



State of Illinois
Department of Human Services

A Guide for Families



The Illinois Early Intervention Program

July 2016



Illinois Department of Human Services

www.dhs.state.il.us

(800) 323-4769

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We wish all families success on their journey through the first three years of their young child's life. We hope that this guide provides help as you move through the Illinois Early Intervention Program.

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The Illinois Early Intervention Program A Guide for Families

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Parenting my premature baby was wonderful and challenging at the same time. My early intervention team helped me find more of the 'wonderful' in being a parent by showing me different ways to help my baby move and play and eat and sleep. My confidence grew by miles, as my baby grew by inches and pounds, thanks to their support!

”

	Name	Phone
My local CFC		
Service coordinator		
Parent liaison		
Providers		
Helpful community resources		
Evaluation date		
IFSP meeting date		



SECTION ONE

Welcome to the Illinois Early Intervention Program!

This guide is for you, your child's primary caregiver. You play a critical role in your child's early years by knowing your child best, supporting your child's development daily, and caring about your child's future. This guide explains the EI program services and eligibility. It describes your role in planning services as a member of your child's team. It also discusses your rights and answers questions that many families ask.

We hope the guide will answer your questions and help you make decisions that will give you and your child a good start. In Illinois, **early intervention** services are provided in your local community through **Child and Family Connections (CFC)** offices.

The Illinois Early Intervention (EI) Program provides a variety of services for families of an infant or toddler with a **disability** or a **developmental delay**. The program is based on the principle that all families help their children learn and grow. Families with a child with special needs may need support to figure out the best ways to help their child develop. Families are partners with professionals in the EI program to help their child have the best start in life. (See Appendix B for the principles of early intervention.)



How Do I Find My Local CFC Office?

EI services are provided through your local Child and Family Connections (CFC) office. To find your local office, call (800) 323-4769 or visit the IDHS website at www.dhs.state.il

Why Do Some Words Appear in Bold Type?

Bold words appear in Appendix A, a glossary that lists and defines many of the terms used in early intervention.

Developmental Milestones From Birth to Age 3

The milestones listed below are typical for young children. **Please remember that every child is unique—growing and developing at different rates.** Most of the time differences between children of the same age are nothing to worry about. But for one child in 10, the difference can be related to a developmental delay.

For more information or to make a referral to the EI Program, call your local CFC office. For the number in your area, call (800) 323-4769.

At age 1 month, most children can . . .

- Raise their heads slightly when lying on their stomachs
- Briefly watch objects
- Make “noise in throat” sounds
- Pull away from a cloth or blanket on their faces

At age 3 months, most children can . . .

- Lift their heads and chests when lying on their stomachs
- Show vigorous body movement
- Follow a moving person with their eyes
- Recognize a bottle or breast
- Smile when someone speaks to them

At age 6 months, most children can . . .

- Sit with minimal support
- Roll from their backs to their stomachs
- Turn to locate and identify sounds
- Transfer objects from hand to hand and from hand to mouth
- Respond to friendly speech with a smile or coo

At age 12 months, most children can . . .

- Pull themselves up to stand and may step with support
- Pick things up with a thumb and one finger
- Nod their heads to signal “yes”
- Give affection
- Say two or three words

At age 2, most children can . . .

- Hand over toys upon request
- Kick a large ball
- Turn pages in a book (two or three at a time)
- Ask for items by name
- Recognize a familiar picture and know if it is upside down
- Use two or three words together, such as “more juice”

At age 3, most children can . . .

- Walk up stairs while holding the railing
- Stand momentarily on one foot
- Open doors
- Unbutton large buttons
- Verbalize toilet needs
- Stack objects of different sizes

Source: Illinois Department of Human Services, Bureau of Early Intervention
<http://www.dhs.state.il.us/page.aspx?item=30321>

One Family's EI Story

I kept wondering if my baby was developing okay. Carson was 8 months old and still hadn't tried to roll over. He had trouble sleeping and was fussy all the time. He seemed more difficult than other babies I knew. So I talked to our pediatrician, and he referred us to the Child and Family Connections Office. They were great! They understood my concerns and listened to me. They watched me play with Carson and recommended that Carson have an evaluation by a team of specialists. I was at the evaluation and provided information and his medical records.

