

A Family Overview



Colorado's Early Intervention System at a Glance



Early Intervention Colorado
for Infants, Toddlers & Families

www.eicolorado.org



The purpose of this booklet is to provide the basic information needed to understand Colorado's early intervention system of developmental supports and services. Families and specialists from a variety of agencies involved with Colorado's early intervention system helped develop this booklet for families.

What is Early Intervention?

Early intervention provides developmental supports and services to children birth through two years of age who have special developmental needs. It can help improve your child's ability to develop and learn. It can also help you and your family learn ways to support and promote your child's development, within your family activities and community life.

In Colorado, the overall system of early intervention is known as **Early Intervention Colorado**. It is designed to "connect" a family with **early intervention services**, such as occupational, speech or physical therapy, to help infants and toddlers grow and develop, and to help their family in this process. It is a voluntary program and does not discriminate based on race, culture, religion, income level, or disability.

Why Early Intervention Works for Infants and Toddlers

The term "early" intervention is important because research shows that the first three years are the most important time for developing and learning in a child's life. The goal of early intervention in Colorado is to "open a window of opportunity" for families to help their children with special needs develop to their full potential. It may also prevent or decrease the need for special help later during the school age years.

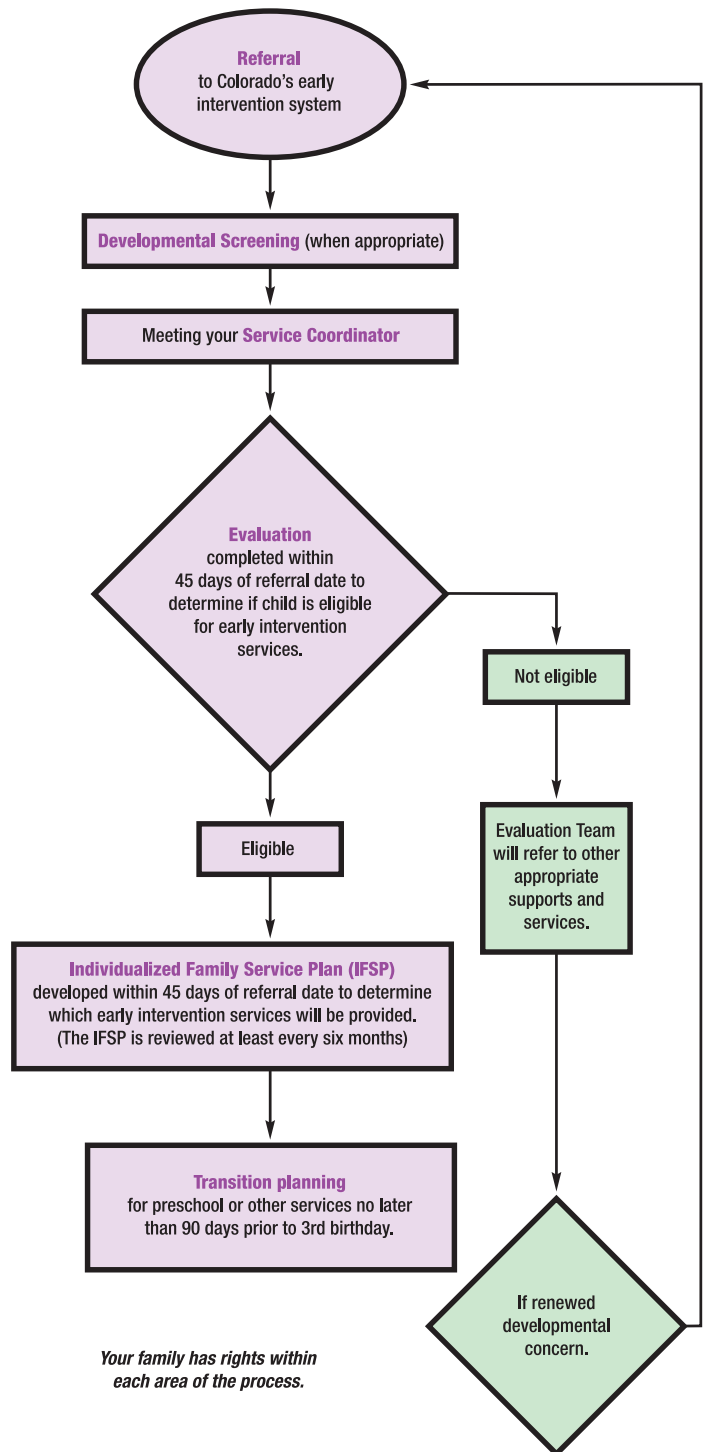
How Does a Family Access Early Intervention Services?

The flowchart on the following page explains the steps within Colorado's early intervention system, from the initial referral to determining eligibility. The flow chart also illustrates the planning process for early intervention services for eligible infants and toddlers, including transition planning when a child approaches three years of age. Each step of this flow chart is described more in the remainder of this booklet.

All children are unique with their individual strengths and talents. The presence of a developmental delay or special need is not the defining characteristic of any child.



