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What Is Early Intervention?

Some children need extra attention because they are born with or are at risk for developmental delays or disabilities. We have learned that the earlier we intervene with infants and toddlers with special needs, the more successful we may be in minimizing or preventing future disabilities.

The Early Intervention Unit at Lanterman Regional Center provides supports, services, and programs that help identify and treat developmental concerns as early as possible in the life of the child. Early intervention services focus on specific developmental areas, including:

- Cognitive
- Physical
- Language and speech
- Social and emotional
- Self-help skills

Early intervention services are family-centered, meaning that they address not only the needs of the child but also the needs of the entire family. Having a child with special needs often requires the family to devote extra time, energy or resources to the child's care, and this can be challenging for both parents and siblings. The Early Intervention Unit provides support to help families adapt to their child's special needs.

Who Is Served By The Early Intervention Unit?

The Early Intervention Unit provides service coordination to families with children between birth and age three. To be eligible to receive services, the infant or toddler must have a significant developmental delay or an established risk condition, or must be at high risk for a developmental disability. (See Section 3 of *Your Partners in Support: Guide to Lanterman Regional Center* for more information about eligibility.)

What Kinds Of Services And Supports Will My Child Receive?

For children birth to three, the focus is on child development. Your Service Coordinator will work with you and other members of your child's planning team to develop an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) based on the needs of your child and your family. The IFSP is the regional center planning document for families with children under three years of age. This plan will be updated periodically to define the types of services and supports needed to reach your goals and objectives. (See Section 5 of *Your Partners in Support: Guide to Lanterman Regional Center* for more information.)

The services provided to your family will be based on the specific assessed needs identified in your IFSP. The types of services that your family may receive include:

- Assistive technology
- Family training, counseling, and home visits
- Health services
- Medical services for diagnostic or evaluation purposes

- Nursing services
- Nutrition services
- Occupational therapy
- Physical therapy
- Psychological services
- Respite
- Service coordination
- Social work services
- Special instruction
- Speech and language services
- Transportation and related costs
- Vision services
- Other family support services

Talk with your Service Coordinator to find out what services would be appropriate for your child and family. (See Section 6 of *Your Partners in Support: Guide to Lanterman Regional Center* for more information about services and supports.)

What Are Natural Environments?

The federal law relating to early intervention services (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, or IDEA) says that early intervention services should be delivered in natural environments. Natural environments are settings that are typical for other children of the same age who have no disability. For example, early intervention services may be provided in the family home, at a baby-sitter's home, or in a community setting, such as a local preschool, a neighborhood play group, or a public park.

Families can play an important role in finding appropriate natural environments for their child. As a parent, you can identify settings in your own neighborhood that would help your child grow and develop similarly to other children of the same age. Your Service Coordinator can also help you find appropriate settings for early intervention services.

What Will Happen As My Child Approaches Age Three?

Early intervention services are provided through the regional center until the child reaches age three, the age of the child's first "transition." Transition is a time of change in a person's

life when he or she moves from one program to another – in this case, from an early intervention program to preschool. It is the age by which two decisions will be made:

- Whether your child will continue to be eligible for regional center services
- Whether your child will become eligible for special education services through the school district.

By age three, and with the help of early intervention services, some children will have “caught up” developmentally to the point that they are no longer eligible for regional center services. If this is the case for your child, your Service Coordinator will help your family connect to appropriate resources in the community for any continuing needs that the child may have.

Other children, because of a continuing significant disability, will remain eligible for regional center services. For these children, however, the types of services provided will change. If this is true for your child, your Early Intervention Service Coordinator will continue to work with your family to assure a smooth transition to these new services.

Many children, whether or not they continue to receive regional center services, will be eligible for services through the public schools starting at age three. To determine if your child is eligible for these services, the school will conduct its own assessment of your child’s growth and development. Let’s look more closely at the process leading up to transition.

Transition Planning Meeting. When your child is 2 1/2 years old, you will be invited to participate in a transition planning meeting with representatives of the school district and the regional center. This meeting is required under the California law that governs early intervention services. (The program is called “Early Start” in California.) At this meeting, you will be introduced to school district personnel who will tell you about the kinds of services available to young children through the schools.

Regional Center Eligibility. When your child is 33 months old, the regional center will convene a multidisciplinary team meeting to determine whether your child will continue to be eligible for regional center services.

IEP Meeting. Prior to your child’s third birthday but following the transition planning meeting, the school district will convene an initial Individualized Education Program (IEP) meeting. The IEP is a planning document used by the school to describe the types of services that your child will receive. At the initial IEP meeting, the team will discuss whether or not your child is eligible for special education services, and if so, what types of services and supports will be necessary for him or her to progress in school.

