



Complex Child E-Magazine

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Early Intervention: Maximizing Your Baby's Development

by Varsha Daryanani

Early Intervention services are governed by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act and are available for young children in every state across the country. The programs may differ from state to state, but the overall purpose of each program is the same: to assist children (usually birth to age three but up to age five in some states) who have or are at risk of developing a disability or other special need that may affect their development. There are many facets to Early Intervention programs but ultimately the goal is to remediate existing developmental problems and prevent new problems from occurring.

Timing: When should my child receive services?

The most crucial component of Early Intervention is timing – the sooner the intervention occurs the more beneficial it is for the child and the family. It is a well-known fact that infants and young children absorb tons of information and learn hundreds of new things on a daily basis. In order to capitalize on this, intervention must occur when the brain is in a state of maximum readiness. To better understand this concept, first we must take a look at how the brain functions and develops.

The brain is the most complex and sophisticated organ in the human body. It is comprised of many regions, each with its own purpose and function. Each of these brain areas contains millions of neurons, or nerve cells, which send messages to each other across synapses. These nerves and synapses function along pathways and create the wiring the brain needs to operate. As brain development occurs, there is an ongoing process of wiring and re-wiring the pathways between the nerve cells. New synapses are constantly being formed and others are broken down. In early childhood, the brain is genetically programmed to produce more synapses than it will use. As the brain develops, it keeps the synapses that it will use and discards those that are not used. Since the brain discards unused synapses, children are at a risk of delayed development when they are deprived of normally expected experiences in infancy and early childhood. As children grow and age, some areas of the brain are less susceptible to change so it is crucial to provide the brain with the stimulation it needs to develop and organize before it is too late.

How do I get services for my child?

Your child does not need a diagnosis or a doctor's referral to qualify for Early Intervention services. As a parent, you can contact the agency yourself if you suspect that your child has a developmental delay or disability. Early Intervention services are generally overseen by state agencies. To find your state's agency, you can go to <http://www.nectac.org/search/mapfinder.asp>.

Once you contact your state's agency, federal law requires that a professional must evaluate your child in a timely manner, typically within 45 days. This evaluation encompasses many factors including, but not limited to, the child's physical ability, mental ability, health status and the family support system. Once the evaluation is complete, the Early Intervention agency will make recommendations as to what type of services the child needs. If your child is found eligible, he/she may be entitled to receive therapy to help with cognitive, physical, communication, social, emotional or adaptive skills. Generally, a caseworker will be assigned to manage the case and help the family look for providers to render the therapy services. Services may be center-based, hospital-based, home-based or a combination. Each child is different so the type of program will be specifically designed for that individual child.

Services vary by state but may include:

- Physical Therapy
- Occupational Therapy
- Speech/Language Therapy
- Vision Therapy
- Audiology or Aural Rehabilitation
- Developmental Therapy or Special Education Teacher
- Assistive Technology Services
- Nutritionist
- Visiting Nurse
- Diagnostic Medical Evaluations
- Family Counseling
- Mental Health Services
- Social Worker
- Care Coordination
- Durable Medical Equipment
- Transportation

How will Early Intervention help my family?

In addition to improving your child's health and development, Early Intervention services offer support to the parents and siblings of a child with special needs. The family of a child with special needs often feels disappointed and socially isolated from their friends and neighbors. The added stress, frustration and helplessness of caring for a child with special needs often takes its toll on a family. Early Intervention services assist the family

by providing educational information regarding the child's disability and support groups in the area. These resources result in parents having improved attitudes about themselves and their child, better information and skills for teaching their child and more time for fun and leisure.

Is Early Intervention beneficial to my child?

Research has shown that Early Intervention increases the child's developmental and educational capabilities, improves functioning of the family unit and also reaps benefits to society. As mentioned earlier, timing is critical: if you do not take advantage of the opportunity to teach early on, it may be more difficult to learn that task at a later time.

Varsha Daryanani is a full-time mom to Alisha, a 2-1/2-year-old diagnosed with Wolf-Hirschhorn Syndrome and Cerebral Palsy. Prior to becoming a mom, Varsha was a Commercial Real Estate attorney for a mid-size California law firm.