



# A Family's Guide to **Early Intervention Services** in Washington State

*Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)*



Washington State Department of  
**CHILDREN, YOUTH & FAMILIES**



When you learn your child has delays, you may have lots of feelings. You may feel scared, you may not believe what has been said or you may even feel anger. These are not unusual feelings, and you are not alone. Other parents have these experiences or feelings as well. There are statewide programs that can help you connect with other parents who have also had these feelings or concerns. You can call the parent support numbers listed in the back of this book for more information and help.

### **Dear parents,**

*I know if you have this booklet, you probably have a concern about your child's development or you have been told your child has a developmental delay.*

*I remember how overwhelmed and confused I was when my daughter, Suzi, was going through testing for her developmental delays. I didn't understand many words professionals used, let alone how to get services.*

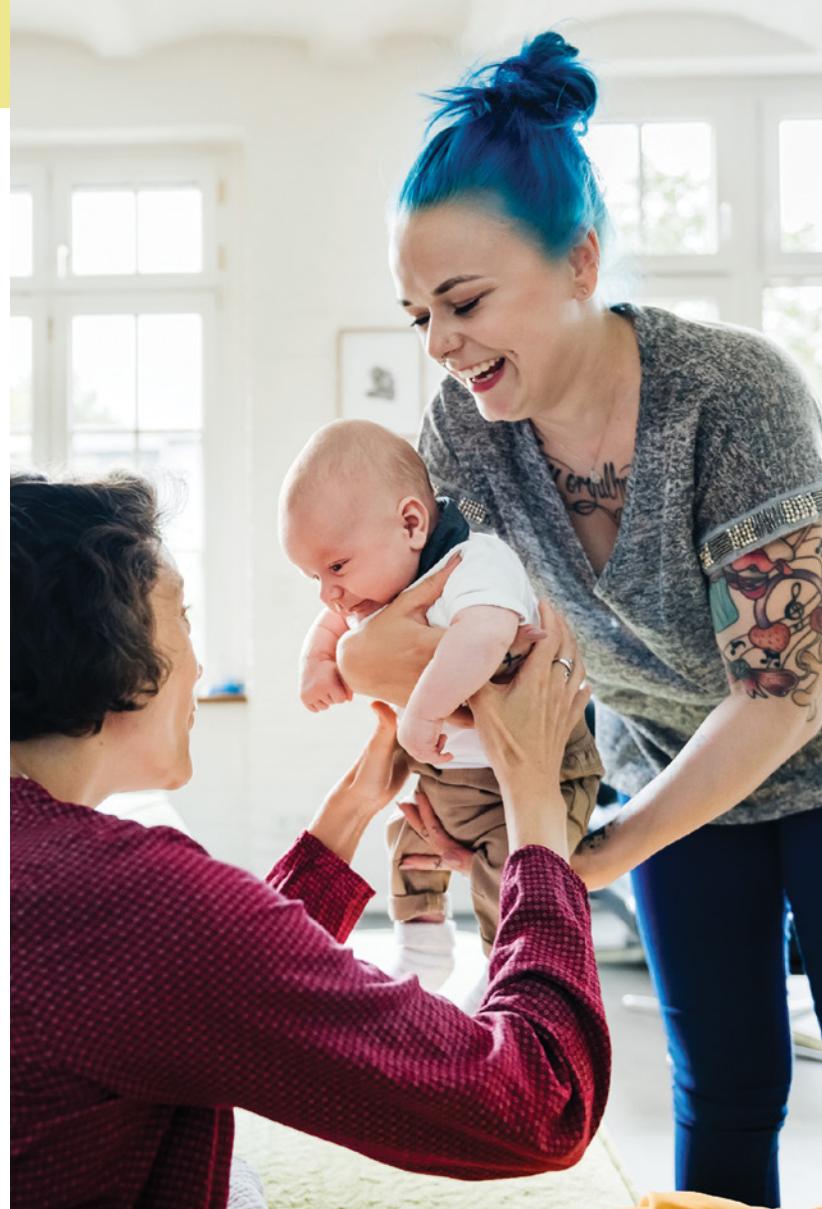
*Once we got the services, through many helpful teachers and therapists, her development really improved. I'm so grateful for where she is today because of the early intervention she got in those critical early years. Also, being linked with other parents and sharing information was most important for our family.*

*I hope you will use this booklet as a guide to the services and supports your family needs.*

