

Early Intervention Tips for Early Childhood Education Providers

When you think of a child and how he or she is growing, you notice things like how soon he or she smiles, sits up, rolls over, or how well he or she walks, talks, holds a spoon, and feeds himself or herself. Children learn naturally during this time by doing, and watching you and other children.

While all children grow and change at their own rate, some children can experience delays in their development. Sometimes this can be cause for concern.

Early Intervention Services and Supports can help.

What is Early Intervention?

Early Intervention (EI) in Pennsylvania consists of coaching supports designed to help families with children who have developmental delays or disabilities. Early Intervention promotes collaboration among families, EI service personnel/providers, and Early Childhood Education professionals involved with your child.

Early Intervention:

- Supports families and caregivers as the child's first teacher

- Helps children with disabilities develop and learn through typical routines, at home, in the community or in their early childhood education program
- Is individualized and considers the values, culture and priorities of the child and family
- Has the role of EI service personnel/providers to coach and support the family, caregivers or early childhood education professionals in a child's life.
- Are provided at no cost to families.

Ten things Early Childhood Education Providers can do when there is a concern about a child's development:

1. If you have questions about a child's growth and development, prepare for talking with the family about your concerns. Document your concerns by collecting samples of the child's recent work or examples of classroom observations.
2. Do not try to diagnose the problem or label the child.
3. Discuss your concerns with the child's family while respecting privacy.
4. Set a special meeting time to talk with the family. Don't try to fit it into a busy pickup or drop-off time.
5. Assist them in accessing resources that will help support their child's success in the child care setting.
6. Ask the family to describe their perceptions of their child's development. Often families will have seen some of the same issues and have some of the same concerns.
7. Recognize this may be a difficult and emotional conversation for the family. Be prepared for a range of emotional responses. Take an active listening role and respect the family's feelings.
8. Sometimes families may not share your concerns about their child's development. This may be the first time they are hearing about concerns. They may need some time to process the information and feel comfortable talking.
9. Keep communication open and use supportive listening skills.
10. Be prepared with referral information to the CONNECT Helpline at 1-800-692-7288. Provide the family with the [Watch Me Grow brochure](#).

Where can families get help?

A first step for any family with concerns about their child's development is to call CONNECT Helpline at 1-800-692-7288.

The CONNECT Helpline staff will refer a family to the appropriate local Early Intervention agency and identify next steps.

Who is eligible for Early Intervention Services and Supports?

Infants and toddlers (birth to age three) who have:

- A delay in one or more areas of development;

OR

- A specialist's determination that there is a delay even though it doesn't show up on the assessments (called informed clinical opinion);

OR

- Known physical or mental conditions which have a high probability for developmental delays (such as Down Syndrome).

Preschoolers (three years of age to school age) who have:

- A delay in one or more areas of development;

OR

- Any of the following physical or mental disabilities: autism/pervasive developmental disorder; serious emotional disturbance; neurological impairment; deafness/hearing loss; specific learning disability; intellectual disability; multiple disabilities; other health impairment; physical disability; speech and language impairment or blindness/visual impairment;

AND

- Are in need of special education and related services.

Through a unique collaboration between the Departments of Education (PDE) and Human Services (DHS), the Office of Child Development and Early Learning (OCDEL) administers the Commonwealth's Early Intervention Program for eligible infants, toddlers and preschoolers.

At a local level, the county Early Intervention programs administer the program for infants and toddlers. OCDEL contracts services through intermediate units (IUs), school districts, private agencies for local services to preschoolers.