

Strategies for Dealing with ECI Programs

- 1) You can be an empowered decision-maker. You can question intervention approaches that you believe are not appropriate or are stressful for your child.
 - Early Intervention (EI) services should be focused on engagement, independence, and social interaction intended outcomes directed by what you want for your child.
 - Take time to reflect on the “what” and “when” of services you believe are appropriate for your child and your family. One mom shared that she wanted to spend more “precious time” with her young son before introducing “more stress into his little life” through appointments, services and therapies.
 - If you receive mixed messages about how EI can benefit your child, for example, if your child’s doctor and the ECI director have different ideas, share with both what information is conflicting. Hopefully, they can reach a consensus about what your child needs and a trusting partnership may form from these discussions.
 - If your child resists some of the EI activities, crying or becoming frustrated, talk with the therapist about why the activity is important. Ask if there are other options that might prevent your child’s distress and possibly even provide enjoyment while reaching the same goal.
- 2) You are the ultimate decision-maker about where you prefer to have Early Intervention services delivered; in your home or elsewhere. The possibilities for where services can be delivered are not limited, but they must be a part of your reality. This suggests that the parent has the sole right to select the locus of service provision, but this is actually an IFSP team decision. This is not to say the IFSP team can make a parent agree to services in the home, but if they can't agree on another setting the parent's only recourse is to refuse that service or enter into dispute resolution.
 - When deciding where to have EI services delivered, it is helpful to “begin with the end in mind”. What is your vision for how your child will live life; included in typical settings or supported in specialized settings?
 - Many families want help in knowing how to involve their child with other family members and with the community.
 - EI visits can be held anywhere; daycare centers, grocery stores, playgrounds, Dairy Queen, the beach, etc. They can also be held anytime. Consider what is convenient for you, your child and family. You could meet when older siblings are home.
 - Natural environments are places where you would find typically developing infants and toddlers spending their time. This could be at home, a childcare center, a park, or a schooled-based EI program. The location where services are delivered depends on where you are comfortable.
 - Natural environments can change as children get older and their world expands. Think of places other than home where your child spends time. For example, if you have a paved driveway, but “Aunt Sue” has a gravel driveway, then both spots might be good places for EI visits.
 - Ask questions of your team to make sure that you learn all sides of issues; the pros and cons of where services are provided.
 - It is perfectly okay to NOT want therapy in your home and for you to tell professionals how important it is for your home to be more of a “sanctuary”. Some parents want their home to be a “safe haven” and to not be associated with therapy. Others welcome therapy being done in the home and believe this leads to greater progress.
 - Many families want to get out of the house with their child and to not have therapy at home.
 - Being actively involved in community life helps you and your child to be known, have an identity, in the community and not feel isolated.

- 3) Utilizing every day activities as opportunities for therapy can help your child make greater progress and help you not to feel like a “therapist”.
- A routines-based interview with your Early Childhood coordinator can provide good information about bedtime, bath time, mealtime, etc. This will help in planning interventions.
 - Share what pastimes you, your child, and your family enjoy. Include your child’s favorite toys, television characters, and activities.
- 4) The Individual Family Support Plan, IFSP, meeting is a good place to start building a partnership with professionals. This is where and how most decisions about the above topics will be made, so parents should speak up about the above issues in IFSP meetings.
- The IFSP meeting is where you can take the lead in letting professionals know what you want for your child - your concerns and priorities.
 - Seek to develop trust through positive communication with professionals.
 - The more that professionals know about your values and your own ways of communicating, the easier it is for them to match their style to yours so you can understand each other better.
 - Feel free to speak up and ask questions, if there are terms or initials that you do not understand or want to use. For example, if a professional suggests that you “work with” your child and you feel that you don’t want to “work with” but would rather “play with” your child, let them know.

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