What Happens At The Transition Planning Meeting?

The transition planning meeting will focus on the steps necessary to support your child and family as you transition out of early intervention services. If needed, your Service Coordinator can help you prepare for this meeting or provide assistance at the meeting. The meeting will include the following:

- A brief review of your current IFSP
- The steps necessary to support transition to special education or other services
- A discussion of assessments needed to determine your child's eligibility for special education services at age 3, and who will complete them
- A timeline and steps for developing an Individualized Education Program (IEP) for your child if he or she is eligible for special education
- A discussion of school placement options and related services.

With the parent's permission, the school district may review assessments provided by the regional center and, if they are current and appropriate, use any or all of them for the purpose of determining eligibility for special education services. Even if they do use these assessments, they will most likely also conduct one or more of their own.

It's important to remember that the eligibility requirements for early intervention, ongoing regional center services, and special education differ from one another. So, even though the school system may be looking at the same assessments that the regional center used to determine eligibility, the school system may reach a different eligibility decision.

What Is The IEP Process?

The IEP – or Individualized Education Program – is a plan that is written for each child who has been determined eligible for special education services based on the assessment described above. The results of the assessment are used to help develop the IEP. You may wish to review the assessment results prior to the meeting to better prepare yourself to participate in the development of the IEP. At the end of this section is a sample letter that you may use to request the assessment results from the school district.

An initial IEP meeting is held for all early intervention consumers to determine whether they will be eligible for special education services and to develop an IEP for children who are eligible. The team that creates the IEP includes the parent or guardian, a school administrator and a teacher. As appropriate, other members of the team may include the child's regional center Service Coordinator, early intervention teacher, psychologist, specialist,

friends, family members, advocates or other supportive people. Your child is not required to attend this meeting.

The IEP document includes the following components:

- An eligibility statement
- The child's present level of performance
- Goals and objectives for the coming year
- Designated Instruction and Services when appropriate
- Appropriate program placement agreed upon by the IEP team

Because parents know more about their child than anyone else, they are in the best position to discuss their child's strengths and areas of needed development. For this reason, your participation in the assessment and IEP process is extremely important. **Remember, you are an important member of the IEP team – and it's OK to disagree with findings or recommendations made by other members of the team.**

As you prepare for your child's IEP meeting, there are a number of questions that you should think about and answer. We have provided these questions on a checklist at the back of this section.

What Are My Child's Preschool Program Options?

When your child reaches the age of three, he or she will have several options for structured daytime programs. The primary ones are:

Head Start – Head Start is a federally-funded program designed to foster healthy development and school readiness in low income preschool age children. While some Head Start centers are administered by local school districts, this is not a special education program. Head Start programs are required to fully include children with disabilities, so a small number of special needs children may enter these programs at age four.

Special School Placements – Children whose needs are significant may have the option of entering a special education preschool or kindergarten class run by the school district.

Non-school district preschool options – You may always choose independently to send your child to a private preschool that is convenient for you and that you believe will benefit your child. Neither the school district nor the regional center is responsible for providing your child with this option.

Regardless of the type of program you choose, your child may also be eligible to receive services (called Designated Instruction and Services) through the school system. These services include speech and language, adaptive physical education, specialized nursing, occupational therapy, physical therapy, and specialized vision services. The services provided to a child are based on the findings of his or her IEP team and are funded by the school district.

What Should I Look For When I Visit The School Or Preschool?

You may wish to visit some special education preschools or early childhood program settings before you decide which one your child will attend. Here are some questions to consider when visiting programs.

Preschool/Early Childhood Program Setting

- Are there appropriate opportunities for my child to interact with typical children of his or her age?
- How will my child be transported to school? Will he or she need to ride a school bus? If so, for how long?
- Will my child be at school for the same length of time as similar-aged children without disabilities?
- Are bathrooms, stairs, playground, etc., accessible and adapted to the needs of my child?
- (If necessary) Can the program serve a child in diapers?

Classroom

Remember, you are observing a program, not a specific group of children. Observe with your child's individual needs and your family's needs in mind.

- Are there age-appropriate role models in the classroom?
- Do the children receive instruction that is individualized to meet their unique needs?
- Are toys and instructional materials placed so that children can reach them?
- Is the classroom arranged so that children can move easily and freely with enough room for any needed special equipment (e.g., walker, wheelchair, etc.)?
- Are children given the chance to communicate their needs?
- Have activities been planned to teach children specific skills?
- Are children exposed to a variety of different learning activities?
- Are parents welcome to participate or observe in the classroom?
- What opportunities are there for parents to become involved with the program?

