Birth To 3
A Family Guide To Early Intervention Services in Maryland
The Maryland Infants and Toddlers Program
Your child is the most precious gift you give to this world. While all children grow and develop at their own rate, some infants and toddlers experience delays in their development. This can be cause for concern.

Early intervention is a system of services available to all children under the age of three who may have a developmental delay, a disability, or a special health condition that is likely to lead to non-typical development. The Maryland Infants and Toddlers Program and your local early intervention system can help address your concerns with a program specially designed to meet the unique needs of your child and family. All services are provided at no cost to your family.

Early intervention services can help you and your family to:
- Identify your child’s needs
- Support and promote your child’s development
- Include your child in your family and community life

Early intervention services can be provided anywhere in the community:
- Your home
- Your child care center or family day care home
- Libraries, recreational centers, playgrounds
- Any place parents and children go for fun and support

As a parent, you help decide:
- The outcomes of early intervention that are important for your child and family
- The early intervention services that your child and family need
- When and where your child and family will get early intervention services

Research shows that early intervention makes a difference! We welcome you and your family to Maryland’s early intervention system of services—a community dedicated to the enhancement of your child’s potential through family-centered support and practices.
A Window of Opportunity

A child’s early years are full of excitement and change for every parent—*a great balancing act between dreams and challenges*. From the earliest stages of a child’s life, a family can enhance all aspects of their child’s development.

Over the past decade, advances in brain research have provided great insight into how the brain continues to grow and develop. It is now clear that a child’s early childhood experiences can profoundly influence how their brain will develop and how they will interact with the world around them. The relationships children develop with adults in their lives lay the foundation for emotional development. Children who receive responsive, sensitive care from their parents and other caregivers in the first year of life, enjoy an important head start toward success in their lives.

Early intervention builds on the natural learning occurring during the first few years of life. The supports and services provided through early intervention can help you to help your child make all the powerful connections to improve his or her ability to learn and play. These early years are the prime time for your child’s vision and hearing development, speech and language development, physical and motor development and social-emotional development. Early intervention helps to open this window of opportunity for your child.

As you open this window of opportunity for your child, use this guide to assist you in understanding:

- How the early intervention system works
- Your legal rights and protections
- The family supports and resources available to you and your family

What The Law Says

Recognizing the importance of early intervention, federal and State law guarantees your child’s right to early intervention services. In 1986, Congress established *Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)* to reinforce the importance of early intervention services and supports available for infants and toddlers with disabilities, birth to age three, and their families. In Maryland, the Part C system of IDEA is called the **Maryland Infants and Toddlers Program (MITP)**. This comprehensive statewide program of early intervention services is coordinated by the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE), in collaboration with many interagency partners. Each of Maryland’s 24 jurisdictions implements a local Infants and Toddlers Program, coordinating services provided by education, health care, and social services agencies and private providers.
### Eligibility

Your child and family may be eligible for early intervention services if your child is under three years of age and has at least one of the following:

- A delay of 25 percent or more in development; or
- Is developing in a way that is considered “atypical” for most children his or her age; or
- A diagnosed condition that is likely to affect development, such as a genetic disorder or severe hearing or vision impairment.

**The first step in determining eligibility for early intervention services is a referral made to the local Infants and Toddlers Program.**

When an infant or toddler is suspected of having a disability, developmental delay, or special health care need, he or she may be referred to the local Infants and Toddlers Program by a parent, health or education provider, child care or social service provider, or a staff person from the NICU or hospital, just to name a few.

The local Infants and Toddlers Program begins assisting the family by asking questions. Then, with the parent’s consent, the local Infants and Toddlers Program arranges for a service coordinator to schedule an evaluation/assessment—at no cost to the family—to determine if your child is eligible for services.

*Please refer to the back of this guide for contact information for each local Infants and Toddlers Program in Maryland.*

### Services

Early intervention services are designed to enhance a child’s potential at each stage of growth and development. The services offered are tailored to meet the unique needs of each child and family.