Afterward, we met and they told me that Carson was showing developmental delays in motor and social-emotional development. We wrote a plan for services, and my service coordinator helped me to choose a physical therapist (PT) and developmental therapist (DT). I was relieved to know I had been right to ask for help. We had PT services for almost a year, and they made a big difference in helping Carson to explore more, to roll, then crawl, and eventually walk and run. I also learned how to encourage and support his efforts and to let him try more. The developmental therapist worked with us until Carson turned 3 years old. She helped me establish routines and showed me different ways to play and connect with my son. I felt like I was part of a team. It made all the difference in the world for our family.

Why Are Early Intervention Services Important?

During the first three years, your child's brain and body are growing rapidly. Your baby will more than double in size every year. Delays are often noticed when babies miss important milestones. The reasons for your child's delay may not be obvious or ever identified. You may want to check your child's development against the list of common milestones listed on the previous page.

If your child was born early or was very small, she may need support to develop like other babies her age. If your baby was born with a disability, he may need extra help to learn and develop new skills. If your child is developing more slowly or differently, then EI can support you and your child in continuing to learn and grow. EI can also help your family and others understand your child's special strengths and gifts. Remember, your child's first three years provide a foundation for life.



What Are Early Intervention (EI) Services?

Early intervention services are designed to meet your child's needs in these areas of development:



- Physical (how your baby moves and explores)
- Cognitive (how your baby learns)
- Communication (how your baby lets you know what he needs)
- Social and emotional (how your baby engages with you and shows feelings)
- Adaptive (how your baby uses new skills)

EI services may include:

- Assistive technology
- Audiology/aural rehabilitation
- Developmental therapy/special instruction
- Family training and support
- Health consultation
- Medical services (only for diagnostic or evaluation purposes)
- Nursing
- Nutrition
- Occupational therapy
- Physical therapy
- Psychological/counseling services
- Service coordination
- Sign language or cued language
- Social work
- Speech language pathology
- Transportation
- Vision
- Translation/interpretation to other languages

The delivery of these services should meet your child's and family's preferences, learning styles, and cultural beliefs.

SECTION TWO

Is Your Child Eligible for the EI Program?

Here are the steps for finding out whether your child is eligible.

Step 1: Contact Your Local CFC Office

You may call your local Child and Family Connections Office (CFC) to talk with a service coordinator about your concerns. If you need assistance finding your local CFC, call (800) 323-4769. Your doctor or child care provider may also refer you to the local office.

Once you contact the CFC, they will assign a **service coordinator** to meet with your family and talk with you about your child's development.

Step 2: Meet With a Service Coordinator

You will meet with a coordinator who knows about EI services and who can help plan an evaluation and possible services. This first meeting is to exchange information and determine whether your child would benefit from an evaluation for services. The meeting may be called an **intake meeting** because you will be asked to share information about your child and family. The coordinator will ask you questions about your child's growth and development, medical history, and your daily activities (play time, meals, sleep schedules, child care). Or you may be given a checklist to identify your child's skills and strengths.

You will be asked to sign a consent form agreeing that the service coordinator may share information about your child with the EI professionals who will evaluate your child and who may help you plan for services. If you give consent, then your child can be referred for an evaluation. The evaluation is free to all families.

Step 3: Participate in the Evaluation and Assessment

You know your child better than anyone else. You notice what he is trying to do and what he does easily. You know what she likes and doesn't like. You probably know how your child learns best and when he may need help. Your knowledge makes you an important partner on your child's evaluation team. The team will include your service coordinator and at least two other



What Makes My Child Eligible for Services?

Your infant or toddler (birth to 36 months) is eligible for services through the Illinois EI program if he or she ...

