Early Childhood Intervention

For Infants and Toddlers, Aged Birth to Three Years

If your infant has a medically diagnosed disability or doesn’t seem to be developing at the same pace as other babies or toddlers of the same age, he or she may be eligible to receive services through Early Childhood Intervention (ECI). ECI is a statewide program that supports families to help their children reach their potential.

Research proves that the earlier a child receives intervention and services, the better he or she will grow developmentally. For a child with a speech delay, “services” may mean speech therapy. For a child with Cerebral Palsy, “services” may be more comprehensive, including physical and occupational therapies and perhaps assistive technology or nursing services.

ECI provides evaluations and assessments for children aged birth to three years, at no cost to families, to determine if the child is eligible for services. After determining eligibility, ECI will recommend services that will best help the infant in his or her development. ECI may ask parents to share in the cost of these services on a sliding scale fee. However, no child will ever be turned away due to an inability to pay.

DARS - ECI Video >

Background

The early intervention system of services for young children, aged birth to three years, is a state and federally funded program through the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Part C. In Texas, Early Childhood Intervention, or ECI, is administered by the Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services (DARS).

ECI coordinates with a variety of local agencies and organizations across Texas to bring services to the infant in his or her “natural
environment” – usually the home, play group, daycare setting, or Mother’s Day Out program. Professionals work together with families to:

• promote development and learning,
• provide support,
• coordinate services, and
• decrease the need for costly special programs.

Shortly after the child turns two, the ECI team begins working with families to help determine the best pre-school programs for the child and ensure a smooth transition to the school system. During this time, called “transition”, the ECI service coordinator works with families to develop a transition plan that will be part of the child’s Individual Family Service Plan (IFSP). Children “graduate” from ECI on their third birthday.

When the child turns three, families may choose from several pre-school options for their child. One option would be private pre-school. Another option might be PPCD. PPCD is the pre-school program for children with disabilities, ages 3-5, that is available through the public school. For more information on transition from ECI to pre-school, please see Preparing to Transition to Preschool.

**What Parents Need to Know**

It is important for families to know that you do not need a medical diagnosis or a doctor’s referral to access ECI services. Anyone involved with the child – family members, caregivers, teachers, doctors, or friends – may make a referral. Most often, parents are the first to notice if their child has missed important developmental milestones. A child can be referred to ECI at any time, even as early as birth.
While Early Childhood Intervention receives some state and federal funding, ECI asks families to share in the cost of services, if they can afford to do so. The amount a family pays for ECI services is determined using a sliding fee scale, based on family size and income after allowable deductions.

The following ECI services are available to families, regardless of income:

- Evaluation/assessment
- Development of the Individual Family Service Plan (IFSP)
- Case Management
- Service coordination
- Translation and interpretation services, if needed
- Services for children with hearing and visual impairments who are eligible for services from ECI and local school districts
- Services for children in foster care or in conservatorship of the state

Families do not pay for any ECI services if their children are enrolled in Medicaid or CHIP - or if their adjusted income (based on the ECI family cost share formula) is below 100% of the Federal Poverty Level. However, parents may be asked for their Medicaid information so that ECI can bill Medicaid for certain services. Other families may pay a cost share or have these services billed to their personal insurance. Any insurance reimbursement will reduce or eliminate the fees charged. ECI services that may be subject to payment include:
It is important to note that no child or family will ever be turned away because of an inability to pay.

If you suspect that your infant has a developmental delay, consult with your child’s doctor or call ECI on the DARS Inquiries Line at 1-800-628-5115. (If you are a person who is deaf or hard of hearing, use the relay option of your choice.) You may also send an e-mail message to DARS.inquiries@dars.state.tx.us.

Additional Resources:
Parent Companion: First Five Years - A guide for Texas parents and caregivers of children with diagnosed or suspected disabilities from birth through 5 years of age.
Texas Dept. of Assistive & Rehabilitative Services (DARS):
  · Early Childhood Intervention Home Page
  · ECI Parent Handbook
  · Beyond ECI: Transition Handbook
National Center for Infants, Toddlers, and Families
Center for Parent Information and Resources - Overview of Early Intervention (NICHCY)