

Early Intervention (EI)

What is EI?

Early Intervention (EI) is a system under the Department of Health which is part of New Jersey's Statewide System of Services. EI is there to help infants and toddlers with intellectual and developmental disabilities learn key skills that are necessary for children to develop from birth to age three.

Key skills may include:

- Physical skills
- Cognitive skills
- Communication skills
- Social skills
- Emotional skills
- Self help skills

What services does EI offer?

- Assistive technology
- Auditory (hearing) services
- Speech and language services
- Counseling and training for the child's family
- Medical services
- Nursing services
- Nutrition services
- Occupational therapy
- Physical therapy
- Psychological services

Services are conducted in a natural setting to be most beneficial to the child in need. Thus, services can be provided in the family's home or at a daycare if necessary.

Why is EI important?

EI is key for helping infants and toddlers with intellectual and developmental disabilities to learn important skills that are necessary for all children to develop from birth to age three. Children experiencing developmental delay may be affected in cognitive, physical, communication, social, emotional, or adaptive development. EI focuses on providing services catered specifically to your child and the family's needs to help your child catch up in these key areas of development to be able to successfully maintain activities of daily living into childhood and adulthood.

How do I know if my child needs EI?

Children develop at different paces, so it's impossible to tell precisely when a child will learn a skill. However, baby milestones instruct parents on the essential development steps. If you feel that there is a concern for developmental delay then you should talk to your child's pediatrician if you believe your child is not developing at the same pace as most children of the same age.

Baby Milestone for 0 to 36 months:

https://www.state.nj.us/health/fhs/eis/documents/reic_developmental_brochure.pdf

What are the costs of the services? ¹

There are multiple ways for you to finance services provided through EI. If your family income falls below the 300% [Federal Poverty Level](#), your family will receive services free of charge. Additionally, if your family income is above the Federal Poverty Level, you can apply for Medicaid which will cover the cost of services partially, and the rest of the payment can be given with assistance from the state.

The following services are provide at federal or state expense, NOT the expense of your family:

- Child Find Services
- Evaluations and Assessments
- Development and Review of an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP)
- Service Coordination
- Procedural Safeguards

However, if your family income is above a certain threshold, there may be a "Family Cost Participation," which is a fee that is paid out-of-pocket for certain services and is dependent on your family's income bracket. Fees are adjusted based on a "sliding scale," found on the NJ Department of Health website in a document titled "Family Cost Participation Table" here <https://www.nj.gov/health/fhs/eis/for-families/eligibility-cost/>. Services that may require an out-of-pocket payment include:

- Assistive Technology Services/Devices
- Audiology Services
- Developmental Intervention (Special Instruction)
- Family Training, Counseling, & Home Visits
- Health Services
- Nursing Services
- Nutrition Services
- Occupational Therapy
- Physical Therapy
- Psychological Services
- Sign Language and Cued Language
- Social Work Services

¹ https://www.nj.gov/health/fhs/eis/documents/system_payment_family_cost_policies_procedures.pdf

- Speech-Language Pathology Services
- Vision Services
- Other Part C Early Intervention Services identified as needed IFSP

No service will be denied to your child even if your family is unable to pay for the service. More information about payment specifically for the state of NJ can be found [here](#).

Timeline & Check-List

1. A referral is made by calling the New Jersey Early Intervention System (NJEIS) at 1-888-653-4463.
2. You receive a service coordinator to guide you through Early Intervention process
3. The service coordinator schedules screening, initial evaluations, and assessments for BOTH your child and your family in order to:
 - a. Determine your child's eligibility
 - b. Understand the familial environment
 - c. Identify services needed to support your child and family
4. The Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) is developed within 45 days of the referral, meaning that all assessments mentioned above must be completed as soon as possible.
5. The IFSP will include:
 - a. The services your child will receive
 - b. Ways your family members can be involved, since they also play crucial roles in your child's development!
6. The EI system will assign service providers to your family.
 - a. If you are not satisfied with the provider, your family can request a change to receive services from a different provider.

How do I get a referral and schedule an appointment for an assessment & evaluation?

Primary referral sources can inform you of your child's developmental delay. Primary referral sources include:

- Parents
- Local educational agencies
- Public health facilities
- Hospitals and other health care providers
- Child care programs

With your consent, as the parent or guardian of the child, the primary referral sources can make referrals for assessment and evaluation meetings provided by the government at no cost. The primary referral sources must maintain written documentation that supports your agreement to refer or your request that a referral not be made.

As a parent or guardian of the child, you can be a primary referral source and refer your child for assessment and evaluation. You should call Project Child Find or NJ Early Intervention system to receive a service coordinator for your child. A service coordinator will schedule an evaluation and assessment meeting at a location and time that is convenient for you and your family.

- Project Child Find: free referral service for underserved children with IDD (up to age 21 from birth)
 - 800-322-8174, <http://www.nj.gov/education/specialed/childfind/>
- NJ Early Intervention system: 888-653-4463

What should families expect for the assessment & evaluation meeting?

Evaluations and assessment services are provided at public expense with no cost to your family, and the services cannot be provided without written permission from you as the parent or guardian of the child.

During the scheduled meeting, two or more people will evaluate your child. The assessment team will include someone who can look at overall development (a developmental therapist). Depending on the need, other specialists may also be part of the team. The team will talk to you as the parent or guardian to get more information about your concerns and to better assess your child's strengths and weaknesses among their skill set and abilities. The specialists will:

- Ask questions about your child's medical history.
- Observe your child playing or interacting with family members.
- Do play-based evaluations where the team asks your child to do certain developmental tasks.
- Use standardized tests or other methods to learn about your child's skills.