- has a significant delay in at least one area of development,
- has a condition that is known to cause disability or delay, or
- is at high risk for a substantial developmental delay.

“

The early intervention process was entirely new and a little intimidating to us. Our initial service coordinator at the CFC was great. She took time to explain all the steps in the process, she always stressed that any decisions were completely open to us, and she made sure that we were aware of all the options available to us. I felt she truly cared about our son.

”

EI professionals. The number of team members may vary depending on the needs of your child and will represent different disciplines (developmental therapy, physical therapy). The team will evaluate your child across five **domains** of development:

- physical (how your baby moves and explores),
- cognitive (how your baby learns),
- communication (how your baby lets you know what he needs),
- social and emotional (how your baby engages with you and shows feelings), and
- adaptive (how your baby uses new skills).

Members of the team will observe your child and interact with him.

They may measure your child’s abilities and compare them against developmental milestones (see page 2). They may also observe and engage your child in activities to see what he can do and likes to do. They will ask you whether you have concerns about your child’s development and what your expectations are. They will ask you if your child is responding in ways that you expect or if he is acting differently than siblings or other



children you know. They may ask you to describe family routines, such as bath time and meal time, and how your child responds. You also will have an opportunity to share your family’s **priorities** for your child and needs you may have in meeting those. If you need an interpreter because your first language is not English, one will be provided by the EI team for the evaluation.

Step 4: Find Out Whether Your Child Is Eligible

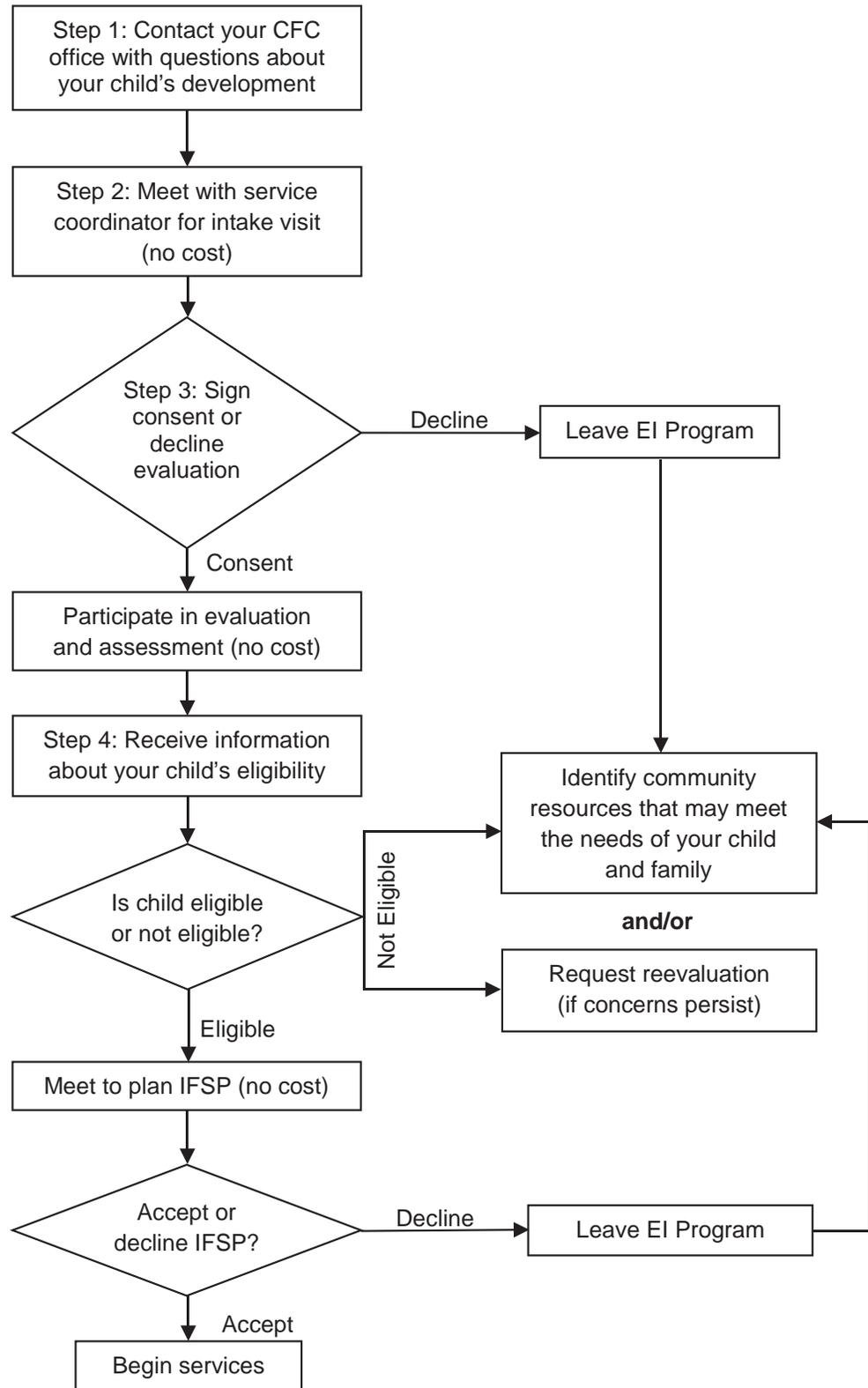
Your child is eligible if your child has a disability that could delay his development or if the evaluation shows that your child has a developmental delay of 30% or higher in one or more domains. After the evaluation is completed, you will be notified by the CFC whether your child is eligible. You have a right to receive the evaluation report. If your child is eligible and you decide that you want your child to receive services, then you will meet to develop an **Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP)**. The development of the plan is free and must occur within 45 days of your child's referral to the EI program.

