

TIP SHEET #13: REFERRING CHILDREN TO EARLY INTERVENTION

WHAT services are available through Early Intervention (EI)?

Early Intervention is a family-centered program administered by the NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene that provides free evaluations and services for children from birth until 3 years of age who have developmental delays or disabilities. EI offers a wide array of services including speech, occupational and physical therapy; special instruction; nursing, nutrition, vision, audiological, social work, and psychological services; family training and counseling; service coordination; respite care; and transportation. EI offers support and training to help parents work with their children and to help child care programs work with children.

WHEN to refer a child to EI

Children should be referred to EI when they have a suspected developmental delay or when they have a diagnosed physical or mental condition that likely will result in a developmental delay. Children who may be eligible for preschool special education services in four months or less should also be referred to the Committee on Preschool Special Education (CPSE).

HOW to refer a child to EI

STEP 1: Call 311 to make an EI referral or fax this form to the EI Regional Office:
<https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/doh/downloads/pdf/earlyint/ei-referral-form.pdf>.

STEP 2: Meet with a service coordinator.

After the referral, the Regional EI office should designate an initial service coordinator for the family. If the parent has not heard from the service coordinator within a few days of referral, follow up with the Regional office. The service coordinator should schedule a meeting with the parent to discuss the evaluation process, provide a list of approved evaluation sites, help the parent select an evaluation site and schedule evaluations, and discuss the parent's rights. The parent should also receive a copy of the EI Parent's Guide.

STEP 3: Choose an evaluation site and schedule the evaluations.

The evaluator must obtain parental consent before beginning evaluations. Evaluators may conduct a *screening* to determine if further testing is needed. However, parents have the right to request a full set of evaluations. These evaluations must include an assessment of the child's abilities in each area of development (cognitive, communication, social/emotional, adaptive/self-help, and physical), a parent interview, a transportation assessment, a physical examination (usually done by the child's doctor) and, with parental consent, a review of the child's medical records. The parent may choose to participate in a family assessment to determine the family's resources, priorities, and concerns. The evaluator must provide an evaluation report and summary to the parent.

STEP 4: Attend the Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) meeting.

If the child is eligible for services, EI must schedule a meeting to develop the child's IFSP within 45 days of the initial referral. The EI Official Designee (EIOD), initial service coordinator, evaluator, and parent must attend this meeting, and the parent can invite others. At this meeting, the team will decide on the child's services, and the parent will



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choose an ongoing service coordinator. The parent must agree to each service or it will not be provided. If EI does not agree to provide a service that the child or family needs, the parent may request mediation or an impartial hearing through the Department of Health.

WHO can refer a child to EI?

A wide variety of professionals are *required* to refer children to EI if they think EI services are needed, unless the parent objects. The parent must consent for EI evaluations to take place.

“Parent” includes a birth or adoptive parent, legal guardian, a person in parental relationship to the student, such as a relative with whom the child lives, or a surrogate parent. The EI Official should designate a surrogate parent when a child’s birth parent is unavailable. While the EI Official can allow a parent to appoint a voluntary surrogate parent upon written consent, this should only occur in limited circumstances, given the positive impact that involvement in EI can have on the relationship between parents and children.

HOW to plan for a child’s transition to preschool

EI services are available until a child turns 3. Many children who receive EI services are then eligible for preschool special education services, for children aged 3-5.

- If a child turns 3 between January 1st and June 30th, the child is eligible for preschool special education services starting January 2nd.
- If a child turns 3 between July 1st and December 31st, the child is eligible for preschool special education services starting July 1st.

Refer all children participating in EI who may continue to need services to the Department of Education’s Committee on Preschool Special Education (CPSE) at least 4 months before the child becomes eligible for preschool special education services. See the ‘Referring Children for Preschool Special Education Services’ Tip Sheet for more information. Do not rely on EI to make the referral. The preschool special education evaluation process is lengthy, so make sure to refer the child early so there is no gap in the child’s services.

If the CPSE holds the Individualized Education Program (IEP) meeting and finds the child eligible for services BEFORE the child turns 3, then the child can continue to receive EI services past his or her third birthday if the parent chooses. This is extremely important because there are often waitlists for preschool special education services, especially preschool special classes.

- If a child turns 3 between January 1st and August 31st, the child can continue receiving EI services through August 31st if he or she is eligible for preschool special education services.
- If a child turns 3 between September 1st and December 31st, the child can continue receiving EI services through December 31st if he or she is eligible for preschool special education services.

If the child is not eligible for preschool special education services or the IEP meeting takes place after the child’s third birthday, then EI services will end as soon as the child turns 3.

For more information, see Advocates for Children’s Guide to Early Intervention at http://www.advocatesforchildren.org/sites/default/files/library/guide_to_early_intervention.pdf.