After the assessment, the specialist team will talk with you as the parent or guardian to review the results and ask further questions. If your child is eligible for EI, an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) will be developed. The IFSP outlines what services and supports your family and your child need to determine how often the practitioners will provide services.

What is an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP)?

- An individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) is developed at a meeting with your family, the service coordinator, at least one member of the evaluation team, and anyone else the family wishes to include.
- For your child to receive services, you as the parent or guardian must consent to the IFSP and can withdraw your consent at any time. Parents or guardians can also say no to some services and still get the services they agree to and feel they need the most.
- The plan is reviewed every six months, or more frequently as appropriate, to ensure it continues to meet your child's and family's needs. At least once a year, you must participate in a developmental evaluation and annual IFSP meeting to review your child's outcomes and IFSP services for any changes. The meeting will be held at a time and location convenient to your family and in the language or other mode of

communication used by your family if English is not your first language and if it is feasible.

- IFSP must include statements about your child's functioning levels of development based on the evaluation and assessment, the frequency, location, and duration of these services, and exactly how the costs will be covered.
- IFSP does not include other services your child receives, such as private services provided by the daycare the child attends. Still, the service coordinator should also assist you as a parent or guardian in navigating the other services.

Transitioning out of EI: What are the Next Steps After Age 3²³?

Children enrolled in EI receive services until their 3rd birthday. If your child has achieved the goals outlined on their Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP), they may not need continued services. However, if your child does need additional services after EI, the local school system and/or Children's Systems of Care will take over as their service providers, depending on your child's individual needs.

After your child turns 2, get a head start and talk with your service coordinator about their transition. You can start formally planning 9 months before your child turns 3 and should meet with the service coordinator at least 3 months prior to their 3rd birthday. Discuss your visions and dreams for your child with your service coordinator, who will guide you through the transition from EI to services with the local school system or PerformCare/ Children's System of Care.

The local school system will provide occupational, physical, and speech therapies in pre-K and on.

Parent Check-List:

- Connect with your school's special education department proactively for an evaluation. Although your child is enrolled in EI, they will need a separate evaluation from the school system to determine whether they qualify for special education services.
- Meet with the school system to create a new plan, known as an Individualized Education Plan (IEP). The IEP is like the IFSP you had while your child was enrolled in EI, but the IEP outlines your child's educational needs through age 21.⁴

Access the Association of Schools and Agencies for the Handicapped (ASAH)'s Pre-school Transition handbook [here](#).

² <https://www.exceptionallives.org/blog/4-steps-for-transitioning-out-of-early-intervention>

³ Transition to Preschool, <http://familylinkreic.org/transition-to-preschool/>

⁴ Preschool Special Education FAQ, <https://disabilityrightsnj.org/wp-content/uploads/Preschool-Guide-FAQ.pdf>

PerformCare/ Children's System of Care (CSOC), under the NJ Department of Children and Families (DCF), will provide family support, respite, after-school care, behavioral support, behavioral analysis therapy, and additional services. Your point of contact is PerformCare, who will *register* your child for these services. Children's System of Care is the division responsible for *delivering* those services.

Parent Check-List:

- Contact PerformCare at 877-652-7624 or see the [website](#) for additional contact information.
- An intake coordinator will take you through the application and evaluation process to receive services from Children's System of Care.

Although your support coordinator will help you transition out of EI, you may want additional help navigating the system. You can contact **Special Child Health Services** (under the NJ Department of Health) at the number listed on the webpage [here](#) for your county for a case manager, who will help connect you with the services discussed above, preventative care, primary care, community programs, and additional resources.

Family Rights

Below are important rights the families of children receiving Early Intervention services should be aware of.

- The right to consent to evaluation and assessment
- The right to be involved with the decisions made concerning their child
- The right to have all information explained to them in their primary language or other mode of communication if the parent is not proficient in English and if it is feasible to do so
- The right to an initial meeting to develop an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) within 45 days of the date the parent consents for the referral if the child is found eligible for the NJEIS
- The right to be informed before any meetings are held or any changes are made to the IFSP
- The right to consent to the IFSP
- The right to say no to some services and to choose only the services wanted
- The right to the early intervention services identified as needed on the IFSP
- The right to referral, evaluation and assessment, IFSP development and review, service coordination, and protection of family rights at no cost
- The right to have all information about the child kept confidential
- The right to review the child and family's early intervention record at any time
- The right to dispute resolution procedures to settle any disagreement over the services related to the child and the family

Dispute resolution

If you as a parent or guardian have a concern that cannot be resolved in discussions with the child's Early Intervention Program (EIP) provider agency, early intervention practitioners and

service coordinator, you have the right to use dispute resolution procedures to work out your concerns. The service coordinator is responsible to give you information about these procedures at the time of referral. Dispute resolution procedures include Complaint Investigation, Mediation and Administrative Due Process Hearing.

Important Contacts

- Contact The Arc of NJ for further assistance: Michael Pearson Jr., Director of Children's Advocacy for The **Arc** of New Jersey, 732-246-4897 or MPearson@arcnj.com
- NJ Early Intervention program: (888) 653-4463 or <https://nj.gov/health/fhs/eis/index.shtml>