

Early Start/Intervention Acronyms and Definitions

1. What are Early Intervention Services?

Early intervention services include speech therapy, physical therapy, occupational therapy, and other such services designed to help children with developmental delays meet their developmental milestones. Research has shown that children's brains are rapidly changing and growing under age five, making it very important to receive early intervention services as early as possible.

2. What is a developmental delay?

A child has a developmental delay if she is not developing at a normal rate and is not reaching her developmental milestones at the expected time.

3. What is the Early Start Program?

The Early Start Program provides early intervention services to families of children with developmental delays under the age of three. These services are provided by the local regional centers.

4. What is a Regional Center? There are 21 regional centers in California.

Regional centers are nonprofit agencies that contract with the state to provide early intervention services to children birth to three and their families. Click on <https://dds.ca.gov/RC/RCzipLookup.cfm> to determine which regional center serves your address.

5. What is an IFSP?

An IFSP is an Individualized Family Service Plan. The IFSP is the plan developed by the regional center to help the child's family achieve goals for the child's healthy development. The IFSP must include the child's present levels of development, developmental outcomes for the child and family, and specific early intervention services for the child and family to address all of the child's delays.

6. What is an IEP?

An IEP is an Individualized Education Program tailored to a student's specific needs. If your child is eligible for special education services when she turns three, an IEP will be developed with the school district. See "Age 3 Transition from Regional Center to School District" below.

7. What is an ERH and how do I become one?

ERH stands for Educational Rights Holder and refers to the person with the legal authority to make educational decisions regarding a child. The ERH is typically the biological parent, but the rights can be transferred to legal guardians, adoptive parents, or a foster parent or court appointed special advocate (CASA) with a court order called a JV535. You can contact your social worker or the child's attorney in court to ask for these rights to be transferred to you.

Regional Center Early Start Evaluation and Assessments

- 8. Can I make a referral to the Early Start Program over the phone?**
Yes, the regional center must accept an oral or written referral. However, it is best to make the referral in writing to document the date of referral. You should also keep a copy for your records.
- 9. I referred my child to the Early Start program. What happens next?**
The regional center has 45 calendar days from the date of your referral to complete the IFSP process. The first step is to conduct an evaluation to determine eligibility. If your child is eligible, the regional center should then conduct further assessments to determine what early intervention services your child needs. Finally, the regional center must hold an IFSP meeting. The IFSP must be developed within 45 days of the referral.
- 10. Does the 45 day timeline start at the date of referral or the date of consent for evaluation?**
The 45 day timeline starts at the date of the referral, NOT the date of consent for evaluation.
- 11. Is an evaluation the same as an assessment?**
No. It can be confusing because regional centers sometimes use these words interchangeably. An evaluation is used to determine if a child is eligible for services. The evaluation should include age equivalents (your child's developmental age) so that a % delay can be calculated. If the child demonstrates delays, the regional center should then conduct comprehensive assessments in the areas of delay. The assessments are more in depth, generally include standardized testing, and are conducted by qualified personnel. For example, if the evaluation shows your child has a 33% communication delay, the regional center should conduct a speech and language assessment by a speech and language pathologist. Both the evaluation and the comprehensive assessments must be done before the IFSP and within the 45 day timeline.

Regional Center Early Start Eligibility

- 12. What are the eligibility criteria for Early Start?**
Children are eligible for Early Start services if they have a developmental delay, "established risk condition" or a low incidence disability.
 - a. Developmental Delay Eligibility:** your child must be performing at a level *significantly below* where most children their age are in one or more of the following areas: cognition, social-emotional, adaptive, physical & motor, or communication development. "Significantly below" means that if the child is less than 24 months old, the child must be 33% delayed in one or more of the five developmental areas. If the child is 24-35 months old, the child must be 50% delayed in one area OR 33% in two or more areas.
 - b. Established Risk Condition Eligibility:** An established risk condition exists when an infant or toddler has a condition which has a high probability of resulting in developmental delay such as chromosomal disorders (Down Syndrome), neurological disorders (Autism, Cerebral palsy, Epilepsy, Hydrocephalus, Spina bifida, Tuberosus sclerosis).
 - c. Low Incidence Disability:** an infant or toddler has a solely low incidence disability (hearing, vision, or orthopedic impairment). Children with low incidence disabilities receive services through the school district, even when they are under three.

Regional Center Early Start Eligibility (Cont.)

