



## Chapter 7

### Early Intervention Services for Infants and Toddlers

As noted earlier, eligible children with disabilities from birth through age 2 are provided services by Alabama’s Early Intervention (EI) System, part of the state’s Department of Rehabilitation Services.

Services for children in this age range are often referred to as Part C services because of the section of the IDEA which requires such services.

Local public school systems are responsible for providing special education to eligible children from ages 3 to 21. Services for children in this age range are referred to as Part B services.

In addition to ensuring that your child’s needs are met while she’s being served by EI, one of the most important things EI system staff will do for you and your child is ensure a seamless transition from Part C services to Part B services when she reaches the age of three.

The Alabama Early Intervention System and the Alabama State Department of Education (SDE) have collaborated on a comprehensive handbook that describes services for children with disabilities, ages birth through five. This book is referred to as the “Red Book.” You can request a copy from your local school system or EI agency, the Department of Rehabilitation Services (EI Division), or the SDE. See the resource list for state contact information.

The handbook may also be found on-line at:

<ftp://ftp.alsde.edu/documents/65/HANDBOOK.pdf>

### What are the goals of EI services?

EI services are designed to achieve four goals for your child:

- To enhance her development and minimize her potential for developmental delay,
- To reduce her need for special education and related services once she reaches school age,
- To maximize the likelihood that she will lead a full and productive life included in her community, and
- To enhance your family’s ability to meet her needs.

### Who is eligible for EI services?

Infants and toddlers from birth through age 2 are eligible to receive EI services if they are delayed by 25% or more as measured by appropriate diagnostic instruments and procedures in their cognitive, physical, communicative, social, emotional or adaptive development, or if they have a diagnosis of a physical and/or medical condition that will likely result in developmental delay.

- **physical development** (including vision and hearing) – how your child grasps, moves, sits, crawls, walks, sees, and hears
- **cognitive development** - how your child thinks and solves problems
- **communication** – how your child communicates with gestures, sounds, and words and understands spoken word
- **social or emotional development** – how your child acts with other children and adults
- **adaptive development** – how your child assists in personal skill areas like eating, dressing, bathing, and brushing teeth

### What Types of EI Services are available?

Depending on the need of your child and family, EI services may include:

- Assistive technology
- Audiology
- Family training, counseling and home visits
- Health services
- Medical services (only for diagnostic and evaluation purposes)
- Nursing services
- Nutrition services
- Occupational therapy
- Physical therapy
- Psychological services
- Service coordination
- Social work services
- Specialized instruction
- Speech-language pathology
- Transportation and related costs
- Vision services

### If I think my child may need EI services, where do I go for help?

Contact the EI System's Child Find Office at 1-800-543-3098.

An intake representative will ask you some basic biographical and contact information which will be passed on to the EI coordinating agency in your community.

A representative from that agency will contact you to set up a time when your child can be evaluated to see if she's eligible for EI services. This referral must be acted upon within two working days. You must give your consent before your child is evaluated.

#### Early Intervention services are:

- **Family-centered** - EI supports and services are for your family, not just your child.
- **Individualized** – EI supports and services are based on your family's and child's unique needs and resources.
- **Coordinated** – EI services are developed across agencies and among professionals within and across agencies.
- **Community-based** – EI services are provided in natural environments including home and community settings.

#### What happens during an EI evaluation?

The IDEA requires that your child receive a comprehensive multidisciplinary evaluation to find out the nature of her strengths, delays or difficulties, and to determine whether she's eligible for EI services.

During an evaluation, your child will be evaluated by at least two qualified EI service system personnel. As part of the evaluation process, these evaluators will observe your child, ask your child to do certain tasks or things, and talk to you and her. The evaluators may want to review other information like your

child's medical history and may seek input from others, including her pediatrician or other caregiving or service providers.

EI evaluations are provided free of charge.

The evaluation process must be completed within 45 days from referral. Following your child's evaluation, you and a team of professionals will meet and review all of the data, results, and reports. The people on the

team will talk with you about whether your child meets the EI eligibility criteria. If so, your child will be found eligible for services.

### **My child has been found eligible for services. What happens next?**

Once your child is found eligible to receive EI services, your child and family will have an assessment conducted to determine your child's unique needs, your family's resources, priorities and concerns related to your child's development, and the nature and extent of early intervention support and services needed. Such assessments will be conducted throughout the time your child is served by the EI system.

With the evaluation and assessment information, you will meet with EI providers to develop a written plan for providing EI services to your child and, as necessary, to your family. This plan is called the Individualized Family Service Plan, or IFSP.

“Remember, [the EI] planning process is for you and your child. You are the one who should make the decisions about what is best for your child and family based on the information you have been given during the evaluation and assessment process. Don't hesitate to express your concerns or doubts about what is happening during the planning process.”

An Eligible Family's Guide to Alabama's Early Intervention System, <http://www.rehab.state.al.us>

The IDEA allows for EI services to begin prior to a complete evaluation if your child has an obvious service need.

An IFSP review must be conducted every six months, but can be conducted more often if conditions warrant or if you request such a review. A meeting must be held annually to evaluate the IFSP, your child's progress, and revise its provisions as necessary.