If your child is not eligible, then you will not develop a plan or receive services. The service coordinator may provide you with a list of resources in your community that may meet the needs of your family and child. If you have new concerns about your child's development, you may contact the CFC office any time before your child turns 3 years of age to discuss your concerns.



Determining Eligibility for EI Services

Dates



Participating in Early Intervention Services

Families who choose to participate are included in all decisions about services. You are a member of your child's team. The first step is planning the Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP). When you and the team finish the plan, you will sign it to indicate you agree with the services. Then services will begin. The plan will describe what services are to be delivered, how often, and by whom. Because infants and toddlers learn best through everyday experiences and interactions, many families agree to have service providers come to their home. Because of work schedules or other demands, some families have service providers come to where their child spends much of her day. This could be a child care program or the home of a friend or relative. You and your team will review your child's plan and progress at least every six months. The following section describes the service delivery process for you and your child.



Your EI Service Coordinator . . .

- is the first point of contact in the EI system (receives referral),
- introduces you to other CFC staff, including the parent liaison,
- coordinates evaluations to determine eligibility for services,
- helps families understand their roles and rights in the EI system,
- assists the family and other EI team members in developing and implementing the IFSP,
- contacts the family monthly while child is in EI,
- develops and maintains the case (service) record for the child and family, and
- assists the family in leaving EI services when the child turns 3 years old.

Step 1: Develop the Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP)

The service coordinator will help you to

- identify your concerns and priorities for meeting your child's needs,
- choose **outcomes** for your child and family,
- select services to meet the outcomes, and
- determine whether services require payment.

You should have a meeting to develop the IFSP as soon as possible but no later than 45 days from your child's referral to the program. There are no charges or costs for developing the plan.

What Is an IFSP?

The IFSP is a plan that you develop with your EI team. The plan reflects your priorities and concerns for your child. You identify the outcomes that you want for your child and your family or caregivers. These are statements that describe changes and benefits that you want to see for your child and family. You and the team also identify services for meeting these outcomes.

You might begin by asking two questions: What benefits do I want my

child to receive from EI? What will be different or better for my child and family when these changes occur?

The plan will have outcomes that help your child to

- gain and use new knowledge and skills,
- improve social and emotional skills, and
- use appropriate behaviors to meet his or her needs.