- 13. What is the Prevention Resource and Referral Services Program (PRRS)?**
PRRS are run by family resource centers that contract with the regional centers. The PRRS offers information, resources, and referrals. They do not provide direct services to the child. Children are eligible for PRRS if 1) they are “at-risk” for development delays due to bio-medical factors (prematurity, exposure to drugs, low birth weight) or 2) they are a toddler 24-35 months old with a developmental delay in one domain between 33 and 49 percent, or 3) the parent of the infant or toddler is a person with a developmental disability.
- 14. How long is my child eligible for Early Start services?**
Your child is eligible for these services until she turns three years old. At that time she may be eligible for special education services through the school district.

Advocating at an IFSP

- 15. What should I do to prepare for the IFSP meeting?**
You should ask for the evaluation and assessment reports before the IFSP so that you can review them. You can make a list of all your child’s areas of need including information from the reports and your own concerns. Think of skills you would want your child to achieve in six months. These are called outcomes in the IFSP document. You can also think about what kinds of services will help your child achieve those outcomes. See “Services Available at an IFSP.”
- 16. What happens at an IFSP meeting?**
The regional center will review the evaluation and assessments and ask you what your concerns are for your child. You should make sure to mention all the areas in which your child has a developmental delay and ask that the service coordinator write your concerns into the IFSP document. You and the IFSP team will talk about outcomes, or goals, for the family and for the child’s development. The regional center will also talk to you about services.
- 17. How many outcomes should my child’s IFSP contain?**
There is no limit; there should be at least one goal in each area of developmental delay.

Services Available at an IFSP

- 18. What is speech therapy?**
Speech therapy (ST) services are provided to develop your child’s communication skills, and may include helping a child express him/herself by improving vocabulary or improving articulation (how words are pronounced)
- 19. What is physical therapy**
Physical therapy (PT) services are provided to work on weaknesses that may affect activities such as walking, sitting, and maintaining balance. These kinds of skills are called gross motor skills.
- 20. What is occupational therapy?**
Occupational therapy (OT) services are provided to develop adaptive skills to become independent. For example, a child who has fine motor deficits (such as an inability to hold a pencil, or button buttons or use a zipper) can benefit from OT.
- 21. What is behavior training?**
Behavior training helps caregivers address behavioral needs such as tantrums. Due to recent changes in the law, this will consist mostly of group classes rather than in-home parent training.

Services Available at an IFSP (Cont.)

22. What is infant stimulation?

Infant stimulation is play therapy, usually provided in the home. An infant teacher will work on developing your child's cognitive (thinking) and communication skills. The infant teacher can also work on motor skills, however, if your child has delays in motor skills you should ask the regional center to conduct assessments to determine if PT or OT services are necessary. Infant stimulation is generally appropriate for children under 18 months.

23. What are center-based programs and neighborhood preschools?

Center-based programs are like preschools and may be appropriate for more delayed children. Generally, children between 18 months and 35 months can be eligible for these programs. Neighborhood preschools are more appropriate for children with lesser delays who could benefit from being around typically developing peers. See "The Importance of Preschool" for more information.

Options when Signing an IFSP

24. Can I disagree with portions of an IFSP and agree with other parts of it?

Yes. For example, you may agree on the goals but disagree with the services as outlined. In this situation, you may give your limited consent, identifying directly on the IFSP what you agree and disagree with. By writing out your consent, you permit the regional center to implement the portions you agree with while you wait to resolve the issues you disagree with.

25. Do I have to sign the IFSP document at the meeting?

You do not have to sign consent at the meeting. If you're unsure about anything in the IFSP, it is always best to take time to review it and consent or disagree later. Many regional centers handwrite the IFSP documents, ask parents to sign, and then provide a typed copy to the parent later. To ensure that you are consenting to the correct services, it is best to either wait for the typed copy, review it, and then sign if you agree or go to a local copy center to get a copy of the handwritten document on the day of the meeting.

Problems after Your IFSP is in Place Including Medi-Cal and Gap Funding

26. Why is the regional center requiring that I use my child's Medi-Cal to get the early intervention services in his IFSP?

Under the law, the regional center is the "payor of last resort." This means that the regional center will only pay for services if the family cannot access the services through insurance or "generic resources" (community programs). The service coordinator should assist you with this process.

27. It has been two months since the IFSP and Medi-Cal hasn't responded yet. What can I do?

You should talk to your service coordinator and ask that the regional center begin "gap funding" the early intervention services in the IFSP. Typically, regional centers have 45 days from the date of the IFSP to pursue Medi-Cal funds for these services. Past 45 days, the regional center must start funding these services.

Problems after Your IFSP is in Place Including MediCal and Gap Funding (Cont.)

