Section III:
Additional Resources & Information
Guiding Principles
For Early Intervention Supports and Services in Everyday Routines, Activities, and Places

The Colorado Department of Education serves as the lead agency in Colorado for Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (Part C of IDEA) through its Part C initiative, Early Childhood Connections. Early Childhood Connections has articulated this set of six principles that should guide how early intervention supports and services are provided. Source: A Guidebook: Early Intervention Supports and Services In Everyday Routines, Activities And Places In Colorado. Denver, CO: Colorado Department of Education (1999).

1. All children are unique, with their individual strengths and talents. The presence of a disability or special need is not the defining characteristic of any child.

2. Children grow and develop in the context of relationships with their families and other caregivers.

3. All children have the right to belong, to be welcomed, and to participate fully in the typical places and activities of their communities.

4. Children with and without special needs learn important things from one another.

5. Everyday routines, activities, and places offer countless opportunities for children to learn and develop.

6. The lives of families are enhanced when they are successful in maintaining their everyday lives and relationships.


Key Features

Of Quality Early Intervention Supports and Services

This handout describes eight key features of quality early intervention supports and services. These key features have evolved from the rich body of theory, research, policy, and practice guidance that has been evolving over the past few decades related to the fields of early childhood and developmental disability. Together, these features form a set of interrelated values and assumptions that should guide the provision of services for infants and toddlers with special needs and their families.

Family-Centered Services

The term “family-centered” refers to a rich constellation of beliefs, philosophies, policies, and practices for providing supports and services for children with special needs and their families. At the core of family-centered practice is the recognition that the family is at the center of a young child’s life and it is the family that is child’s constant support, decision-maker, and advocate. Family-centered practice honors the premise that families offer unique perspectives and expertise about their children. Families need to be regarded as full team members and need to participate in shaping all aspects of service delivery, including specific services for an individual child, program development, and policy formulation.

Building on these assumptions, one of the primary purposes of early intervention is to support families in their task of enhancing their children’s learning and development. One of the primary roles of the service provider is to work closely with families in identifying meaningful goals. Intervention needs to provide families with information, opportunities to learn new skills, and feedback on how to meet their goals and support their children to participate fully in daily routines and activities at home and in the community.

Cultural Competency

Complementing family-centered services is the concept of cultural competence. Families are unique. A family’s diversity might be expressed in many forms, including ethnicity, race, religion, linguistics, and economics, as well as by their values and beliefs. Early intervention programs and individual service providers need to provide their services in ways that honor the diversity of families.

Service providers need to continually increase their knowledge and skills for understanding and respecting the wide diversity of families that make up the community that they serve. Among the many skills one needs in order to practice in a
culturally competent manner are the abilities to: understand the impact of culture on how one views and acts in the world; use self-examination and self-awareness to accept and value one's own culture; request and use information from others to best understand who they are and how they would like to be treated; locate resources in the community to support their work with families; and, to work with and collaborate effectively with others across cultures.

**Services Provided In Everyday Routines, Activities, And Places***

Early intervention supports and services should be delivered as much as possible in the context of everyday routines, activities, and places. Everyday routines, activities, and places are the day-to-day settings and activities that promote children's learning. *Family routines* are the usual events that are customarily a part of families' schedules. These routines might include meal time, bath time, play time, car rides, and nap time. *Everyday activities* that a family does with their infant or toddler might include such things as having fun at the playground, going for a walk, spending time with friends at a playgroup, shopping, and going to the library. *Everyday places* are those that families and typically developing children frequent, day-in and day-out, including the home, the neighborhood, and community programs such as a recreation center, library, park, or store.

The term “natural environment” is sometimes misinterpreted so that people think only about the place where supports and services are provided. Although location is important, it is only one element of quality supports and services. The elements of why the service is being provided, what the service is, who is providing it, when it is being provided, and how it is being provided are other essential characteristics. Rather than focusing only on place, if we carefully plan for the “why, what, who, when, and how,” of services, we are much more likely to provide meaningful input to the child and family, and in this way, best support the child’s learning and development. We believe this more elaborate interpretation is the fundamental intent of the call for services in “natural environments”.

Why are everyday routines, activities, and places important? It is the nature of children to learn throughout the day, wherever they are, and whatever they are doing. Everyday experiences, events, and situations provide children with continuous learning opportunities that promote and enhance their development. Everyday routines, activities, and places are unique to each child and family and are identified by the family as they talk about their typical daily events, such as visiting grandpa, walking to the store, getting the mail, feeding the dog, and doing the laundry. Sometimes children learn through planned activities, but at other times children learn spontaneously by participating in daily activities and routines. For example, children learn about “water” while playing in the bathtub, washing hands in the sink, getting a drink, splashing in a puddle, or swimming in a pool. The location of these everyday routines and activities include such places as the bathroom, kitchen sink, backyard, and community playground. These typical activities are children's opportunities for learning and adults' opportunities for encouraging the child's development.