It will also include family outcomes. Three important outcomes include

- understanding your child’s strengths, abilities, and special needs;
- helping your child develop and learn; and
- knowing your legal rights regarding services for your child.



Who Should Be Involved in Developing the IFSP?

Your service coordinator will explain the IFSP process to you and set up the meeting to plan the IFSP. The coordinator will work with you to identify a date and location that is convenient for you. You will receive a written notice confirming the meeting. The meeting should be conducted in your primary language. You may ask for an interpreter if you communicate in a language other than English.

The meeting will include you, the service coordinator, and evaluation team. You may invite family, friends, and your child’s caregivers to the meeting.

To help you prepare for the IFSP meeting, you may want to complete the worksheet “My Child’s First IFSP” on pages 12 and 13. Remember that you are an equal partner in the planning. You

can ask for changes to the plan. You can accept some services and decline others. You can stop services at any time. Your participation is voluntary and requires your consent.

Why Do You Sign the IFSP?

Once you and your team agree on outcomes and services for the IFSP, you will sign the plan and receive a copy of the plan. Your signature indicates that you agree with the plan. Your coordinator also will help you determine if you will pay an annual participation fee for delivery of EI services. No fees are charged to families whose income is at or below 185% of the **federal poverty level (FPL)**. If your income is above this level, you will talk about payment options for services. (For more details, see Section 4, “Paying for EI Services.”)

Step 2: Participate in Services

Who Provides EI Services?

Your service coordinator will offer you a choice of service providers who are available to provide EI services outlined in the IFSP. Your choice of providers may be limited because of availability, insurance requirements, or the unique needs of your child.

Where Are Services Delivered?

Typically, EI services are provided in the child's **natural environments**. This means the places where your child is most likely to spend much of his time and where young children without a disability are likely to spend time.

Natural environments can be your home, child care, library, a relative's home, or other places where your family typically spends time. Natural environments allow you and your EI provider to use your daily routines to teach new skills or behaviors to your child. If these activities can fit into your child's routines, you and other caregivers are more likely to do them often with your child, even when your service provider is not with you. The key principles related to natural environments are provided in Appendix C.



What Should You Expect During an EI Visit?

You and your EI service provider should agree on a time and day to meet. At the first meeting, your provider is likely to discuss your child's current development and your questions and concerns. He or she will suggest ways that you can work with your child to achieve IFSP outcomes. Your provider will consider you or your child's primary caregiver as a partner in the delivery of EI services. This means that you will be asked to participate actively during EI visits and sessions.

Things I Want You to Know About My Child

1. These are things I want everyone to know about my child: _____

2. These are my concerns now: _____

3. This is how my child communicates with me and others: _____

4. These are ways my child likes to learn new things: _____

5. This is what my child does when he or she needs help: _____

6. My child's normal schedule is:

Morning _____

Afternoon _____

Evening _____

7. Places my child likes to go: _____

8. These are things I would like my child to learn in the next 6–12 months: _____

9. These are things I would like to learn in the next 6–12 months: _____

10. The ways I learn best are: _____

How Do You Participate in EI?

Working with your EI service provider is important so you can support your child's learning and development. Your provider gathers information by talking with you and other family members or caregivers. Your provider also learns about your child's strengths and needs by observing you and your child in everyday routines. Use the "Things I Want You to Know About My Child" worksheet to guide your conversations with providers.

As a partner you can help by doing the following:

- Get to know your EI service providers.
- Actively take part in your child's home visits and appointments.
- Ask your EI providers to explain the activities that they are doing with you and your child. Ask for the reasons behind the activities.
 - Share information about routines, family traditions, and culture.
 - Talk about the places that you and your child go. Include playgroups and friends' homes.
 - Describe the people you and your child enjoy being with.
 - Notice what your child is interested in.
 - Tell your EI provider about any concerns you have about your child.
 - Learn activities to promote your child's development. Include these in your daily routines. Provide lots of opportunities for your child to play and practice new skills during everyday routines—dressing, mealtimes, diaper changes.
 - Identify your family's formal and informal supports and resources. Who can you contact for help? What do you already have that you can use to support you and your child?
- Ask for help when needed. Let family, friends, and providers know how they can help during challenging times.
- Play with and talk to your child. She'll know she is special and loved!