**Examples of early intervention services include:**

- Physical Therapy
- Occupational Therapy
- Nursing Care
- Social Work
- Special Instruction
- Nutrition Counseling
- Speech and Language Services
- Hearing and Vision Screenings/Services
- Family Counseling

*Other services may also be available.*

The types of services recommended for your child will depend upon the needs of your child and family. Services are recommended by a team of professionals, and are coordinated and delivered by your local Infants and Toddlers Program with support from various agencies in your jurisdiction. These agencies may include your local school system, local departments of health and social services, and other private and community-based providers and partners.

**All early intervention services are provided at no cost to your family.** Of course, none of the services may begin without your permission. Your family should understand all of the services and options presented to you so that you can make an informed decision. You may choose all of the services offered to you and your child, or you may choose only some of the services. *The choice is yours.*
Critical Components of an Effective Early Intervention System

Evaluation and Assessment

Your local Infants and Toddlers Program has 45 days from the date of your child’s referral to complete an evaluation and assessment.

Your family will always be a part of the evaluation process, which is critical in determining your child’s strengths and needs, and in planning the best course of action. Your child’s evaluation and assessment will include a variety of tools and sources of information.

Qualified persons who are directly involved in the diagnosis of your child or in conducting the evaluation and assessment will determine your child’s eligibility for early intervention services.

Family Tips:

• Provide relevant information about your child, including your child’s medical history. Share any necessary documents, such as immunization records and results from prior testing, if you have them available.

• Share the priorities and concerns your family has about your child’s development.

• Be present for all assessments. You may choose a time and location that are convenient for you.

• Ask questions so that you may understand the process and the program. Your service coordinator and local program providers know that these services are new to most families. They can help answer your questions.

Individualized Family Service Plan

Once your child’s evaluation and assessment are complete and your child is found eligible for early intervention services, it is time to develop a plan for addressing the identified needs. The Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) is the foundation for providing services and support to meet the unique needs of your child and family.

The IFSP document is developed by an IFSP team that is made up of many individuals, including early intervention staff and an expert on your child—you! You are an important member of the IFSP team. No one knows your child better or better understands the needs of your family.

As required by law, the IFSP document puts in writing:

• Your child’s strengths and needs;

• Your family’s priorities;

• The services that your child and family will receive and where these services will be provided; and

• The outcomes you wish to achieve, timelines for achieving results, and details on how success toward outcomes will be measured.

The IFSP is more than just a written document. The IFSP represents a working partnership between you and the local Infants and Toddlers team and helps provide answers to questions you may have about your child’s development.

To help your family better understand the IFSP process, Maryland’s Birth to Five Parent Information Series includes A Family Guide to Understanding and Developing the Individualized Family Service Plan. Be sure to request a copy from your local Infants and Toddlers Program.
Critical Components of an Effective Early Intervention System

An Ongoing Process To Review the IFSP

According to the law, once the necessary services are determined and the IFSP is written and agreed upon, early intervention services must begin within 30 days. The IFSP must be flexible in order to meet the ever-changing needs and priorities of your family. The IFSP should be reviewed at least every six months, or whenever your child has achieved an outcome as documented on the IFSP, or you identify a new area of need.

You may request a review of the IFSP with your service coordinator at any time.

What One Family Says

“Our first experience with the Infants and Toddlers Program (ITP) happened soon after our first newborn son came home from the hospital. As new parents with a baby already exhibiting atypical development, we were nothing less than overwhelmed. Rather than joining infant play groups, we started researching support groups for parents of children with disabilities. Our son was referred to our local ITP. The ITP team came to our family and provided us with solutions after one simple phone call. Through the ITP, our son was evaluated by a team of professionals. Soon after the initial assessment, we began receiving therapeutic and family-focused interventions. The ITP taught us how to interact with our son in a way that supported his overall development. His once absent smile began to spread across his face when he recognized his family and surroundings.

