



Early Intervention:

A Guide for Parents

Early Intervention is a program that helps infants and toddlers with developmental delays or disabilities. The program provides extra support during early childhood. The sooner kids get help, the better they do now and in the future.

Why it matters

The first three years are key. A baby's brain grows faster now than at any other time in life. Finding delays early and getting help right away can make a big difference in how a child develops. In fact, 1 in 3 kids who get early help no longer need special help by kindergarten.

Who is eligible?

Each state has its own rules. A child may qualify if they have a known cause of delays, like Down syndrome. They may also qualify if they show delays in speech, movement, thinking, or social skills. Being born prematurely (too early) may also qualify a child.

Anyone can make a referral. That includes parents, doctors, and child care workers. You do not need a doctor's okay to ask for help.

How to get started

Ask your child's healthcare provider for a free check, called an **evaluation**. You can also call your state's program directly. The evaluation can happen at home or at a center nearby. The state has 45 days to finish the check and create a plan. That way, your child gets help fast.



What services are available?

A plan for services is created to meet your child's and family's needs. Services may include:

- Speech therapy
- Tools to help your child learn or move
- Help with daily tasks
- Help with feeding, sleeping, or behavior
- Help with walking

Services usually happen at home, in child care, or in another place your child knows.

Is there a cost?

There is no charge to find out if your child qualifies. Some states have a sliding fee for services. But a child cannot be turned away if a family cannot pay.

What happens next?

If your child qualifies, you will work with a service coordinator. Together, you will make a plan. It is called an IFSP. The plan lists where your child is now. It also lists the goals you set and the services they will get. It tells you when and where each service will happen. You will go over the plan every six months. You will update your plan and goals each year.

Does early help mean special education?

No. Some families worry that early help will label their child. But your child's services are not shared with their school unless you want them to be. Some kids only need help for a short time. Others move from Early Intervention to special help at age 3. The service coordinator helps with that step.

Have more questions? Talk to your child's healthcare provider or one of the professionals supporting your family.

Text **SPARKS** to 274 448

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