**Cassie, parent**

# Contents

Introduction .....	2
What is early intervention? .....	3
What if I have questions about my child's development? ..	4
Who is eligible for early intervention in Washington? .....	5
What happens next? .....	6
What happens at age 3? .....	7
What are my rights under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)? (Procedural Safeguards) .....	8
What if I don't agree with a decision about my child's or family's services? .....	10
Where can I go for more help or information? .....	11
How can I be more involved? .....	12
What does that mean? (Glossary) .....	13
Acknowledgments .....	14



# Introduction

*“When my son was six months old, he still didn’t sit up. I thought maybe I was doing something wrong. I took him to our doctor who helped me connect with an early intervention program. Now my son is receiving services that are really helpful. He is making good progress, and I’m learning more about what I can do. I now know that it wasn’t because I was doing anything wrong that I didn’t do things as fast as other kids.”*

**Heather, parent**



**The primary purpose of this guide** is to provide you and your family with an overview of the Washington State Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) Early Support for Infants and Toddlers (ESIT) program. Your family’s participation in the ESIT program is your choice. If your child is found eligible for the ESIT program, early intervention services are available to your child and family to address delays in your child’s development.

This guide provides you with general and important information about the statewide ESIT program, including a listing of some of your rights as a parent. A complete and more detailed description of the procedural safeguards/parent rights available to you and your family are provided in a separate document called “The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Part C Procedural Safeguards (Parent Rights).” As you read this guide, your family resources coordinator (FRC) or someone from the ESIT program can answer any questions you may have about the program.

Throughout this document, many terms common to early intervention are used. If you have questions about any of them and need a definition, turn to page 13 of this booklet for a glossary of terms.

## **Washington State Early Support for Infants and Toddlers (ESIT)**

As parents you are the most important people in your child’s life. Children grow and change rapidly during their first three years. Think of your child and how he or she is growing. You know your child best. Notice things like how and when your child smiles, sits up, walks, talks or holds a cup. What you are seeing is how your child is growing through the different developmental stages. When a child has a delay in development, services are available throughout the state. The Washington State Early Support for Infants and Toddlers (ESIT) program coordinates a statewide effort to help families get these services.

## What is early intervention?

Early intervention services are developmental services, provided under public supervision, and in natural environments. They are designed to meet the developmental needs of eligible infants or toddlers and are designed to help parents help their child develop and learn.

Early intervention (during the first years of a child's life) can make a big difference by helping you:

- ▶ Find the services you need for your child.
- ▶ Understand your child's developmental growth.
- ▶ Support your child's learning and development and successful participation in home and community activities.

### What is the purpose of early intervention?

The purpose of early intervention is to build upon family strengths by providing coordination, supports, resources, and services to enhance the development of children with developmental delays and disabilities through everyday learning opportunities.

To enable families to care for their child and participate in family and community activities, families will:

- ▶ Know their rights.
- ▶ Effectively communicate their child's needs.
- ▶ Help their child develop and learn.

To help children be active and successful participants across a variety of settings and situations, children will demonstrate improved:

- ▶ Positive social-emotional skills and social relationships.
- ▶ Acquisition and use of knowledge and skills including language and communication.
- ▶ Use of appropriate behaviors to meet their needs.



### What is the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)?

In 1986 Congress amended the law now known as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and created a program to encourage states to develop and implement statewide systems of early intervention services for young children with disabilities and their families. The law developed standards for states to follow in providing services to families with infants and toddlers with disabilities. Each state decides every year if it can continue to provide early intervention services as defined by IDEA. The Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) Early Support for Infants and Toddlers (ESIT) program directs the coordination of the statewide system of early intervention services.

Early intervention services are designed to meet the developmental needs of each eligible child and the needs of the family related to enhancing the child's development.

If you need a sign language interpreter, one must be provided for you. If you do not speak English, an interpreter must be provided for you, unless it is clearly not feasible to do so.

# What if I have questions about my child's development?

Call the lead family resources coordinator (FRC) in your local area. FRCs are in each county or geographic area. Their role is to help your family get the early intervention services your child may need. To find out the name of your local lead FRC, call the Family Health Hotline number at 1-800-322-2588. You can also call your local health department or school district.

Talk with your health care provider about your concerns. He or she can provide a screening or suggest other resources. If you don't have a doctor and want more information or help, call the Family Health Hotline number listed above. You do not need a doctor referral to get into early intervention services. You may self-refer as a parent.

## What is a screening?

A screening is a quick look at how your child is learning and growing. Screenings are done by people trained to determine how your child is developing. If your child's development is a concern, your FRC can share information on how to get an evaluation for your child.



## What is an evaluation?

An evaluation will provide an in-depth look at your child's development. The evaluation is done with you, your child and early intervention professionals.