Families know their children best, and must be respected and valued members in decision-making about what their child needs.





Children grow and develop in the context of relationships with their families and communities.

Step 1: Referral for Early Intervention Services

If you or someone who cares about your child has concerns about his or her development, early intervention services may help. You can request a free evaluation at any time to answer questions about your child's development, and determine whether your child may benefit from the early intervention services. There are twenty local agencies known as Community Centered Boards throughout Colorado who are responsible for coordinating the local early intervention system in their service area. To be connected to the Community Centered Board in your county, you can call 1-888-777-4041 or visit www.eicolorado.org and choose the city or county you live in from the drop down list within the "state and local contacts" section.

Other people may also contact the Community Centered Board in your county, such as a doctor, childcare provider, neighbor, or family member, on behalf of your family. However, no evaluation of your child or early intervention services will be provided without your consent.

Step 2: Screening Your Child's Development

Depending on the reason of referral and if your child's development has not already been screened, a request may be made to screen your child's development. A developmental screening is a quick look at how your child is developing and learning. A doctor or other professional involved in your child's life, such as child care provider, may have already screened your child's development. If this is the case, it is important for the early intervention program to have a copy of this information at the time of referral.

Step 3: Meeting Your Service Coordinator

A service coordinator is a person who works with you during your child's involvement with Colorado's early intervention system and to help protect your legal rights. Federal and state laws require that all children and families served by the early intervention system have a service coordinator. A service coordinator is your main contact and is assigned to each infant or toddler and their family within three business days of the referral being received.

Service Coordinators:

- *Help families identify their strengths and needs, find resources, think about decisions the family needs to make, coordinate all the services being received, and*
- *Make sure that the rights of the child and family are protected.*

Step 4: Having an Evaluation

Your service coordinator will work with you to schedule an evaluation for your child. All infants and toddlers referred to Colorado's early intervention system have the right to a free evaluation. Information from the evaluation is used to determine your child's eligibility and will look at all areas of your child's development. It is a process that will help you to better understand your child's developmental strengths and needs and how early intervention



All children have the right to belong, to be welcomed, and to participate fully in the typical places and activities of their communities.

services can help. Unless you request otherwise, the evaluation must be completed within 45 days of the referral date. You must sign a written permission form before any evaluation of your child occurs.

Your child and family may receive early intervention services if:

- your family and child live in Colorado;
- your child is birth through two years of age; and
- your child is eligible based on one of the following two criteria.

I. Developmental Delay

A child may be determined eligible because he or she has a significant delay in one or more of the following developmental areas:

- thinking and learning skills (cognitive development)
- moving, seeing, and hearing (physical development)
- understanding and using sounds, gestures, and words (communication development)
- responding to and developing relationships with other people (social-emotional development)
- taking care of one's self when doing things like feeding or dressing (adaptive development)

II. Based on a Diagnosis

A child may be determined eligible because he or she has been diagnosed with a physical or mental condition that has a high probability of resulting in a significant developmental delay or disability as the child gets older even though the child may not currently have an observable delay or disability. A list of conditions that will qualify a child for Colorado's early intervention system is available on the Early Intervention Colorado website at www.eicolorado.org within the family section. If your child has a condition that establishes their eligibility, your child will still need an evaluation to help plan for what services may be needed.

Your concerns and the needs of your child will determine which specialists will be involved in your child's evaluation. However, at least two people from different specialty areas must be a part of the "multidisciplinary" evaluation team, along with you and your service coordinator.

You will receive prior written notice about when and where your child's evaluation will be held. This notice must be in your family's native language, unless it is not feasible to do so. The evaluation must be held at times and locations that are convenient for your family.

All information from the evaluation is confidential and cannot be shared with anyone without your written permission. Copies of the evaluation are available to you upon request. You can review your child's early intervention record at any time and, if necessary, correct or comment on information related to your child's screening, evaluation, and eligibility.

If it is determined that your child is not eligible, the evaluation team and/or your service coordinator will help you find other appropriate supports and services in your community. If you do not agree with the results of the evaluation, you have the right to object to the decision of the evaluation team and to



Children with and without special needs learn important things from each other.

have the decision reviewed. If you agree with the decision, you may always re-contact the Community Centered Board in the future if you have renewed concerns about your child's development.

Step 5: Making a Plan for Services— Your IFSP

The Individualized Family Service Plan, usually referred to as an IFSP, is your family's written plan for early intervention services. Your child, if eligible, will have an initial IFSP developed within 45 days of the referral date. Just like the evaluation process, you will receive prior written notice in your family's native language, unless it is not feasible to do so, about when and where your child's IFSP meeting will be held. Very often, the date of the evaluation is the same date that the initial IFSP meeting occurs. The IFSP meeting must be held at times and locations that are convenient for your family and is family-centered. This means that you will be an active team member and the key decision maker throughout the planning process.