28. I requested a speech assessment for my child but the regional center told me I had to use Medi-Cal. Doesn't the regional center have to conduct the assessment?

Yes. The regional center cannot make a parent go through Medi-Cal to get an assessment. There is a clear exception to the "payor of last resort" provision for assessments. You should ask that the regional center conduct the assessment or deny your request in writing. You can then file for Mediation or a Due Process Hearing to resolve the dispute. See "What are your options if the Regional Center has violated your rights?"

29. We are moving and the regional center told me a different regional center serves our new address. Will I have to go through the assessment process again?

No, the regional center cannot make you go through the assessment process again. The new regional center must implement your current IFSP, as closely as possible. Also, the old regional center and new regional center must work together to minimize any delay in providing your child's early intervention services. It often takes regional centers weeks to transfer a child's case to the new regional center. You should contact your service coordinator and the service coordinator's program manager to let them know the child has moved and ask that the case be transferred immediately or that the old regional center continue providing services until the new regional center begins providing them.

What Are Your Options if the Regional Center Has Violated Your Rights?

30. My child is not receiving the services listed in her IFSP. What can I do to make the regional center provide those services?

You may file a compliance complaint with the California Department of Developmental Services (DDS) for failure to implement portions of the IFSP.

31. What is a compliance complaint?

A compliance complaint is a letter to the California Department of Developmental Services (DDS). You can file a compliance complaint for: 1) Failure to adhere to legal timelines (ex. The regional center did not hold an IFSP until after the 45 day timeline, and as a result your services were delayed), and 2) failure to implement portions of the IFSP (ex. The regional center failed to give your child speech therapy even though the IFSP said she would receive it twice a week.) You may be entitled to compensatory services to make up for the delay in services. You do not need a lawyer for this.

32. What is Mediation?

Mediation is a voluntary process that you and the regional center have to agree to. It is confidential and overseen by a neutral party. Mediation is an informal way to deal with and resolve disagreements. You can file a request for mediation at any time. Mediation is available to resolve disagreements related to: 1) evaluation and assessment, 2) eligibility determination, 3) services, and 4) violations of other Early Start laws and regulations. If you cannot resolve the issue at Mediation, you can file for an Administrative Due Process Hearing.

33. What is an Administrative Due Process Hearing?

An Administrative Due Process Hearing is like a formal lawsuit against the regional center. It is advised that you speak with an attorney if considering due process as the regional center will likely always be represented by an attorney in such proceedings.

Age 3 Transition from Regional Center to School District

34. My child is turning three soon but I am still concerned about his development. What do I do now that he won't be eligible for Early Start services?

The regional center and school district must hold a transition IFSP meeting between three and six months before your child turns three. At the meeting, you will discuss your concerns regarding your child's development, and the team will develop a plan for transitioning to the school district.

35. The transition IFSP was a few months ago and I have not heard anything from the school district. What happens next?

The school district should provide you with an assessment plan. You may have already signed one at the transition IFSP. The assessment plan lists the assessments the school district plans to conduct to determine if your child is eligible for special education services. You should review the plan to make sure all the areas of suspected disability will be assessed. The district must conduct the assessments and hold an IEP meeting before your child turns three.

36. Why does the school district have to do more assessments? If my child is still delayed shouldn't the school district keep providing services anyway?

The school district has to conduct their own assessments because the eligibility criteria for special education services are different than for regional center services. Also, the types and amounts of services may also be different.

Importance of Preschool

37. Is it important to put my child in preschool or can I just wait until he is old enough for kindergarten?

All children can benefit from enrolling in high quality early care and education programs to develop cognitive, language, physical, and social/emotional skills that contribute to school success. This is true for all children, regardless of whether they have developmental delays.

38. What are my options for preschool programs?

There are many options for early care and education programs. Early Head Start is a free program serving low income pregnant women and children birth to 3. Head Start is a free program serving children 3 to 5 and provides comprehensive early education and development classes for children. Call 1-877-773-5543 or visit www.PreKKid.org for referrals. Another option is the California State Preschool Program (CSPP) which is a free development program, part day or full day, for three and four year old children of low-income families. Child Care and Development Centers also provide developmental services for infants, toddlers, and school-aged children. Los Angeles Universal Preschool (LAUP) is a part-day child development program for 4 year olds. For referrals to any of these programs, call the Los Angeles Child Care Alliance Resource and Referral Line at 1-888-92-CHILD.

39. Can I get a preschool program written into my child's IEP?

You may be able to get a special education classroom for your child. For more information about IEPs and special education placements, see the Special Education FAQs.