

CALIFORNIA

EARLY START



With Early Start... We make a difference

Early Start is California's system of early intervention services provided to infants and toddlers with disabilities and their families. It is a multiagency effort by the Department of Developmental Services and the California Department of Education that encourages partnerships between families and professionals, family support, and coordination of services. 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.

An important part of Early Start is the network of family resource centers (FRCs) that provide parent-to-parent contact, information about disabilities and early intervention, and assistance in accessing services. Phone contact, home or hospital visits, and support groups are all ways in which families might connect with experienced, knowledgeable parent "peers" through their local FRC.

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 and family's daily activities and routines. Eligible children and families may receive a variety of early intervention services; some children may need only one or two early intervention services. Early intervention services may include:

- ▶ assistive technology, including devices or services
- ▶ audiology or hearing services
- ▶ family training, counseling, and home visits
- ▶ health services necessary for a child to benefit from other early intervention services
- ▶ medical services for diagnosis and evaluation only
- ▶ nursing services
- ▶ nutrition services
- ▶ occupational therapy
- ▶ physical therapy
- ▶ psychological services
- ▶ respite services
- ▶ service coordination (case management)
- ▶ social work services
- ▶ special instruction
- ▶ speech and language services
- ▶ transportation and related costs necessary for a child to receive services
- ▶ vision services



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Who is eligible?

Infants and toddlers from birth up to 36 months may be eligible for early intervention services if, through documented evaluation and assessment, they meet one of the criteria listed below:

1. have a developmental delay in either cognitive, communication, social or emotional, adaptive, or physical and motor development including vision and hearing; or
2. have established risk conditions of known etiology with a high probability of resulting in delayed development; or
3. are at high risk of having a substantial developmental disability due to a combination of risk factors.

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 may be used to fund an early intervention service if the family will not incur a financial cost or loss of coverage of benefits. Use of private insurance is voluntary and requires the family's informed consent.

Are other services available?

Yes. The California Departments of 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, special instruction, 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 or call 800/515-BABY for resource information and referral to local regional centers, education agencies, and family resource centers.



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