

Natural Environments



What is in the law?

Questions about routines, activities, and places

Definitions

Guiding principles

THE FEDERAL REGULATIONS SAY...

The regulations for Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act indicate that, to the maximum extent appropriate, early intervention services will be provided in natural environments, including home and community settings in which children without disabilities participate, to the maximum extent appropriate. Services can be provided in a setting other than natural environment only when early intervention cannot be achieved satisfactorily in a natural environment. {(SEC.635 and SEC.636)}

“Providing services in natural environments is not just the law, but more importantly, it reflects the core mission of early intervention, which is to support families to provide learning opportunities for their child within the activities, routines, and events of everyday life.

Early Intervention should be a truly **family-centered** process that ensures young children with disabilities and their families receive early intervention services and supports as part of their daily routines and activities.” (Position paper on provision of Early Intervention Services in Accordance with Federal Requirements)

QUESTIONS

Why are everyday routines, activities, and places important?

Children learn throughout the day, wherever they are and whatever they do. Research confirms that everyday experiences, events, and situations provide children with the best opportunities to learn and develop.

How are a child’s everyday routines, activities, and places identified?

Everyday routines, activities, and places are unique to each child and family. They are identified by your family as you talk about your typical daily activities, such as visiting grandpa, walking to the store, getting the mail, feeding the dog, and doing the laundry. Children learn about “water” in the bathtub, washing hands in the sink, getting a drink, splashing in a puddle, or swimming in a pool. In addition to learning what water is, children learn self help skills like drinking from a cup, hand and face washing, or motor skills like walking and jumping. The location of these everyday routines and activities include places like the bathroom, kitchen sink, backyard, and community playground. These activities are your child’s opportunities for learning and your family’s opportunities for enhancing your child’s development.

DEFINITIONS

 **Providers** are professionals who work with your child in early intervention. It may be a Speech Therapist, an Occupational Therapist, a Physical Therapist, a Special Instructor, or a Hearing Resource Consultant. A Service Coordinator is assigned to work with families and providers to assist in identifying your needs and services. A *Primary Service Provider* works with you and your child to address immediate concerns and priorities. Your provider will share information to aid you in making choices about learning opportunities. The relationship between the provider and family evolves as your family's needs change.

 **Routine Based Activities** occur daily and include play, special events, or care giving routines. Routines provide the framework to help your child develop and learn.

 **The Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) team** includes family members, a service coordinator, and providers. Together you decide how and where supports and services will be provided. The *team members* discuss details about your family's daily routines and activities, and plan activities accordingly.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

 **Children's optimal development depends on their being viewed first as children and second as children with developmental delays and/or special needs in Natural Environments...**

- early intervention services are provided in the home and community settings that are natural and normal for children of the same age with no disabilities.
- children have opportunities to develop and use their skills and abilities with children who do not have developmental delays.
- children with and without developmental delays learn from one another.
- children and families are supported to take the lead role and set expectations.

 **A child's greatest resource is their family.**

 **Early intervention occurs in settings where the child and family would spend their time if their child did not have a disability or delay.**

 "Early intervention supports and services should be delivered in settings and during activities which are determined by the child's needs, the desired functional outcomes, and the family's life style and routines."

 "...one of the primary purposes of early intervention is to enhance the capacity of families to support their children's well-being, development, learning, and participation in their communities." Colorado, "A Guidebook" by Larry Edelman, Editor

"No infant or toddler needs physical, occupational, or speech therapy twice a week in order to grow and develop. What young children need is exposure to communication, mobility, play, gradual independence in activities of daily living, and nurturing interaction with family members, *everyday*, in the places they live, learn and play." (Hanft, B. & Pilkington, K., 2000) from the Implementation Guide to Natural Environments, Nov 2003, Michigan Department of Education

"Intervention that is embedded within the context of the family's natural environment, such as using the family's regular activities, materials, resources, and places where they spend time, appears to promote positive long term outcomes for the child and family." (Dunst, Herter& Shields, 2000)