the family's resources, priorities, and concerns about such development;
- the child's measurable results or outcomes to be achieved;

- the EI services identified as appropriate for the child based on his or her needs;
- the settings where EI services will be provided; and
- other services the child will receive.

Early intervention services are to be provided in **natural environments** to the maximum extent appropriate. Natural environments are settings that are natural or typical for a same-aged infant or toddler without a disability. Examples may include the home or community settings (such as the child’s daycare if the child is in daycare). If an EI service is to be provided in a setting that is *not* a natural environment, the IFSP Team must include an appropriate justification in the IFSP.

The child’s parent must give **consent** to the provision of each EI service identified in the IFSP. A parent may consent to a particular EI service without jeopardizing the child’s right to receive any of the other EI services identified in the IFSP. Parents may also **revoke their consent** for an EI service at any time. That revocation of consent is not retroactive.

Steps 4-6 summarize what happens *after* the initial IFSP is written and the lead agency receives parental consent to provide the EI services identified in the IFSP.

**Early intervention services are provided.**

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Each EI service listed in the IFSP must be made available as soon as possible after parents give their consent for that service. The service coordinator serves as the single point of contact for the family and helps coordinate the EI services for the child and family.

**Every six months IFSP is reviewed and revised, as needed.**

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The IFSP is reviewed at least every six months to see if changes need to be made, given the child’s growth or changes in developmental status, or given changes in the family’s priorities and concerns. The IFSP periodic review may be held more frequently if the family requests it or if conditions warrant it.

Parents receive a *prior written notice* if there is a proposal or refusal to conduct a reevaluation or to change EI services for the child. If there are no changes being proposed, the six-month IFSP review meeting may be a small meeting with just the service coordinator and the parent and an advocate or other family member requested by the parent.

**The IFSP is reviewed annually.**

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The IFSP must be reviewed annually. The annual review meeting is held with the service coordinator, the parent, an advocate or other family member requested by the parent, and appropriate service providers. IFSP Team members review the progress the child is making in meeting the measurable results or outcomes listed in the IFSP. Do changes need to be made to the IFSP to reflect the child’s current levels of developmental functioning or the family’s resources, priorities, and concerns about that development? If so, the IFSP Team revises the IFSP, as needed.

**Transitioning from Early Intervention** | Steps 7–8 summarize what happens as the infant or toddler with a disability approaches his or her 3rd birthday, when eligibility for early intervention typically ends. These steps are meant to prepare for the child’s smooth transition from Part C services to Part B or other appropriate services or programs.

*For all children in EI*

**7**

**A transition plan for the child’s exit from Part C is included in the IFSP at least 90 days before the child’s 3rd birthday.**

Part C services end when the child reaches age 3. At least 90 days before the child’s 3rd birthday, with the approval of the family, the lead agency or EI provider will hold a conference with parents to develop a **transition plan**. This conference may also be held up to 9 months before the child turns 3, at the discretion of all parties. The program options available to the toddler upon leaving the EI program are reviewed and may include:

- preschool services under Part B of IDEA;
- elementary school or preschool services for children participating under a State’s extended Part C option (which permits EI services to be continued past a child’s 3<sup>rd</sup> birthday);
- early education, Head Start, or Early Head Start or childcare programs; or
- other appropriate services.

The transition meeting also focuses on the **transition steps and services** the child and family need to ensure they make a smooth transition from Part C to the next program setting. This information is included in the transition plan, and the transition plan is included in the child’s IFSP. (For many children who are referred to Part C after their 2nd birthday, the transition plan may be part of the initial IFSP.)

Parent consent is needed before the transition plan may be implemented.

*For children potentially eligible for Part B services*

**Lead agency must notify the SEA & the child’s LEA. The LEA must take specific actions before the child’s 3rd birthday.**

Some exiting toddlers may be eligible for preschool services under Part B of IDEA. For each of these children:

- The transition conference described under Step 7 must occur; and
- The State educational agency (SEA) and the child’s local educational agency (LEA) must be notified.

***About the transition conference***

If the child is potentially eligible for preschool services under Part B, with family approval, participants in the conference include the lead agency, family, and the LEA, as well as other members of the IFSP Team, including the service coordinator and individuals invited by the family.

***About the transition notification***

When a toddler is potentially eligible for preschool services under Part B of IDEA, the lead agency or EI provider must notify the SEA and the child’s LEA that the toddler will soon reach the age of eligibility for services under Part B. This transition notification must take place at least 90 days before the child’s 3rd birthday. The notification includes the child’s name, date of birth, residence, and parent contact information.

(Step 7 continued...)

Once notified, and **before the child turns 3**, the LEA must:

- provide the *procedural safeguards notice* to parents, which explains the procedural safeguards available to them under IDEA;
- decide if the child is suspected of having a disability as that term is defined under IDEA Part B and therefore needs to be evaluated to determine his or her eligibility under Part B, and, if so, conduct that evaluation; and
- make sure that an *Individualized Education Program (IEP)* is developed for the child, if he or she is found eligible for preschool services under Part B.

**Child exits early intervention.**

**8** By age 3, the child exits the Part C early intervention program. The child transitions either to the Part B preschool program or to another appropriate program, if one is available in the State.



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