When our third child was born with Down Syndrome, our prior experience with the ITP eliminated many fears. While medical staff cautiously delivered the diagnosis, we found ourselves experiencing an overwhelming sense of relief because we knew we had the ITP available to help us meet our daughter’s needs. Once again, the ITP team came into our lives to share their talents with us. Our daughter’s needs were very different from those of her older brother, but the individualized therapies and supports suited her perfectly. The ITP staff even took into consideration our typically-developing middle daughter. With their assistance, she learned how to bond with her brother and sister. She learned how to play and interact with them, to recognize their similarities, and to accept their differences.

Without the ITP, we’re not sure how we could have grown to become the strong family team we are today. ITP services are a tremendous resource to families in preparing them to care for and raise their children with delays or life-long disabilities. We are forever grateful to the many professionals who have joined us on this journey.”

–Michele Hart & Robert Bristown, Baltimore County
Your Rights and Protections

Federal and State laws provide many protections for children and families. These rights help assure that your early intervention program is implemented in a voluntary, nondiscriminatory manner, and at no cost to your family. Maryland summarizes these rights in its Parental Rights and Procedural Safeguards Notice.

Among the rights outlined in Maryland’s Parental Rights and Procedural Safeguards Notice, you have a right to:

- Consent to evaluation, assessment and the provision of services;
- Receive notice of your rights and actions proposed by the early intervention system;
- Review your child’s early intervention record and request amendments;
- Keep your child’s and family’s personal information confidential, as required;
- File a complaint; and
- Play an active role in the early intervention process as a valued member of the IFSP team.

A copy of the Parental Rights and Procedural Safeguards Notice will be provided to you at least once a year from your local Infants and Toddlers Program; however, you may request a copy at any time. And to help you further understand your rights and protections, Maryland’s Birth to Five Parent Information Series includes a guide called, A Family Friendly Resource Guide to Understanding Your Parental Rights. Request a copy from your local Infants and Toddlers Program. Your service coordinator may also provide information and guidance.

Transition Time

Transitioning from your local Infants and Toddlers Program is a process. Your local Infants and Toddlers Program will support you to develop a transition plan to meet the needs of your child and family. Part of the planning process involves considering if your child has needs that require services beyond age 3.

If your child may need services beyond age 3, your child will be assessed to see if he or she is eligible for services under Part B of the IDEA. As part of Maryland’s birth through five system of services, if your child is found eligible for Part B services, your family will be presented with options. These options include the opportunity to continue services under an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) or move to an Individualized Education Program (IEP). Services provided under an extended IFSP or an IEP will reflect the individual needs of your child and family and will be delivered in a range of early childhood community-based and school-based settings.

To help you better understand the transition process, Maryland’s Birth to Five Parent Information Series includes A Family Guide to Next Steps: When Your Child in Early Intervention Turns Three, as well as Stepping Ahead To Success: A Family Guide To Transitioning. You may request a copy of each guide from your local Infants and Toddlers Program.
Early intervention services and supports are available through the Maryland Infants and Toddlers Program and delivered through 24 local Infants and Toddlers Programs. Services are provided to eligible infants and toddlers, ages birth to 3. Certain services and supports are also available to parents and members of the immediate family.

The Maryland Infants and Toddlers Program is not a medical program that “treats” your child. While you may not be a trained specialist, you are your child’s most important teacher. You and your early intervention team will work together to support and enhance the development of your child. Your team of professionals will demonstrate and model techniques for you to use with your child. They will coach you and your family on how to implement strategies into your child’s daily routine and in-between provider visits.

You are your child’s best advocate. The relationship you develop with your early intervention team will be an important relationship for both you and your child. Clearly communicate what you think your child needs. Be sure to speak with your service coordinator often and collaborate with your entire team.

Local Infants and Toddlers Programs are staffed with qualified professionals who must meet Maryland’s personnel standards. Providers are carefully screened before they are hired and are closely supervised by local program administrators and participating agencies.

You and your IFSP team will create an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP). Your child’s IFSP will not resemble anyone else’s. It is unique and based on the needs of your child and family. It may also look different from what is offered in other states.

Your doctor or specialist may suggest a certain number of hours of therapy or services for your child. Local Infants and Toddlers Programs use a coaching model to work with children and families; this model may be different from the “clinical or medical” model used by many private therapists and agencies.