Teacher and Staff

Remember, when you visit a classroom, the teacher may not have time to answer all of your questions. You may need to schedule a time outside class to speak with him or her.

- Does the teacher seem responsive, comfortable and warm with the children?
- Is the teacher comfortable with children with disabilities?
- Are there enough adults to teach the children?
- How does the teacher keep in contact with the parents?

Special Medical Needs

If your child has special medical needs, including regular medication, you may also want to ask questions such as these:

- Is there a responsible adult who can dispense my child's medications?
- Is this person familiar with side effects and what to do if they occur?
- Are staff trained how to handle seizures?
- Can the staff handle other needs such as g-tube feeding?

As you visit the programs, don't compare your child to the other children. The children in each program will be quite different from one another and from your child. You may be visiting groups of children who have been together for some time (months or even a year). The dynamics of the group will probably be different when your child enters.

Remember that transition will continue after the IEP meeting. For the first week or perhaps longer, your child will be busy getting to know the new kids, routine, toys and especially the new adults in the classroom.

You can help the staff to get to know your child by sharing some specific information, for example:

- Special positions he or she uses for feeding, sitting, etc.
- Snacks or foods your child particularly likes, doesn't like, or can't eat
- Special methods of communication used by your child (signs, gestures, a communication device, etc.)
- Special equipment used by your child and how it is used
- Things your child particularly likes to do.

What Is The Role Of Our Family?

At Lanterman Regional Center, we encourage families to work as partners with us to find and coordinate services that best meet the needs of the child and family. Since you know your child and family better than any professional does, it makes sense that you be involved as an equal member of the planning team. The following steps can help you and your family take a more active role in the planning process:

1. **Keep copies of important documents organized in a binder.** Be sure to bring this material to all planning meetings (IFSP, IPP). (See Section 12 of *Your Partners in Support: Guide to Lanterman Regional Center* for information on Record-Keeping.). Read through documents such as assessments from physicians, therapists, and other service providers before the IEP, IFSP or IPP, so that you have a good idea what all the team members think.
2. **Invite individuals whom you would like to be part of your family's team to your planning meetings.** Let your Service Coordinator know in advance who will be attending, and your Service Coordinator will try his or her best to arrange a convenient meeting place and time.
3. **Before a planning meeting, think about the questions that may be discussed.** You may also want to talk with friends or other family members who cannot attend the meeting, but who know your child very well.

Here are the kinds of questions to consider:

- What are my child's strengths?
Example: "My child is able to smile at people."
- What are my child's needs?
Example: "My child has trouble sitting up."
- What is important to my family?
Example: "My extended family is very important, and I want them to be included in the planning process."
- What are my concerns?
Example: "I am concerned about getting health care for my family."
- What goals do I have for my child and my family?
Example: "I want my child to become potty-trained."
- What kind of help do I already have, and what do I need?
Example: "My mother baby-sits for my child, but she sometimes needs some time off. Is respite care available?"

- What kinds of natural environments are best for my child?
Example: “My child likes to play with the children in the neighborhood. Perhaps he could have a therapist work with him during our neighborhood play group.”
- Was our last plan (within the last six months) successful?
Example: “We had hoped to decrease my child's temper tantrums through behavior management training, but my child still needs more help to reach this goal.”
- How will I know if the plan is working?
Example: “We want our child to participate in the local preschool with support. To find out if this is successful, we will talk with the teacher.”

At the end of this section, you will find a worksheet called, “Planning for the Future,” that you can use to write your answers to these questions. For some families, learning how to approach these questions is the biggest challenge. You may want to talk with your Service Coordinator about child development to help you think about strengths, needs, and goals for your child.

4. ***Seek help or information from available resources.*** Your Service Coordinator can answer questions you may have about early intervention services. You may also find it helpful to visit our Koch-Young Resource Center. The Resource Center provides information and education to regional center families through a multi-media library, support groups, peer support partners and training. It also has information about community resources, events and conferences. By becoming more aware of the resources available in the community, you can become more active in creating your family's IFSP.

What Are My Rights And Responsibilities?

- You have the *right* to information about your child and your child's program.
- You have the *responsibility* for seeking and maintaining this information.
- You have the *right* to review your child's records.
- You have the *responsibility* for asking questions when you don't understand terms or reports.
- You have the *right* to be full partners in your child's program.
- You have the *responsibility* for becoming and remaining active members of the team.
- You have the *right* to stand up for your child to make sure he or she gets the services needed.
- You have the *responsibility* to base your actions on accurate information.

