

Screening in Early Intervention: Facts for Families

What is screening?

Screening is one of the first steps in Early Intervention (EI). It is a *quick* look at your child in areas such as seeing and hearing; babbling, talking and understanding; playing alone and with others; eating, learning; and how your child moves his body or uses her muscles. It is like other types of health screenings your child probably had at birth. Information from screening helps you and the EI program learn about the ways your child is learning and developing.

The screening does not tell you if your child has a delay in development or disability. But it does help you look at how your child is growing and learning. It also will not tell you if your child is “eligible” for Early Intervention services and supports. It can give good information about your child’s growth and any worries you have.

After the screening, you and your EI person will talk and decide if more evaluation might help. You have a right to ask for more testing, regardless of the results of the screening.

The screening will not occur unless you say yes. At any time, before or during the screening, you can ask to stop and move to another step in the information gathering.

What happens during screening?

During screening, EI staff will ask questions about what your child does every day. The questions asked are connected to the age of your child. Sometimes, the EI person may come to your home so they can help you gather information about your child. Sometimes, they may call to ask you the questions or mail them for you to look over and answer.

As you are answering the questions, be sure to share any added facts about your child that you think may be important. Pictures may be given to help you to best understand some of the questions. You may want to use your own toys or things in your house to play with your child and then decide how to answer some of the questions.

What will the screening results tell me?

After the screening has been done, EI staff will go over the information with you. This will give you an idea of what your child can do in each of the areas mentioned above. Remember that this is just a quick look at how your child is growing and learning. Be sure to ask any questions you have, or share any concerns if the results do not seem to describe your child well.

After the screening, you and the EI person may decide that no more information is needed because both of you do not have any more concerns about your child. If this is true, then the EI screening will stop. This means that your child’s growth is typical for their age, and that EI supports and services are not needed.

Some families may still have questions about how they can help their children’s growth. The EI person can help answer questions and offer ideas about how you can help your child’s learning and development.

Sometimes the screening may say that the information gathering should go on with a closer look at your child’s development. The next step to get more information is called a Multi-Disciplinary Evaluation (MDE). The MDE will gather more developmental information to see if your child needs for EI services.

As a parent, you have the right to ask for an MDE, no matter the results of the screening. Also, you can call your EI program at any time, to ask for a MDE. EI staff can help you in this planning.

The good news is that if your child is developing in a way that is typical for children their age, EI services are not needed. It is also good news that, if now or later, your child has a delay or disability, EI services are available, to all children that need this extra support.

If you want to know more about the screening process in Early Intervention, please ask the Early Intervention program person who is talking with you about your child.