

What Is Early Intervention (EI)

- A program for children from birth up to 3 years old who have developmental delays or a diagnosed condition likely to cause a delay.
- The goal is to help with learning, playing, speaking, moving, hearing/vision, social-emotional development, etc.
- It is free to families. Insurance (private or Medicaid), if available, may be used, but there is no direct cost to the family.
- The program is voluntary, family-centered, and confidential.

How to Apply / Get Started

1. Referral: If you or someone (doctor, daycare provider, caregiver) is concerned about a child's development, you can make a referral.

- Call ****311**** and ask for Early Intervention.
- Or fill out the ****Early Intervention Referral Form**** (PDF) and fax it to the Citywide Early Intervention Referral Unit.

2. Assignment of Service Coordinator: Once referred, the family is assigned a service coordinator. This coordinator explains how EI works, helps select an evaluation agency, and guides them through the process.

3. Evaluation: The child is evaluated by licensed/certified evaluators to see if they are eligible. The evaluation covers developmental skills: talking, walking, playing, etc. If a diagnosed condition exists, that too helps.

4. Determining Eligibility: After evaluation, if the child meets the criteria, eligibility is established.

5. Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP): If eligible, a meeting is held with family + professionals to set goals and decide what services, where, and how often. This produces the IFSP.

6. Services Begin: Once IFSP is agreed, services (therapies, interventions, supports) begin. These can take place in the home, child care settings, or community settings.

7. Transition at Age 3: As a child approaches age 3, there is transition planning, often from EI to the preschool special education services (through the Committee on Preschool Special Education, CPSE). Documents are transferred, etc.

What Services Are Available

- Speech & Language Therapy
- Occupational Therapy (for fine motor, daily living skills)
- Physical Therapy (gross motor, movement)
- Vision/Audiology services (hearing and sight assessments & interventions)
- Social work, psychological services, family counseling/support
- Special Instruction (helping with learning, play, social skills)
- Assistive Technology Devices & Services if needed (e.g. hearing aids, communication devices)
- Parent/caregiver training, workshops, support groups

Challenges & Barriers

- Delay in services: Even once eligible, some children wait longer than they should to start services.
- Incomplete service provision: Many children do not receive all of the therapies/planned services spelled out in their IFSP.
- Provider shortages: In certain boroughs or neighborhoods, there are not enough therapists or providers, especially in-home or early morning/evening availability.
- Scheduling & accessibility: Families with work, transportation, or childcare constraints may find it hard to get sessions in convenient times/locations.
- Awareness and stigma: Parents may not know EI exists, or might hesitate because of stigma, or misunderstandings about what services are and what's involved.
- System/administrative issues: Paperwork, coordination, ensuring continuity when switching providers, or during transitions.

Tips for Parents

- Don't wait: if you suspect delays, ask for help right away. Early action means better outcomes.
- Keep good records: write down observations of what your child *isn't* doing (or what seems different). Doctors often respond to specific concrete examples.
- Be your child's advocate: ask what's in your IFSP — check frequency, location, types of services. If something isn't happening, follow up with your service coordinator.
- Ask about telehealth or home-based services if getting out is hard. Some flexibility may be possible.
- Stay informed: get to know your rights, the timelines (e.g., how long evaluation should take, how soon services begin), and how the transition to preschool services works.
- Build supports: connect with other parents, support groups; sometimes peer support helps figure out what to expect.
- Be clear about priorities: in IFSP, pick goals that matter most to your family's daily life. That helps focus service.

References

1. <https://www.nyc.gov/site/doh/health/health-topics/early-intervention.pag...>(link is external and opens in a new window) "Early Intervention - NYC Health"
2. https://health.ny.gov/community/infants_children/early_intervention/earl...(link is external and opens in a new window) "Early Help Makes a Difference!"
3. https://www.challenge-ei.com/how-to-start/?utm_source=chatgpt.com(link is external and opens in a new window) "How to Start | Challenge Early Intervention"
4. <https://www.nyc.gov/site/doh/providers/resources/early-intervention-info...>(link is external and opens in a new window) "Early Intervention: Information for Providers - NYC Health"
5. https://challenge-ei.com/services-we-provide/?utm_source=chatgpt.com(link is external and opens in a new window) "Services We Provide – Challenge Early Intervention New Site"
6. <https://www.thecity.nyc/2023/03/01/youngest-children-early-intervention-...>(link is external and opens in a new window) "58% of NYC's youngest children don't receive all of their Early Intervention services | THE CITY — NYC News"