- You have the *right* to make suggestions and recommendations about your child's program or services.
- You have the *responsibility* for doing so.
- You have the *right* to a vision for your child's future.
- You have the *responsibility* for helping your child achieve it.

What Are The Laws Affecting Special Education?

Following this section, we have listed a few Web sites where you can obtain additional information about your rights.

The Individuals With Disabilities Education Act (PL101-476)

Passed in October 1990, IDEA guarantees four basic rights to all children with disabilities.

- *A Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)* — Children with disabilities are entitled to a public education appropriate to their needs, at no cost to their families.
- *Education in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)* – Children with disabilities must be educated with students who do not have disabilities as much as possible, and as close to home as possible.
- *Designated Instruction and Services (DIS)* – Children with disabilities must be provided related services that they need in order to benefit from their educational program. These services are outlined in the IEP. Examples of related services are: physical therapy, occupational therapy, speech therapy, counseling, deaf and hard of hearing services, vision services, and adaptive physical education.
- *Assessment* – An assessment must be completed to determine the child's needs in all areas related to his or her suspected disabilities. This may be done only with the parent's informed consent.

In order to assure that these basic rights are enforced, IDEA also includes two protections.

- *Individualized Education Program (IEP)* – This IEP must be written at least annually for all children with disabilities.
- *Due Process* – Due process rights ensure that no changes can be made in a child's educational program without prior notice to the parents. Further, due process provides a mechanism for the resolution of disagreements.

The Rehabilitation Act, Section 504 (PL93-112)

Section 504 of this law guarantees that people with disabilities may not be discriminated against because of their disability. Some children who are not covered by IDEA are assured the right to a free and appropriate education under Section 504.

PL99-547 Part H

Part H authorizes assistance to states to address the needs of infants and toddlers with disabilities, and their families.

Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA)

The ADA guarantees equal opportunity for individuals with disabilities. Corresponding state law regarding special education can be found in the California Education Code, Part 30, Sections 56000 to 59300, and Title 3 regulations.

Where Can I Get More Information?

The following Web sites offer a great deal of information about special education and the laws governing it.

Protection and Advocacy, Inc. (PAI) California: www.pai-ca.org

U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS): www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/osers/index.html

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act: www.ideapractices.org

IEP Checklist

As you prepare for your child's IEP meeting, you should be sure that you can answer "yes" to each question on this checklist.

- Have you notified the district of the names of the people you want to invite to the meeting?
- Have you signed and returned the written notification of the meeting?
- If you wish to review assessments prior to the meeting, have you requested a written copy of your child's assessment reports?
- Are you familiar with the preschool education and related services provided by your school district?
- Are there other early childhood programs, services and activities available in your community that you would like to consider for your child?
- Have you discussed visiting these programs with your Service Coordinator?
- Have you made a list of your child's abilities and strengths?
- Have you made a list of your child's needs?
- Do you have short-range and long-range goals for your child?
- Do you know what the registration requirements are for your community programs and/or school district?
- Do you have current copies of immunization records, medical reports, therapy reports, education reports, assessments, or any other related information?

Sample Letter For Requesting Assessment Results

The following is a sample letter you may use to request a copy of your child's assessment results. You would send this letter to the school district special education department where your child was assessed.

Date

Division of Special Education
Infant/Preschool Support Services

Your local school district (e.g., LAUSD)

Street Address
City, State and Zip Code

Dear (name of Special Education Coordinator),

On (date) my child, (child's name), was assessed by (name of school district) to determine eligibility for preschool. Please send me a copy of my child's assessment results so that I may review them before the IEP meeting.

Sincerely,

Your name
Your address
Your phone number

Worksheet: Planning For The Future

This worksheet can help you prepare for regional center planning meetings, such as the IFSP meeting, or for the IEP. (Make copies of this original to write on.) Write down your responses to each question before each meeting. This way, you will be ready to talk about the different steps in developing or updating the plan. You may also want to write down thoughts of friends or other family members who cannot attend the planning meeting, but who know your child and family very well. By answering these questions, your family will be better prepared for the planning meetings. If you need help in responding, talk with your Service Coordinator or the Koch-Young Resource Center. Bring this worksheet, along with your binder of important documents, to your next IFSP meeting.

What are my child's strengths? _____

What are my child's needs? _____

What is important to my family? _____

What are my concerns? _____

What goals do I have for my child and my family? _____

What kind of help do I already have, and what do I need? _____

What are natural environments for my child? _____

Was our last plan (within the last six months) successful? _____

How will I know if my current plan is working? _____