Early intervention services are family-centered. This means that the needs of your whole family are as important as the needs of your child. Your early intervention services will be provided in your child’s natural environment where he or she lives, learns and plays. Your child may be eligible for one service or several services. Once the services are identified, you may choose the services you want your child and family to receive. Remember that your early intervention team understands this may be an emotional or stressful time for you and your family. Your team will assist you in identifying resources to help you participate in the growth and development of your child and maintain your emotional well being.

There is no charge to families for early intervention services. Under State and federal law, all services delivered by a local Infants and Toddlers Program in Maryland must be provided free-of-charge, regardless of the family’s income, availability of insurance, or employment status. There is never a “wait list” for services. Your local program is supported by several sources, including local, State, and federal dollars.

Maryland has a strong Family Support Network (FSN) that includes parents of children with disabilities as well as professionals who can assist parents as they travel through the world of early intervention and beyond. Ask for the name of your local FSN coordinator if you need additional support and resources, including the opportunity to connect with other families who have received similar early intervention services.

Never forget that as a parent you and your child have certain rights under State and federal law. Each state must provide parents with a list of their rights. During the development of your IFSP, you will receive a copy of the document, Parental Rights: Maryland Procedural Safeguards Notice. There are other resources in this Parent Information Series to help you understand your rights.
Glossary of Terms

Words and Phrases You’ll Hear In Early Intervention

- **Assessment**: Ongoing procedures used by qualified professionals throughout a child’s early intervention experience to identify the child’s unique needs, the family’s resources, concerns and priorities related to their child’s development, and the nature and extent of services required to meet these needs.

- **Child Advocate**: A parent or professional, paid or unpaid, who acts on behalf of a child and family to protect their rights and interests and ensure their access to services for which they are eligible.

- **Early Intervention**: A collection of services provided by public and private agencies and designed by law to support eligible children and their families in enhancing a child’s potential for growth and development from birth to age three.

- **Early Intervention Record**: Any personally identifiable information about a child or family generated by the early intervention system that pertains to evaluation and assessment, development of the IFSP, and delivery of early intervention services.

- **Evaluation**: Procedures used by qualified professionals to determine a child’s initial and continuing eligibility for early intervention services, consistent with the definition of infants and toddlers with disabilities.

- **Impartial**: Describes the person appointed to implement the complaint resolution process. This person is not an employee of any agency or program involved in the provision of early intervention services or the care of a child, and does not have a personal or professional conflict of interest in the case.

- **Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP)**: The written plan for providing early intervention and other services to eligible children and families that:
  - Includes services necessary to enhance the development of the child and the family’s capacity to meet their child’s needs;
  - Is developed by the family and appropriate professionals working together; and
  - Is based on a multidisciplinary evaluation and assessment of the child and family, as required by law.

- **Infants and Toddlers with Disabilities**: Children from birth to age three determined eligible for early intervention services because they:
  - Are experiencing a developmental delay of at least 25 percent, as measured and verified by appropriate methods, in one or more of the following areas: Cognitive, Physical (fine/gross motor, sensory), Communication, Social and Emotional, Adaptive; or
  - Exhibit atypical development or behavior in at least one of the above areas, demonstrated by abnormal quality or function that interferes with current development and is likely to result in subsequent delay, even when diagnostic procedures do not indicate a delay of 25 percent; or
  - Have a diagnosed physical or mental condition that puts them at risk for developmental delay.

- **Interim Service Coordinator/Interim Case Manager**: The individual designated at the single point of entry to assist the referred child and family through the initial evaluation/assessment and IFSP process.
Glossary of Terms

Words and Phrases You’ll Hear In Early Intervention

- **Multidisciplinary**: The involvement of two or more professions in the provision of integrated and coordinated services, including evaluation and assessment activities and IFSP development.

- **Native Language**: The language or mode of communication normally used by the parent of an eligible child.

- **Natural Environments**: Home and community settings that are natural or typical for a child of the same age without disabilities.

- **Parent**: A parent, guardian, acting parent, or surrogate parent; this term does not include the State if the child is a ward of the State.

