

# Part C of the IDEA: Early Intervention

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The [Individuals with Disabilities Education Act \(IDEA\)](#) is probably best known for its goal of making sure that children with [certain disabilities](#) get a "free appropriate public education," or FAPE. This includes special education and other services specifically designed to meet each child's special needs. This is known as [Part B](#) of the IDEA. It applies to eligible children between the ages of 3 and 21.

Many parents may not know about [Part C](#) of the IDEA, though. Under this part, certain children under three years old, and their families, are entitled to various kinds of assistance and services.

## What Part C Provides

Part C provides **early intervention** services for infants and toddlers (up to 3 years old) who have **developmental delays**; or have been **diagnosed** with physical or mental condition (like blindness or Down Syndrome) that creates a high probability that the child will suffer a developmental delay. Some states cover children who are **at risk** of experiencing a substantial developmental delay if they don't receive early intervention services. So, what's all that mean, exactly?

**Early intervention services** can be any number of services, education and support mechanisms that help your child's physical, cognitive, communication, social, emotional or adaptive development. The special rules or "regulations" for Part C [list](#) possible early intervention services. Some examples include family training and counseling, nursing assistance and physical therapy.

Generally, a **developmental delay** is when an infant or toddler develops or matures at a slower rate than other children her age when it comes to her communication skills or her physical, cognitive, adaptive, or social or emotional development. For example, a two-year-old toddler who isn't talking yet may have a developmental delay in her communication skills. Each state has its own definition of definition of "developmental delay," so be sure to check the laws in your [area](#).

## How Part C Works

The federal government offers money to states to help them pay for early intervention services. Any state that takes this federal money must make sure that eligible infants and toddlers in the state receive the Part C services they need. Also, each state must create:

- A **lead agency**. It manages all early intervention services in the state. It agency may be the department of education, health department or some other office in your state. If you don't know how to contact your state's lead agency, you should contact the [state education agency \(SEA\)](#) in your state, or ask your child's pediatrician
- An [Interagency Coordinating Council \(ICC\)](#) or state interagency coordinating council (SICC). This is made up of parents like you and persons who provide early intervention services. The ICC helps the lead agency make sure that early intervention services are available for eligible infants and toddlers

If you think your infant or toddler has a developmental delay, you should contact the lead agency or ICC in your area and ask that your child be "assessed." A team (sometimes called a "multidisciplinary team") will test your child to see if he's eligible for early intervention services. Team members are professionals in speech and language skills, physical abilities, hearing and vision and other important areas of development. You don't have to pay for this evaluation.

If your child qualifies, you'll meet with medical professionals, therapists and social workers. Together you'll develop an **individualized family service plan (IFSP)**. This plan sets out in detail what early intervention services your child and family needs and how you'll get them. The IFSP must contain several [items](#) of information, like:

- A statement about your child's current levels of physical, cognitive, communication, social, emotional or adaptive development
- A list of the specific early intervention services that are needed, including how often they're needed

- A description of the "natural environments," such as your home or child care center, where you and your child will receive the services. If services won't be provided in a natural environment, such as in a hospital or clinic, there must be a statement explaining why
- The name of the person who'll make sure that the service providers and agencies deliver the services (he's sometimes called a "service coordinator")
- A description of any plans to "transition" or move your child out of Part C services and into another program, such as a special education program under Part B of the IDEA, when your child turns three years old

The IFSP is reviewed every six months. Also, you must give the ICC your written consent or permission before you and your child will receive any early intervention services. You should get details about these matters after the IFSP is completed.

**Who pays?** Other than the initial evaluation, development of the IFSP, and the work done by the service coordinator, you may have to pay for some or all of the Part C services you get. Each state has different rules about this. However, many states require the family to pay for a portion of the services based upon the family's income level.