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Children learn best when they practice skills in the settings and within the activities and routines in which they would typically use those same skills. Children are provided an opportunity to acquire skills within the context of daily life rather than in contrived learning situations that may not represent real life challenges. The use of everyday routines, activities, and places as a context for early intervention services provides numerous ways to incorporate these skills into a child's and family's life. Many naturally occurring routines and activities can serve as development-enhancing opportunities, increase the number of learning opportunities, and support learning.

**Participation**

One of the greatest heartaches for a family—any family—is when their child is excluded. One of the greatest gifts that service providers can offer is helping children participate in every day life. In addition to supporting learning and development, early intervention supports and services should promote equity and belonging. When services are delivered in everyday routines, activities, and places, children are supported to participate fully in community and family life and are much less likely to find themselves segregated from their peers. In this sense, early intervention supports and services honor the rights of persons with disabilities to participate in all of society.

Each child's level of participation is the result of a complex relationship between the child's abilities, other personal characteristics, and the circumstances in which the child lives. Society can facilitate or hinder participation. An environment with barriers (physical or social) can restrict participation, while environments that are accessible and involve people who promote positive interactions and have appropriate expectations can increase the child's opportunities for more active participation. To maximize each child's participation we need to assess the child's ability to take part in various life domains and to identify conditions that impede and support participation. The standard for assessing a child's participation is how a child of similar age without a disability will participate in that particular activity, in that particular community. We must observe the child to see if a discrepancy exists between the observed participation and the expected participation of a child without a disability. Interventions are then designed to increase participation by removing barriers and promoting conditions that result in increased participation. Strategies used to increase participation are very diverse, including use of low and high tech assistive technology, adaptation of activities and environments, changing or reframing attitudes that limit child participation, and increasing the child's skill level. Early intervention should promote child participation in all areas of daily life, including play, self-care, and social activities.

**Developmentally Appropriate Practice**

For the past fifty years, the most widely accepted child development theories have recognized that opportunities for children to play are essential components for early cognitive, social, and language development. Building on this recognition, pre-eminent early childhood professional organizations have advanced an approach to educating
and caring for young children known as developmentally appropriate practice. Developmentally appropriate practices are age appropriate and individually appropriate. Developmentally appropriate practice incorporates enjoyable play activities, thereby encouraging full participation in play activities as well as the acquisition and retention of skills gained in play. By being appropriate to the age and unique character of a given child, developmentally appropriate practices are responsive to, and respectful of, individual children.

Functional, Meaningful Outcomes

Supports and services should directly help young children function as independently as possible in their everyday lives. Functional outcomes are derived by listening to and working with families to identify the skills that children need to master, and/or the accommodations in tasks and the environment that will support the child to participate in family and community life. By focusing on functional outcomes, families and other caregivers recognize how to use the many learning opportunities that naturally occur in children's daily lives. In order to attain functional outcomes, skill development, accommodations, and adaptations must be addressed within the context of children's daily activities.

In addition to being functional to the child, outcomes need to be meaningful to the family. Early intervention services need to address families’ concerns, priorities, and resources and “fit” the context of their culture, life-style, and schedules. Service providers can keep focused on meaningful outcomes by listening to and planning with families. Through conversations focused on the perspectives of the entire family, practitioners can learn what family members currently do and want to do in the future, who the key individuals are in their lives, and how best to blend early intervention services and supports so that children participate fully and families can reach their goals.

Transdisciplinary Team

The transdisciplinary team approach is based on the assumption that a child’s development should be regarded as an integrated and interactive whole, rather than as a collection of separate domains. Likewise, supports and services are most successful when the team works as an integrated, interactive whole, rather than as a collection of separate disciplines. A hallmark of this team approach is the sharing of assessment, program planning, and implementation information and skills across disciplinary boundaries in the interest of providing an integrated program for children and their families. Information, skills, and knowledge is continually shared during team meetings and other interactions.

In the early intervention transdisciplinary team one person assumes the role of primary service provider with a family while other team members serve as consultants to this primary provider. There may be times when a specific need of a particular child

and family is so complex that the primary service provider is not able to meet that need, even with consultative support from other team members. In such cases, the team member from the most appropriate discipline might provide intervention together with the primary service provider.