The IFSP is based on information from your child's evaluation and from the concerns, resources, and priorities that you identify. It will list the services your child needs to develop and learn, and the services your family needs to support your child's development. In addition, it will list the duties of everyone involved. Some of the help you receive may come from your own family and friends. Other services will be provided by specialists.

Allowable Early Intervention Services...

- Assistive Technology
- Audiology Services
- Developmental Intervention
- Health Services
- Nutrition Services
- Occupational Therapy (OT)
- Physical Therapy (PT)
- Psychological Services
- Respite Care
- Service Coordination
- Social/Emotional Intervention
- Speech-Language Therapy
- Transportation
- Vision Services

Your service coordinator is responsible for explaining the IFSP process to you. He or she will make sure the IFSP is written and will answer any questions you have. Your signatures on the IFSP show your participation and your agreement with the plan. However, if you disagree with all or part of the IFSP, you have the right to share your concerns and ask for changes. You may accept or refuse any or all services suggested to you. You may stop a service any time you wish. A copy of the IFSP must be given to you after it is completed and signed.

Step 6: Putting Your IFSP Into Action

A family must give written permission or consent before any services can begin, end, or change. Early intervention services outlined on your child's IFSP are required to begin within 28 days of your consent for services. In the case where your family disagrees with the early intervention services being



Everyday routines, activities and places that are defined by the family offer countless opportunities for children to learn and develop.

provided to your child or with the ways in which the early intervention services are being provided, your family can request changes through either negotiation with the Community Centered Board involved, mediation, or an administrative hearing.

The IFSP is reviewed at least every six months. It is also updated at least once a year. However, your needs and resources may change sooner, so more frequent reviews can be held to make changes. Once completed, the IFSP becomes a part of your child's early intervention record that is kept confidential by the specialists working with you and your child. It cannot be shared with anyone without your written permission. Your family has the right to review and, if necessary, correct or comment on early intervention records related to your child's IFSP.

Step 7: Transition Planning

Colorado's early intervention system serves eligible children from birth through two years of age. As your child approaches his or her third birthday, you and your service coordinator will plan for the move from services you are now receiving to those you may need in the future. Some children may no longer need any services, some children and families may go on to other appropriate services in the community, and other children receiving early intervention services may be eligible for preschool special education services from their school districts. If potentially eligible for preschool-age services, your family has the right to have a transition conference no later than 90 days prior to your child's third birthday, with steps and services to support your child through the transition process in place. Preschool special education services are for three and four year olds with special developmental needs. The eligibility criteria are different for the special education preschool program, so your child will need to have their development evaluated for eligibility.

Where Can You Get More Information?

The best source of additional information about anything in this booklet is the Community Centered Board in your community. For more details about topics covered in this booklet visit the Early Intervention Colorado website: www.eicolorado.org.

Additional guidebooks are available to you that provide more in depth information about the system, offering questions for families to ask and worksheets to document important dates, contacts, and information about your child's development. You can download these guidebooks at the state Early Intervention Colorado website or you can request a pre-printed copy of the guidebooks by contacting the Community Centered Board in your community (1-888-777-4041).

You may also contact the state Early Intervention Colorado office by calling 303-866-7263 or 1-888-777-4041 and selecting this option when prompted. The state office is located at the Colorado Department of Human Services, Division for Developmental Disabilities.



All family members benefit when they are supported to maintain their everyday lives and relationships.

Other Organizations That You May Find Helpful Include:

The **ARC of Colorado** provides advocacy services for persons with developmental disabilities and their families.

- 303-864-9334 or toll-free 1-800-333-7690
- www.thearcofco.org

El Grupo Vida is a network of families who have children with disabilities or special needs.

- 303-904-6073 or info@elgrupovida.org
- www.elgrupovida.org

Family Voices of Colorado is a chapter of the national, grassroots organization made up of families and friends who care for and about children with special health care needs. The primary goal of Family Voices is to ensure that children's health is addressed amidst change in public and private health care systems.

- Toll-free 1-800-881-8272
- www.familyvoicesco.org

Parent to Parent of Colorado provides parent-to-parent connections to support families on the journey of parenting a child with special needs. Parent to Parent of Colorado provides the following supports and services for families:

- One-on-one matching of parents to other parents
- Listserv of parents sharing resources and offering support
- Toll-free number for information (1-877-472-7201) or e-mail at mail@p2p-co.org.
- Website full of resources (www.p2p-co.org)

PEAK Parent Center provides information, support, workshops, and technical assistance for parents of children with disabilities and to professionals who work with children with disabilities. Family advocates are available to assist families with Individualized Education Program (IEP) and IFSP processes. PEAK Parent Center disseminates many printed materials including a monthly calendar of activities around the state.

- 1-800-284-0251
- www.peakparent.org
- info@peakparent.org

The Legal Center for People with Disabilities and Older People protects and promotes the rights of people with disabilities and older people through direct legal representation, advocacy, education, and legal analysis. Questions are answered and limited technical advice provided free of charge.

- 303-722-0300 or 1-800-288-1376
- www.thelegalcenter.org
- tlcmail@thelegalcenter.org



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Colorado Department of Human Services
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