Tell us how we are doing: Talk to your parent liaison or your service coordinator often.

What If You Can't Be at Your Child's EI Visit?

Children can receive EI services in many locations, including child care, the family home, and community locations. If you cannot be present during the EI visit, then request that the EI service provider communicate important information about the visit. For example, if your child receives speech and language therapy at his child care program, ask the EI provider and child care provider to tell you about the session. They could do this by writing you notes about the session. (See sample contact note on p. 31.) They also could videotape part of the EI visit so you can see what your child is learn-

ing and how you can help continue your child's learning. Or you could request a phone call to discuss the visit and how you can support your child.

How Can You Meet Other Parents in the EI Program?

Your local Child and Family Connections (CFC) office has a **parent liaison** who has experience with the EI service system because he or she is the parent or guardian of a child with special needs. The liaison's role is to provide information and support to families.

You can ask them to

- provide you with information about your child's diagnosis,
- be your advocate,
- provide personal support that you may sometimes need, and
- connect you with other parents.

The Early Intervention Clearinghouse (<http://eiclearinghouse.org>) also is a source of free information for you. You can visit the website, obtain information through the virtual library, receive newsletters, and call or e-mail with questions. An expert in EI will respond within 48 hours to your questions or requests.



Step 3: Review the IFSP Every Six Months

An IFSP can be changed. As your child grows and develops, he or she may need new or different services. The EI team can change services to better meet the needs of your child and family.

You and your IFSP team review your child's progress at least every six months. You and your team will update the plan at least once a year; however, if your needs change, you can review and change the plan more often.

To prepare for the next IFSP meeting, you may want to ask yourself the following questions:

- Has your child made progress?
- Do the new outcomes require different or additional services?
- Have your priorities for your child changed?
- What services might your child need in the future?
- Has your child met the outcomes of the IFSP? Are new outcomes appropriate?
- Has your family met the IFSP outcomes? Are new outcomes needed?

The purpose of the IFSP review also is to determine whether your child continues to be eligible for EI services or whether your child has met developmental milestones and no longer needs services.

Tell us how we are doing: Talk to your parent liaison or your service coordinator often.

“

Our provider helped us along the way in early intervention. We wouldn't have known how to start without her guidance.

”

“

Our therapist has been wonderful with my son; she looks out for him, and I feel like we've made progress with her help. She is a very caring person.

”

What Takes Place During a Typical EI Session?

A typical visit for EI services usually includes most of the following actions:

- **Advance planning for the visit.** The provider reviews notes and plans activities and strategies for the visit. The parent or caregiver may also like to review notes from the last meeting.
- **Arriving and greeting.** The provider arrives and chats with the parent or caregiver; they identify goals for the session and get ready to start.
- **Engaging in activities that focus on outcomes.** The provider and parent or caregiver work together with the young child.
- **Observing each other.** The parent or caregiver may observe the provider interact with their child, and the provider may also observe the parent or caregiver and child interact and provide supportive feedback.
- **Demonstrating and practicing new activities or strategies.** The provider may show the parent or caregiver new or different ways to help their child learn.
- **Sharing information and knowledge.** Both the provider and parent or caregiver may have important information to share about development, services, supports, and the child's progress.
- **Documenting services provided.** The provider leaves written information for the parent or caregiver about what happened during the visit. This is especially important when services are provided when a primary caregiver isn't present, such as at child care.
- **Planning activities and strategies between visits.** The provider can help the parent or caregiver think about ways to fit the activities they have practiced into their natural daily routines. They also may identify information that the provider or caregiver might gather for the next EI visit.
- **Scheduling the next visit.** To ensure that services continue without interruption, the parent or caregiver and provider schedule the next EI session and visit.