Evaluation looks at these areas of development:

- ▶ Cognitive – ability to learn and how your child learns
- ▶ Physical – ability to move, see and hear
- ▶ Communication – ability to understand language and express needs
- ▶ Social or emotional – ability to relate with others
- ▶ Adaptive skills – ability to dress, eat and take care of himself or herself.

An evaluation is a way to see if your child is eligible for early intervention services. The evaluation will occur only with your written permission and at no cost to you.

## Tips for evaluation planning:

- ▶ Ask your family resources coordinator (FRC) for help.
- ▶ Bring any questions or concerns you might have about your child's development.
- ▶ Share all information that you think is important: medical records, a baby book, growth chart or other reports.
- ▶ Decide what times or locations would work for you and your family.
- ▶ Invite other family members, a friend or support person if you wish.
- ▶ Inform your FRC if you need any interpreters or other assistance.

After the evaluation, you and the other members of the team will talk about what your child is doing and identify any concerns. If there are areas of delay, your child may be eligible for early intervention services. You have the choice to receive or not receive these services.

## Who is eligible for early intervention in Washington?

To be eligible, a child must have a 25 percent delay or show a 1.5 standard deviation below his or her age in one or more of the developmental areas. A child may also be eligible if he or she has a physical or mental condition, such as Down syndrome, that is known to cause a delay in development.

### What is an assessment?

An assessment is a collection of information from you, others who know your child, and from procedures the early intervention providers may use to understand your child's behavior and development in many typical routines and activities. An assessment looks at how your child learns new skills, how he or she relates to others and what he or she likes as well as what he or she finds frustrating or challenging. The assessment information will help you and your team decide what outcomes (changes) you want to work on and the services and supports that can help achieve those outcomes.

An assessment also includes the ongoing procedures used to determine your child's progress toward achieving outcomes and ensure that the services and supports you are receiving are helping your child make progress.



# What happens next?

## Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP)

If eligible, your child may receive IDEA early intervention services. You will have a meeting with your family resources coordinator (FRC) and other service providers. Your family, with others, will write a plan, called an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP). Work with your FRC to ensure the plan reflects your family's concerns, interests and values.

Services begin when you have agreed to the IFSP and consent to the services.

The IFSP is an ongoing process that meets the changing needs of your child and family. It is reviewed at least every six months and rewritten on a yearly basis.



An IFSP includes:

- ▶ **Present levels of functioning** – what your child is doing now.
- ▶ **A family statement** – a statement of your family's concerns, priorities and resources; your family statement is an important part of the IFSP, but you may choose not to have one.
- ▶ **Outcomes** – changes you want to see for your child and family.
- ▶ **Early intervention services needed** – how often and how long, where they will happen, and who will pay for them (many different sources fund early intervention services). You may accept or decline any service you are offered (except family resources coordination) if you are participating in the early intervention program.
- ▶ **Natural environments** – a statement of the natural environments in which early intervention services will be provided. IFSPs must include a written justification if services will not be provided in natural environments.
- ▶ **Timelines** – when services will begin and end, and when you will look at your plan again.
- ▶ **Other services needed that are not funded under IDEA** – who can help you find these services.
- ▶ **A family resources coordinator (FRC)** – named in your plan.
- ▶ **A transition plan prior to age 3** – looking and planning for services after your child is 3 years old.

You may want to invite other family members, a friend or support person to the meeting. Bring any information about your child you feel is important.

## What happens at age 3?

At least six to nine months before your child turns 3, your family resources coordinator (FRC) will assist you in planning a move to the next service provider or agency serving your child. This can change where and how services are provided. In early intervention, this change is called transition. IDEA requires a written plan for this transition. A transition plan meeting must take place at least 90 days before your child turns 3. Your transition plan will identify special education or community-based services your child may need.

Your FRC will ask you to sign a permission form, so the next agency or service provider can be contacted to plan for transition. A meeting between you, your FRC, service provider(s), and the local school district will be set up.

The school district determines if your child is eligible for preschool special education services. They will discuss the results of their tests with you and give you information about your rights. If your child is eligible, their services will be provided through an Individualized Education Program (IEP).

Your FRC will assist you in planning a move to other possible services if your child is not eligible for special education preschool services.

### Tips for the transition meeting:

- ▶ Gather as much information as possible about the proposed change.
- ▶ Ask about possible program options or choices.
- ▶ Ask what training and supports the new program offers families.
- ▶ Visit the new program before the change.
- ▶ Ask for written materials and learn the procedures for entering and participating in the new program.
- ▶ Provide as much information about your child as possible to the new program.



