



# FAQ's – California's Early Start Services

## What is Early Start?

Early Start is California's system of early intervention services provided to infants and toddlers (0 to 36 months) with developmental delays, high risk factors or developmental disabilities and their families. It is a multiagency effort by the Department of Developmental Services and the California Department of Education that encourages partnerships and coordination between professionals in order to help families' access early intervention services and other family support(s). The statewide system of early intervention services is available throughout California and can be accessed through regional centers for developmental disabilities, county offices of education, local school districts, health or social service agencies, and family resource centers/networks in your community.

## Federal Law

### **Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act, Part C**

California's Early Start system of early intervention services was enhanced in response to federal legislation authorizing states to maintain and implement statewide interagency systems of early intervention services for infants and toddlers with disabilities and their families. The Early Intervention Program for Infants and Toddlers with Disabilities was enacted in 1986 and reauthorized in 2004 and 2011 under Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA; 20 U.S.C., §1431 et seq.). Federal regulations are found in 34 CFR, Part 303.1-303.654.

## State Law

### **California Early Intervention Services Act**

After six years of state and local interagency planning and coordination, the State Legislature passed the California Early Intervention Services Act in 1993 (CEISA; 14 G.C., §95000 et seq.). CEISA established state authority to expand California's early intervention service system to meet federal requirements. The California Department of Developmental Services (DDS), as the Part C lead agency, plans, develops, implements, and monitors the statewide early intervention service system in collaboration with the California Department of Education (CDE) and with advice and assistance from the State Interagency Coordinating Council (ICC) on Early Intervention. The Departments of Health Care, Public Health, Social Services, Mental Health, and Alcohol and Drug Programs cooperate and coordinate with DDS and CDE in the delivery of services to children under the age of 3 and their families.

## What happens once an infant or toddler is referred to Early Start?

Within 45 days of receipt of referral, the regional center will complete evaluations and assessments, including receipt and review of other records to determine eligibility. Regional centers may not extend the 45-day-timeline unless there are exceptional circumstances and the family is requesting to extend the timeline and/or written consent to evaluate and assess has not been provided.

## Who is eligible for Early Start?

After evaluations and assessments, including review or other records the Early Start Eligibility Staffing Team will recommend eligibility based on one of the following criteria:

### **25% Developmental Delay in at least ONE or more area of development:**

- Physical - large and small movements, including vision and hearing.
- Communication - pre-speech and language
- Cognitive - thinking and problem-solving
- Social-Emotional - emotions, interacting with others
- Adaptive - daily activities, ie, eating and getting dressed

### **High Risk Condition:**

Two or more medical factors that place them at risk for a development disability such as:

- Prematurity of < 32 weeks gestation and/or low birth weight
- Assisted ventilation of >48 hours during the first 28 days of life.
- Prenatal substance exposure
- Or an infant or toddler born to a parent with a developmental disability

### **Established Risk Condition:**

Children born with a condition with a known probability of causing a disability or delay such as:

Down syndrome or cerebral palsy

## What is an IFSP?

If a infant or toddler is determined to be eligible for services, the Early Start program meets and collaborates with the family to develop a written **Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP)**. The IFSP meeting is held in the family home. The IFSP is developed to address the developmental strengths and needs of the infant or toddler, review parental concerns, priorities and resources. Additionally, developmental outcomes (goals) and early intervention services will be identified to help the child and parent attain the desired developmental outcomes (goals).

## Who provides services and supports?

Early intervention services are individually determined for each eligible infant or toddler and are provided, purchased, or arranged by a regional center or local education agency. Local education agencies are primarily responsible for services for infants with vision, hearing, and severe orthopedic impairments, including any combination of these solely low incidence disabilities. Regional centers are responsible for services for all other children eligible for Early Start. Family resource centers that receive Early Start funding provide parent-to-parent support, information, and referral for all families.

## How much does it cost?

Early Start services are provided at no cost to eligible families. Early Start is funded by state and federal funds. Other publicly funded services may also be used. Private insurance is another resource that is used to fund early intervention services. Use of private insurance is required for medical therapies that include occupational, physical, and speech therapies and behavioral services.

## What are early intervention services?

Early intervention services are provided based on the developmental needs of the child, the concerns and priorities of the family, and the resources available to them. Services are provided within the context of the child's and family's daily activities and routines. Eligible children and families may receive a variety of early intervention services based on the individualized and assessed need; some children may need only one or two early intervention services. Early intervention services may include:

- occupational therapy
- physical therapy
- psychological services
- social work services
- child development services
- speech and language services
- vision services
- audiology or hearing services
- family training and counseling
- nursing services
- nutrition services
- service coordination (case management)
- medical services for diagnosis and evaluation only
- assistive technology, including devices or services

## What is the Family Focus Resource Centers (FFRC)?

California's Early Start Family Focus Resource Centers (FFRCs) are staffed by parents who have children with special needs and provide information and parent to parent support. Each FRC is unique, reflecting the needs of their community. They may operate as independent sites or be based in regional centers, local education agencies, public health facilities, hospitals, or homes. Services are available in many languages and are culturally responsive to the needs of the individual family.

## Are other services available?

Yes. The California Departments of Education, Health Care Services, Public Health, Mental Health, Social Services, and Alcohol and Drug Programs are state agencies that provide services and resources that may be of benefit to children and their families. Each agency determines eligibility for the services that it provides.

## Does early intervention make a difference?

Years of research on the effectiveness of intervention has shown conclusively that early intervention is effective (Wolery & Bailey, 2003; Guralnick, 1997). Specialized services and supports, such as physical therapy, speech and language therapy, child development services, home visits, family support, and service coordination, increase the chances a child will develop to his or her full potential (*Zero to Three Policy Brief*, February 2003).

## How do I get more information?

Visit DDS' Early Start website at [www.dds.ca.gov/earlystart](http://www.dds.ca.gov/earlystart) or call 800.515.BABY for resource information and referral to local regional centers, education agencies, and family resource centers.