



FACT SHEET



Natural Environments

... where children without disabilities spend their time.

The Law says...

Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Amendments of 1997 says that to the maximum extent appropriate, early intervention services must be provided in natural environments, including home and community settings in which children without disabilities participate. Services can only be provided in a setting other than a natural environment when early intervention cannot be achieved satisfactorily in a natural environment. [Section 632 (4)(G) and Section 635 (a) (16) (B)]

Providing services in natural environments is not just the law. It reflects the core mission of early intervention, which is to provide support to families to help their children develop to their fullest potential, and allows children and families to more fully participate in their communities. We have learned many important things about how infants, toddlers, and families can benefit most from early intervention.

What We've Learned...

- Families participate in many, many teaching opportunities throughout the day but often do not recognize the significance of the “stuff” of everyday life. Young children learn best when they are taught skills like eating, playing, moving, and communicating during the times and in the places where they need to eat, walk or talk.
- Family members and other care providers need support to provide children with learning opportunities. Early intervention can assist them in helping their child acquire the skills he/she needs. New skills are best learned from people and peers the child prefers. The traditional hands-on, direct therapy approach is not enough for children. All care providers need to feel confident in helping children practice skills in settings where they live, learn, and play and at times throughout the day.
- Friends, neighbors, child care providers, play groups, churches, libraries, and other community supports enhance the quality of every family's life. Services provided in natural environments support and encourage families to find and strengthen natural supports outside the early intervention system. These supports, established when the child is young, are likely to remain throughout his/her school career and into adulthood.
- Young children with delays or disabilities have difficulty taking skills they learned in a therapy room or special classroom and transferring them to places like the park or their living room or church nursery.
- Children who do not receive early intervention natural environments are more likely to spend their adult lives living and working in segregated settings.

Providing Services in Natural Environments Means...

- Assisting families to provide teaching and learning opportunities for their child within the activities, routines, and events of everyday life;
- Increasing the opportunities for ALL children to learn, play, and interact together;
- Helping families to build positive relationships and lifelong friendships within and among their community networks;
- Supporting learning opportunities where the child uses the skills immediately, such as during meals, car travel, getting dressed, etc.;
- Increasing a sense of community by connecting families to natural sources of support, such as friends, neighbors, or church members.

Providing Services in Natural Environments Does NOT Mean...

- Only providing home-based services. Services are provided in the most appropriate and support environments for the child.
- Placing children in settings with other children without appropriate supports and services. The IFSP team develops and implements an individualized plan that provides not only intervention for the child, but consultation and training for child care providers in all settings.
- Expecting the family to provide all the services. Each family has individualized needs, concerns, and capacities which are integrated into the IFSP.
- Decreasing opportunities for team members to work together. Opportunities for the team to work with all care providers are essential to the success of providing services in natural environments.
- Preventing families from networking with and receiving support from other parents of children with disabilities. Opportunities are provided within many community activities.

Family Support:

The requirement that services be delivered in natural environments does not mean that Babies Can't Wait cannot help parents meet other parents who have children with similar delays or disabilities. Parent support and training can and should continue to be provided when parents want and need it. Support services may take place at a local Babies Can't Wait office, on the telephone, in a library, in a parent's home, over the Internet, etc. Professionals who work with infants and toddlers should also help parents identify sources of support in their neighborhood or community.

If you need more information about natural environments, contact your BCW service coordinator, local Early Intervention (Babies Can't Wait) Coordinator, BCW Parent Educator, or the State Babies Can't Wait office (404-657-2726 or toll free 888-651-8224).

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