The team includes professionals from a variety of disciplines and the child’s parent(s), recognizing that the family is the primary decision-maker for the child and that the parent(s) choose their level of team participation. The team’s performance relies on effective interaction skills including clear and open communication, effective problem solving, group decision making, and conflict resolution. These skills allow team members to transcend the scope of their own discipline, teach and learn across disciplines, and develop unified individualized plans.

Coordination

Every family with a child enrolled in Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) should be offered the support of a service coordinator who works in partnership with the family to assure that they receive the services to which they are entitled and to facilitate the development of the Individualized Family Services Plan (IFSP). Participating in the development of the IFSP is an integral part of service delivery for all providers.

The "officially" designated service coordinator may be a separate and distinct role from the early intervention service providing team. However, all service providers have inherent responsibilities to participate fully in the entire IFSP process and to coordinate closely with the family, service coordinator, and other supports and services effectively throughout their involvement with the family.

[* Portions of this section of this document are adapted with permission from: "Frequently Asked Questions About Natural Environments," published by the Georgia State Interagency Coordinating Council and Babies Can’t Wait, Georgia’s Part C Lead Agency.]

Identifying Family Activities and Routines
Conversation Starters

Consider using some of these comments or questions to open a dialog about the child’s and family’s activities, environments, and routines.

★ We’d like to learn about some of your child’s daily routines and activities for teaching and learning. By sharing your daily activities and routines, you are identifying potential times and places for your child’s intervention.

★ Tell me about your day. What are the routines/activities or places that you go that most often occur for you and your child?

★ What types of things happen on most:
   Mornings?   Afternoons?   Nights?   Weekends?

★ Life with children usually makes us be pretty flexible. Can you give me some ideas about what usually happens before or after __________? (Use some event the careprovider mentions– “One Life to Live.” Systematically identify events, and then proceed.)

★ If the careprovider is having difficulty identifying activities or routines, ask some specific questions about some of the following: dressing, breakfast, watching TV, car travel, preparing meals, household chores, nap, lunch and evening meals, yard work, bath, bedtime stories, or hanging out.

Possible follow-up questions to consider:

★ Are there any activities or places that you go (e.g., shopping, doctor’s appointments) that occur on a less than regular basis (e.g., once a week, every few days)?

★ Are there other events that occur fairly regularly or during the weekend (e.g., sport events for siblings)?

★ Who are the important people who participate in your child’s life? Who are helpful in your child’s care, and who may also have activities and routines for teaching and learning (e.g., grandparents, big brother, neighbor, friend)?
Family-guided Approaches to Collaborative Early Intervention Training and Services

★ What routines/activities does ______ (child’s name) ______ enjoy doing?
  • What makes this routine(s) enjoyable to ____________?
  • What does_________________________ usually do during the routine/activity?
  • What do you (or the other careproviders) do during the routine/activity?
  • How long does it take?

★ Are there opportunities for your child to interact with other children?
  • How many other children participate in this routine/activity?

★ What routine/activity(s) does ____________________ not like?
  • What makes this routine/activity difficult or uncomfortable for ____________?
  • What does_________________________ usually do during the routine/activity?

★ What are your (family’s) expectations of the children during the routine/activity?
  • What do you do during the routine/activity?
  • How do you let the child know what is expected in this routine/activity?

★ Are there better times for you during the day or locations that are more comfortable for intervention routines?

SUMMARY INFORMATION

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(Adapted from Woods Cripe, Woods Cripe & Venm)
Early Intervention Affects Families’ Quality of Life

Supports for families of young children with disabilities—as provided by Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act—are vital, according to a study that assessed family outcomes at the end of early intervention near their child’s third birthday. FPG Director Don Bailey, Ph.D., with FPG Investigators Anita Scarborough, Ph.D., and Lauren Nelson, Ph.D., co-authored the article in *Pediatrics* (December 2005)—“Thirty-Six-Month Outcomes for Families of Children with Disabilities Participating in Early Intervention”—that highlights the findings.

**The Study: Questions & Answers**

A nationally representative sample of over 2500 parents in 20 states completed a 40-minute telephone interview on or near their child's third birthday. Five broad questions were asked. (Go to www.sri.com/ncilb/ for a copy of the interview.)

1. **Did early intervention enable the family to help their child grow, learn, and develop?** Most parents knew how to care for their child’s basic needs, such as feeding, bathing, and dressing. They noted that they could help their child learn and develop. However, more than one-third indicated that they had a difficult time figuring out what to do about their child’s behavior.