### **Who can attend the IFSP meeting?**

- You, the child's parents!
- Other family members, friends, service providers or advocates, as you request
- Your child's EI service coordinator
- Evaluation or assessment personnel
- As appropriate, persons who will be providing services to your child and family

## What is an Individualized Family Service Plan?

An IFSP must include:

- The name of your child's EI service coordinator. This person is responsible for implementation of the IFSP and for coordinating with other agencies and persons. The EI service coordinator assigned to your family at the time of initial referral may continue to serve as your child's EI service coordinator, or a new service coordinator may be appointed at the IFSP meeting.
- A statement, based on evaluation and assessment information, of your child's developmental status in each of the five specified developmental areas: your child's physical development (including vision and hearing), cognitive development, communication skills and needs, social or emotional development, and adaptive development.
- A statement, if your family consents to its inclusion, of your family's resources, priorities and concerns related to enhancing the development of your child.
- A statement of the major outcomes expected to be achieved for your child and family, with the criteria, procedures and time lines to be used in measuring progress.
- A statement of the specific EI services that are going to be provided in order to achieve the identified outcomes. This statement must answer the following questions:
  - Who will provide the services?
  - How will the service be provided?
  - Will they be provided individually or in a group? How long will each session last?
  - How will the services be funded?
  - Where will the services be provided? To the maximum extent appropriate to the needs of your child, EI services must be provided in natural environments — home, childcare centers, or other community settings in which children without disabilities

participate. If the identified services are not going to be provided in a natural environment, the IFSP must include a statement explaining why.

- To the extent appropriate, the IFSP must include a statement of medical and other services that your child needs but that are not required under Part C. Including these other services allows the IFSP Team to have a comprehensive picture of your child's total service needs. Your child's EI service coordinator should help you secure these services, whether through public or private means.
- The projected starting dates for services and their anticipated duration.
- The steps to be taken to transition your child to Part B services (e.g., preschool services or other services that are considered appropriate for your child) when she reaches the age of three.

The transition plan must be included in your child's IFSP by the time she turns 30 months old. These transition steps include discussing and educating you about future placement and service options. These steps also must include preparing your child for the upcoming transition so she's ready for it. In preparation for transition, the IFSP must include a plan for transmitting information about your child to your local school system. You must provide consent for this information to be transmitted to your local school.

## Transition from Part C to Part B Services

At the age of three, children are no longer eligible for services funded or coordinated by the EI/Part C system. Instead, eligible children with disabilities are provided services by their public school system.

One of the most important responsibilities of the EI system is to help ensure your child's smooth transition between these two service systems. The IDEA's transition requirements seek to ensure that evaluations and planning are completed in a timely way so that when your child turns three years old, an IEP has been written for her (if she's eligible for Part B services) and it's ready to be implemented.

From the moment your child starts receiving EI services, you and your child's service coordinator should start thinking ahead to what's going to happen when she turns three. What will her needs be? What service delivery options are available in your community? Which of those options are right for your child and family? Do you understand the rights that your child has under Part B?



By the time your child reaches the age of 30 months (2 ½ years), a written EI transition plan must be included in her IFSP. You and your child's EI service coordinator will create this plan, inviting other EI team members to participate as desired.

At a minimum, the EI transition plan that is in place by the time your child reaches the age of 30 months old must include information about:

- Potential preschool and community placements and services,
- Training about transition and how it will affect your child and family including the differences between Part C and Part B services, and
- With your permission, plans for how information regarding your

child and her EI history and needs will be shared with your school system as part of a referral and an invitation to your school system's EI transition representative to participate in a Transition Meeting

By the age of 33 months, a Transition Meeting must be held with an EI transition representative employed by your local school system. The purpose of the Transition Meeting is to continue to fine-tune your child's transition planning and to identify next steps in the planning process, including formal referral to the Part B services, eligibility matters, and the IEP process.

Your child's eligibility for Part B services is determined by your school system according to the time lines and eligibility criteria noted under Part B (see Chapter 2). However, an eligible child must have an IEP in place and ready to be implemented by the time she turns 3 years old.

If you request it, your child's school must invite a representative from your EI service system to attend your child's initial IEP meeting to assist in the smooth transition of services.

It is important for the IFSP to be clear about what services are to be provided and by whom, the actions to be taken by the EI service coordinator, and the role you as parents play in the IFSP.



### **Do I have to give my consent for my child to be evaluated and provided EI services?**

You must give your written consent before your child's initial evaluation and assessment and before EI services begin for your child.

You may withdraw your consent for services at any time and you determine whether you, your child or other family members will accept any planned EI service.

### **May I review my child's EI records?**

You have the right to inspect your child's EI records promptly, but in no case more than 45 days after you ask to do so. You may receive copies of your child's records under certain conditions.

### **What if I disagree with a proposed change to my child's EI services?**

The EI system must provide you with written notice before it makes any changes to your child's services.

### **What steps can I take if I feel my rights or my child's rights have been violated?**

The EI system provides for three ways for you to resolve any matter related to your child's eligibility under the EI system or her services. You may:

- **Request Mediation** — a voluntary process where an impartial, qualified mediator assigned by the Commissioner of Rehabilitation Services helps you and the EI service provider or system reach a mutually agreeable resolution. The mediator will provide a written report to the parties with a copy to the Commissioner. The report will become a part of your child's record.
  
- **Request an impartial due process hearing** — a hearing officer assigned by the Commissioner of Rehabilitation Services will hear evidence and make a determination regarding the dispute. A hearing must be completed in 45 calendar days after requested, unless there is an extension. The Hearing Officer's decision is final, unless appealed. Within 30 days from the receipt of the Hearing Officer's decision, the EI service provider must provide the EI system with written notice of its intended response to the actions ordered by the Hearing Officer. The EI system will review the written notice of intent and will verify all proper actions have been completed. During the hearing, your child must continue to receive the EI services

currently being provided to her unless you and the provider agree otherwise. If the issue involves an application for initial services, your child, with your consent, must receive those services not in dispute.

■ **Ask for an impartial resolution of complaints** — made by providing the Commissioner of Rehabilitation Services with facts and information related to the alleged violation of federal and/or state law, including efforts made to resolve the issue to date. A state level EI staff person will investigate the complaint, according to state procedures. The process must be completed within 60 days unless an extension is granted.