- **Periodic Review**: A review of the IFSP conducted every six months, more frequently as conditions warrant, or at the family’s request.

- **Service Coordinator/Case Manager**: The individual selected by an early intervention team and designated in an IFSP to coordinate and facilitate early intervention services and integrate the family into the process. This person must demonstrate an understanding of the laws and nature of the process.

- **Service Provider**: A public or private agency designated to provide early intervention services for an eligible child and the child’s family, in accordance with an approved IFSP.

- **Single Point of Entry**: The local contact point designated to accept referrals from sources who suspect developmental delay in an infant or toddler.
Maryland Family Support Network/Preschool Partners

At any point during your journey, you may need the support of individuals who know about special resources, can share valuable information, or have life experiences similar to yours. In Maryland, families receiving early intervention services can find support through their local Family Support Network. Each Family Support Network is staffed by a parent of a child with a disability, and offers information on community services, referrals to local support and advocacy groups, and opportunities for families to network and share ideas and experiences with other families. In addition, as families transition to next steps, family support services are available through Preschool Partners. Each Preschool Partners program is staffed by a parent of a child with a disability, and can guide and support families as they move through the transition process from age 3 through age 5. Your local Family Support Network and Preschool Partners are just a call away. Ask your local Infants and Toddlers Program for contact information or go online to the Maryland Early Childhood (EC) Gateway: http://www.mdecgateway.org.

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Visit the Maryland Early Childhood (EC) Gateway online at http://www.mdecgateway.org. There you will find a list of statewide family support services including your local Family Support Network, and resources for families and caregivers of children with disabilities birth through age five.

Maryland’s Birth Through Five Parent Information Series

Maryland’s Birth Through Five Parent Information Series is a collection of publications designed to assist families as they participate in Maryland’s early intervention and education system of services for children with disabilities ages birth through five. Each publication is available from your local Infants and Toddlers Program.

Maryland’s Birth Through Five Parent Information Series includes the following guides:

- Birth to 3–A Family Guide to Early Intervention Services
- A Family Friendly Resource to Understanding Your Parental Rights and Maryland’s Procedural Safeguards Notice
- A Family Guide To Understanding and Developing the IFSP
- A Family Guide to Next Steps–When Your Child In Early Intervention Turns Three (Families Have A Choice)
- Stepping Ahead to Success–A Family Guide to Understanding the Transition Process
- 3 Through 5–A Family Guide to Preschool Special Education Services and Other Early Childhood Opportunities
More resources for families:

For additional information, contact:

Local Infants and Toddlers Programs

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<tr>
<td>Allegany County</td>
<td>301-689-0466</td>
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<td>Anne Arundel County</td>
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<td>Carroll County</td>
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<td>Cecil County</td>
<td>410-996-5444</td>
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<td>Charles County</td>
<td>301-609-6808</td>
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<td>Dorchester County</td>
<td>410-221-5207</td>
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<td>Frederick County</td>
<td>301-600-1611 or 301-600-1612</td>
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<td>Garrett County</td>
<td>301-334-1189</td>
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<td>Harford County</td>
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<td>410-827-4629, x108</td>
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<td>St. Mary’s County</td>
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<td>410-820-0319</td>
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<td>Worcester County</td>
<td>410-632-5033</td>
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<tr>
<td>Maryland School for the Blind</td>
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<td>Maryland School for the Deaf</td>
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Online Resources:

www.mdecgateway.org - Resources and information for families and providers of children with disabilities age birth through five

www.marylandpublicschools.org - Find IEP related resources, including:

- Building IEPs with Maryland Families: What A Great Idea! A Guide To Developing, Implementing and Reviewing IEPs For Students with Disabilities
- Understanding the Evaluation, Eligibility, and IEP Process in Maryland
- Parental Rights: Maryland Procedural Safeguards Notice

http://tinyurl.com/extendedifspropption - Link to the Policies and Procedures document for the Maryland Extended IFSP Option

Additional information and resources may also be provided by the:

Early Childhood Intervention and Education Branch

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