



# Early Intervention: What It Is and How It Works for DC, Maryland, and Virginia

## At a Glance

- In every state, very young children can receive early intervention help if they have developmental delays or specific health conditions.
- Early intervention helps children meet developmental milestones through a wide range of services.
- An evaluation can confirm whether your child is eligible.

If you're concerned that your young child may have a developmental delay or learning and attention issues, early intervention services can make a significant difference. This overview explains the first steps you can take to help your child.

## What are Early Intervention Services?

Early intervention services are targeted programs designed to help young children who have developmental delays or specific health conditions. Various specialists work with these children to help them catch up and increase their chances for success in school and life overall.

**"Providing services early helps children catch up and increases their chances for success in school and life overall."**

These services are provided under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Through federal grants, children who qualify may receive services free of charge or at low cost. Every U.S. state and territory offers these services through comprehensive, coordinated programs. Support is also available for families who care for children receiving early intervention services.

## Who's Eligible for Early Intervention Services?

Early intervention is available for children from birth to age 3. To be eligible, your child must have either:

- A developmental delay, meaning they are significantly behind other children their age.
- A specific health condition that is likely to lead to a delay, such as genetic disorders, birth defects, or hearing loss.

Eligibility criteria and the definition of developmental delay can vary from state to state. Some states may also provide services if a child is at risk for developmental delays due to factors like low birth weight or drug exposure. In some cases, a doctor or clinician can recommend early intervention.

## How to Access Early Intervention Services

If you have concerns about your baby or toddler, start by talking with your child's pediatrician, who should be familiar with early intervention services. You can also contact your state's early intervention program and request an evaluation to determine whether your child is eligible for services.

If your child qualifies, your family will receive an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP). A team from your state's early intervention program will work with you to develop the IFSP, which outlines goals and the types of services that will support your child's development.

## Types of Early Intervention Services Available

Children may receive services at home or in the community to help with development in various areas, including:

- **Physical skills:** Reaching, crawling, walking, drawing, building
- **Cognitive skills:** Thinking, learning, solving problems
- **Communication skills:** Talking, listening, understanding others
- **Self-help or adaptive skills:** Eating, dressing
- **Social or emotional skills:** Playing, interacting with others
- **Sensory processing skills:** Handling textures, tastes, sounds, smells

A child who qualifies for an early intervention program may receive one or more of the following services:

- Screening and assessment
- Speech and language therapy
- Physical or occupational therapy
- Psychological services
- Home visits
- Medical, nursing, or nutrition services
- Hearing (audiology) or vision services
- Social work services
- Transportation

A service coordinator from the early intervention program will help set up and schedule these services.

## **Duration of Early Intervention Services**

Early intervention services typically last until the child turns 3 years old. However, some states may extend services beyond the third birthday if needed. After age 3, children may be eligible for special education services under IDEA, which continue to support their development.

## **What If My Child is Already 3 Years Old?**

If your child is already 3, you can still seek help. An evaluation will determine if your child needs special education or related services. If eligible, you'll work with school professionals to develop an Individualized Education Program (IEP) for your preschooler, which may include services similar to those provided to infants and toddlers.

## **Key Takeaways**

- If you have any concerns about your child's development, seeking help early is crucial.
- Early intervention to address developmental delays can make a significant difference in your child's life.
- While children age 3 or older don't qualify for early intervention, they may qualify for special education services.

- For more information about specialists who work with babies and toddlers and to learn about common myths regarding early intervention, explore resources available from your state's early intervention program.

## Early Intervention Services in DC, Maryland, and Virginia

### For Children Under 3 Years of Age

#### Maryland:

- Contact Maryland's Infants and Toddlers Program (MITP).
  - **Phone:** 1-800-535-0182
  - **Website:** Maryland Infants and Toddlers Program
- MITP provides services to families with children who have developmental delays or disabilities. A service coordinator will help determine eligibility and create an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) to meet your child's needs.

#### Washington, DC:

- Contact Strong Start DC Early Intervention Program.
  - **Phone:** 202-727-3665
  - **Website:** Strong Start DC
- Strong Start provides evaluations and services for children under 3 with developmental delays. A service coordinator will guide you through the eligibility process and develop an IFSP tailored to your child's needs.

#### Virginia:

- Contact Virginia's Early Intervention Program.
  - **Phone:** 1-800-234-1448
  - **Website:** [Virginia Early Intervention](#)
- The program assists families in identifying supports and services for children with developmental delays. A service coordinator will work with you to develop an IFSP and plan for transitioning to school services as your child approaches their third birthday.

### For Children Over 3 Years of Age

#### Maryland:

- Contact your local school system. Reach out to the school your child is zoned for or call the Special Education office at your local Board of Education.
- After the initial contact, the school may conduct additional evaluations and request previous reports. If eligible, an Individualized Education Program (IEP) will be developed with input from a Multi-disciplinary Team (M-Team) meeting.

### **Washington, DC:**

- Contact your local school or the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE).
  - **Phone:** 202-727-6436
  - **Website:** OSSE Special Education
- The school will evaluate your child's needs and develop an IEP in collaboration with you, focusing on educational supports and services.
- Health Services for Children with Special Needs (HSCSN) serves children and young adults up to age 26 who live in Washington, DC and receive Supplemental Security Income (SSI).
  - Primary Telephone: 202-467-2737
  - Translation and Language Line: 202-467-2737
  - TTY/TDD: 202-467-2709 dial 711

### **Virginia:**

- Contact your local school district. Reach out to the Special Education office at the Board of Education or the school your child is zoned for.
- The school will conduct necessary evaluations and obtain previous diagnostic reports. An IEP will be developed during an M-Team meeting, specifying the educational services and supports your child will receive.

### **Additional Resources:**

- **Maryland Transition Toolkit:** [Maryland Transition Toolkit](#)
- **DC Transition Resources:** DC OSSE Transition
- **Virginia Transition Guide:** Virginia Transition Guide

If you have questions or need more information, don't hesitate to reach out to these resources. They are there to support you and your child through each step of the process.