# What are my rights under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)?

## *(Procedural Safeguards)*

Most laws includes rights for citizens and IDEA is no different. Your family resources coordinator (FRC) will give you “The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Part C Procedural Safeguards (Parent Rights)” that explains your rights.

## **Examples of your rights under IDEA include your right to:**

- ▶ Be the primary and final decision maker for your child.
- ▶ Access services which include:
  - Early identification of concerns/Child Find
  - A timely multidisciplinary evaluation and assessment
  - Determination of your child’s eligibility
  - Family Resources Coordinator/coordination

## **If your child is eligible, you have the right to:**

- ▶ An Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP).
- ▶ Ongoing family resources coordination with an FRC, until your child’s third birthday.
- ▶ Ask for a different family resources coordinator (FRC).
- ▶ Receive early intervention services related to your child’s development.
- ▶ Accept or decline the services your child and family will receive as determined through the IFSP process.
- ▶ Decline some services recommended by the IFSP team and still receive other services (except FRC services).
- ▶ Participate in all meetings concerning your child’s early intervention services and changes in delivery of services.
- ▶ Have meetings at a time and place agreeable to your family.
- ▶ Receive notices and IFSP documents in your native language or the way of communication used in your home.





### **You also have safeguards regarding your child's early intervention records. These include your right to:**

- ▶ Review records and request amendments to the records.
- ▶ Receive copies of the records.
- ▶ Be informed about the types and the locations of records collected, maintained or used in the program, who in the program has access to those records, and when they see those records.
- ▶ Request information about who has seen the records or copies of the records.
- ▶ Challenge information in a record you believe is inaccurate or misleading or violates the privacy or rights of your child or family. Your child's early intervention records include, among other things:
  - Screening reports
  - Evaluation reports
  - Assessment information
  - Eligibility determination
  - All information that is a part of the IFSP

### **Information about your family is confidential.**

#### **You have the right to:**

- ▶ Confidentiality of personal and identifiable information including:
  - The name of your child, yourself or other family members.
  - The address of your child.
  - Any personal characteristics or other information that would make it possible to identify your child with reasonable certainty.
- ▶ Request local policies and procedures regarding how confidentiality is protected.
- ▶ Give informed written consent for the exchange or sharing of information or records.

In addition to the parent/family rights, children have the right to a surrogate parent if:

- ▶ No parent can be identified.
- ▶ The service provider/ public agency, after reasonable efforts, cannot discover the whereabouts of a parent.
- ▶ The child is a ward of the state.



# What if I don't agree with a decision about my child's or family's services?

Please talk with your family resources coordinator (FRC) about the problem. If that doesn't work or you are not comfortable, you may choose to use any or all of the following options:

- ▶ **Mediation** – Mediation will be provided to you at no cost to help resolve a dispute. Mediation is offered as an alternative to a formal administrative hearing. Mediation is a voluntary process.
- ▶ **Advocacy services** – These are programs that will give you information and help you plan how to address the problem. One advocacy organization is PAVE (see page 11). Your FRC can provide you with information about advocacy services in your area.
- ▶ **Due Process Hearing (proceeding)** – This is a formal hearing or proceeding conducted by an administrative hearings officer. A request for an administrative hearing must be in writing and include the complaint. Address the request to the director of the early intervention services provider or your local early intervention services contractor. Your FRC can give you their names and addresses or you can email [esit@dcyf.wa.gov](mailto:esit@dcyf.wa.gov) and ask for help.

Any parent, other person or organization may file an administrative complaint if they think an agency or early intervention services provider is violating a requirement of the law. The complaint must be written, signed and include the facts about the complaint.

Send the complaint to:

**Early Support for Infants and Toddlers**  
**Department of Children, Youth, and Families**

PO Box 40970

Olympia, WA 98504-0970

The complaint will be reviewed and a response written within 60 days.



# Where can I go for more help or information?

The following organizations and groups can provide more information, assistance and support:

## Family Health Hotline

1-800-322-2588

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

This hotline maintains current information on public and private early intervention resources, including Family Resources Coordinators (FRCs). It also includes information about immunization, nutrition and other children's health services available in Washington.

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## Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF)

### Early Support for Infants and Toddlers (ESIT) program

Email: [esit@dcyf.wa.gov](mailto:esit@dcyf.wa.gov)

[www.dcyf.wa.gov](http://www.dcyf.wa.gov)

Directs the statewide system of IDEA, Part C early intervention services.

