

Early Intervention Tips for Early 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, by watching you and other children, and by being taught how to do different things.

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 can help.

What is early intervention?

Early intervention in Pennsylvania consists of services and supports designed to help families with children who have developmental delays. Early intervention builds upon the natural learning occurring in those first few years. It is a process that promotes collaboration among parents, service providers, and others significantly involved with the child.

Early intervention:

- Enhances the families' capacity to meet the developmental needs of their children in the settings where children would be if they did not have a disability;
- Respects families' strengths, values, diversity and competencies;
- Supports communities to become more aware of the gifts and abilities of all its children;
- Helps prevent the need for more and costly intervention in the future;
- Develops early intervention practitioners' skills to work collaboratively with families, caregivers, and educators to help children grow and learn.

Ten things early education providers can do when they have concerns about a child's development:

- If you have questions about a child's growth and development, it is best to discuss your concerns with the child's family.
- Set a special meeting time to talk with the family. Don't try to fit it into a busy pickup or drop-off time. Hold the meeting in an area that is private and comfortable.
- Assist them in accessing resources that will help support the child's success in the child care setting.
- Ask the parents 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.
- Recognize that 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.
- Sometimes a parent may not share your concerns about their child's development. Keep in mind that this may be the first time they are hearing about concerns, and they may need some time to process the information and feel comfortable talking.
- Keep communication open and use supportive listening skills.
- Document your concerns by collecting samples of the child's recent work, showing samples of observations that have occurred over a period of time, and by listing the modifications that you have made to your program to meet the child's needs.
- Do not try to diagnose the problem or label the child.
- Be prepared with referral information. Provide the family with information about early intervention services and how to access them. Help to make the referral call if needed.

Where do I tell families to get help?

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

The CONNECT Helpline staff will refer a family to the appropriate local early intervention agency.

www.connectpa.net / connecthelp@tiu11.org

Who is eligible for early intervention services?

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; mental retardation; multiple disabilities; other health impairment; physical disability; speech 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 Public Welfare (DPW), 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.