2. **Did early intervention enhance the family’s perceived ability to work with professionals and advocate for services?** Most parents said that they know how to work with professionals and advocate for services, and what to do if they did not feel their child was receiving needed services.

3. **Did early intervention assist the family in building a strong support system?** Most parents agreed that they had friends or relatives they could turn to for support or help in dealing with challenges related to their child’s special needs. The majority said their ability to work and play together as a family was fairly normal, though their child had special needs. But more than one-third had little chance to participate in community activities, such as religious, school, or social events.

4. **Did early intervention enhance the family’s perceived quality of life?** Most parents rated their quality of life as excellent, very good, or good.

5. **Did early intervention help enhance an optimistic view of the future?** Almost all parents expected their family’s future situation to be excellent, very good, or good.

In addition to answering these questions, parents weighed how the help and information from intervention have affected their family. Most parents rated their families as better off, with a very small percentage reporting that their family was about the same or worse off.

**Room for Improvement**

At the end of early intervention, families of infants and toddlers with disabilities generally describe themselves as competent and confident in their capacity to support their child, work with professionals, and gain access to formal and informal supports. These findings offer evidence that Part C programs have supported most families in their caregiving responsibilities.

The article also suggests areas for improvement:

- More specialized help for families of children with behavior problems
- Expanded efforts to help families gain access to community support systems
- More concerted efforts to ensure that early intervention is equally accessible and effective for families from diverse cultures
- More integration of pediatric health care with early intervention, particularly for children who have special health needs in addition to disability

These findings also underline the key roles that pediatricians and other professionals play in working with families to identify children who need and might qualify for early intervention. Early referral could result in more optimal outcomes for these children and their families.
The Importance of Joining Professional Organizations

You will find that many professional organizations sponsor meetings that include sessions designed to improve the expertise of professionals working with infants and toddlers. These groups offer professional-development opportunities of various kinds, including workshops or more formal sessions in which individual presenters share ideas. Some professional organizations focus on specific subject areas and specific categories of learners. Joining a professional group gives you an opportunity to meet people with shared interests. Members often get productive new ideas from even casual conversations with others in the group.

Many professional organizations sponsor the publication of journals that feature excellent, practical how-to-do-it articles. Subscribing to professional magazines like Journal of Early Intervention, Zero to three or Young Children will also give you advice and information from other early childhood professionals.

Many national organizations represent the general interests of those who work with young children with special needs. These organizations include:

- **The Council for Exceptional Children (CEC)**
  (CEC) This is the largest international professional organization dedicated to improving educational outcomes for individuals with exceptionalities, students with disabilities, and/or the gifted. CEC advocates for appropriate governmental policies, sets professional standards, provides continual professional development, advocates for newly and historically underserved individuals with exceptionalities, and helps professionals obtain conditions and resources necessary for effective professional practice.
  
  www.cec.sped.org

- **The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)**
  (NAEYC) This organization is the world’s largest early childhood education organization with a national network of state, local and regional affiliates. By joining this organization you will connect with over 100,000 educators who want to work together to ensure young children make the most of their early years.

  www.naeyc.org

- **Zero to Three**
  Zero to Three is a national nonprofit multidisciplinary organization that advances its mission by informing, educating and supporting adults who influence the lives of infants and toddlers. Zero to Three’s mission is to support the healthy development and well-being of infants, toddlers and their families.

  www.zerotothree.org
**Professional Resources in Rhode Island**

Professional development is designed to enhance your school and work growth opportunities. Professional development can be achieved through training, workshops, research and professional mentoring by a professional. The State of RI offers multiple conferences, RI Early Childhood Conference, Keys to Quality and Link to Learning as well as individual events around specific themes. Workshops are offered by many agencies, RIAEYC, and Kids Count just to name a few. Review the enclosed list of resources for more information and agencies to contact.

**Professional Resources in Rhode Island:**

The Arc, for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities
www.thearc.org

Prevent Child Abuse Rhode Island
(401) 728-7920
www.preventchildabuse-ri.org

Ready to Learn Providence (R2LP)
(401) 490-9960
www.R2LP.org

Rhode Island Association for the Education of Young Children (RIAEYC)
(401) 398-7605
www.riaeyc.com

Rhode Island Head Start Association
(401) 351-2750
www.riheadstart.org

Rhode Island Parent Information Network (RIPIN)
(401)270-0101 or (800)-464-3399
www.ripin.org

**National Resources:**

National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)
www.naeyc.org

National Education Association (NEA)
www.nea.org

**Zero to Three**
www.zerotothree.org