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## Parent to Parent

1-800-821-5927

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

A statewide parent network providing emotional support and information to parents who have young children with disabilities or developmental delays.

## Washington State Father's Network

425-747-4004 ext. 218

<https://fathersnetwork.org>

Advocates for, and provides support and resources for, all men and families who have children with special needs.

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## Washington PAVE (Partnerships for Action, Voices for Empowerment)

1-800-5PARENT

[wapave.org](http://wapave.org)

A statewide parent training and information center providing assistance to families who have children with disabilities ages birth through adulthood.



## How can I be more involved?

You have an important role in the planning and developing of programs and services for your child. You also can take part in planning how your community provides services.

This planning is done at the county level through County Interagency Coordinating Councils (CICCs). Each CICC is required to have parents as members on the council. Together with all other members, parents help decide how services can best happen. CICC meetings are open to the public.

There is also a State Interagency Coordinating Council (SICC). This Council must also have parent representation. SICC meetings are open to the public. For more information about meeting times and locations contact your Family Resources Coordinator, ESIT, or visit the website at [www.dcyf.wa.gov](http://www.dcyf.wa.gov).

This booklet is a summary of the Washington State Early Support for Infants and Toddlers program. For full details on Washington's approved plan under IDEA or for more information about either your CICC or the SICC, contact the Washington State Early Support for Infants and Toddlers program at [esit@dcyf.wa.gov](mailto:esit@dcyf.wa.gov).

[www.dcyf.wa.gov](http://www.dcyf.wa.gov)



# What does that mean? (Glossary)

## Administrative Hearing

A formal process with a neutral person, a hearings officer, who listens to the evidence and arguments of the parents/family and the agencies and decides who is right and who must do what.

## Assessment

Ongoing procedures used by qualified professionals throughout a child's early intervention experience to identify his or her unique needs; the family's resources, priorities and concerns related to his or her development; and the nature and extent of early intervention services required to meet these needs.

## Assistive Technology Devices

Any item, piece of equipment or product system used to increase, maintain or improve your child's ability to do things (for example; eat, communicate, move).

## Assistive Technology Services

A service that directly assists a child with a disability to select, get or use an assistive technology device.

## Child Find

Includes early identification, screening, referral and initial service coordination.

## Early Intervention

A collection of services provided by public and private agencies and designed by law to support eligible children and families in enhancing a child's potential for growth and development from birth to age 3.

## Evaluation

Procedures used by qualified professionals to determine a child's initial and continuing eligibility, which focus on determining the status of the infant or toddler in all of the developmental areas; cognitive, social/emotional, physical (including vision and hearing), communication and adaptive.

## Family Centered Care

The principle that promotes parents as the decision makers and builds parent/professional partnerships.

## Family Statement

A family directed statement of family's concerns, priorities and resources included on the Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP).

## Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP)

The written plan for providing early intervention and other services to eligible children and families that: (1) is developed jointly by the family and appropriate professionals; (2) is based on a multidisciplinary evaluation and assessment of the child and family; (3) has a family directed statement of resources, priorities and concerns if the family wishes; and (4) includes services necessary to enhance the development of the child and the capacity of the family to meet his or her developmental needs.

## Infants and Toddlers with Disabilities

Children from birth to 3 who are eligible for early intervention services because they are experiencing a 1.5 standard deviation or at least a 25 percent developmental delay in one or more of the following areas: cognitive, physical, communication, social/emotional or adaptive; or has a diagnosed physical or mental condition that has a high probability of resulting in a developmental delay.

## Mediation

An informal process in which a trained, impartial person may help parties in conflict resolve their differences and find a solution satisfactory to all sides.

## Multidisciplinary

The involvement of two or more disciplines or professions in the provision of integrated and coordinated services including evaluation and assessment activities, and the development of the IFSP.

## Natural Environments

Settings that are natural or normal for the child's age peers who have no disability. This may include the home, neighborhood or community settings.

## Outcomes

Statements of changes that you want to see in your child or family as a result of early intervention services. These statements are part of your IFSP.

## Screening

A quick checklist or survey about your child's development to see if further evaluation is needed.

## Surrogate Parent

An individual appointed by the local or state agency to act in place of a parent or legal guardian in safeguarding a child's rights in the decision making process.

## Transition Plan

The plan developed for your child when leaving early intervention services at age 3.

# Acknowledgments

The Family Guidelines Workgroup, a committee of the State Interagency Coordinating Council (SICC) developed this booklet.

Its purpose is to help parents of infants and toddlers with disabilities understand early intervention services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

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