



## **A Parent's Guide to Early Intervention Services: From My Experience**

As a parent, I know firsthand how overwhelming it can be when you're told your child might need extra help. You hear words like "developmental delays" and "therapy," and it feels like a whirlwind of new information and emotions. But let me tell you, you're not alone, and there's so much support out there for you and your child. I want to share what I've learned along the way, so it's easier for you to navigate.

### **What is Early Intervention?**

Early intervention services are designed for babies and toddlers (ages 0-3) who have developmental delays or are at risk of falling behind due to a disability. The goal is simple: to help your child build critical skills like moving, communicating, and interacting with the world. These services are usually free or come at minimal cost, and they often happen right at home or in places your child is already comfortable, like daycare.

### **How to Get Started: Referral and Evaluation**

Getting started with early intervention was easier than I expected. I talked to our pediatrician about my concerns, and they helped refer us to our local Early Intervention (EI) program. You can also refer your child yourself by reaching out directly to your state's EI program—just google "Early Intervention in [Your State]."

Once we were referred, the EI team reached out to schedule an evaluation. This part was nerve-racking, but the professionals were wonderful—they asked lots of questions, played with my child, and did everything they could to make us both feel comfortable. It was clear they weren't just testing; they genuinely wanted to understand how my child learns and interacts.

### **Eligibility and the IFSP**

After the evaluation, we learned that my child qualified for services. Honestly, I was relieved. It meant we would be getting the support we needed. Once your child is deemed eligible, the next step is creating an **Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP)**. This plan is all about you and your child. It lays out the specific therapies and supports that will help your child grow and thrive.

The plan included an assessment of my child's strengths and areas that needed a little extra focus. As parents, we had a say in everything—we got to express our hopes and concerns, and these were turned into concrete goals for our child's development. For us, that meant speech therapy and physical therapy several times a week. Your plan might look different because it's completely tailored to your child's needs.

### **Types of Services**

The services your child receives could range from speech and language therapy to physical or occupational therapy. My child's motor skills were the primary concern, so we focused on physical therapy. We also received help with communication, which meant lots of fun play-based activities that felt more like games than therapy. And don't worry—if your child has sensory challenges (like vision or hearing problems), those are supported too.

### **Your Role as a Parent**

One thing I didn't realize at first is just how involved I would be in the process. I quickly learned that as parents, we're not just observers—we're active participants. The therapists encouraged me to practice certain exercises with my child at home and made sure I knew how to keep things going between sessions. If something wasn't working, I spoke up, and we adjusted the plan. It's empowering to have that level of involvement and say in your child's development.

### **Looking Ahead: Transitioning to Preschool**

When your child nears their third birthday, the services don't stop—there's a transition process. For us, that meant getting ready to move to preschool services. Around this time, your team will work with you to develop an **Individualized Education Program (IEP)**, if your child is eligible. The IEP is the next step in ensuring that your child continues to get the support they need, now within the school system. It was a big change, but with the right team behind us, the transition was smooth.

### **A Final Thought**

If I could offer one piece of advice to parents just starting this journey, it would be this: take it one step at a time and lean on the people around you. The early intervention team is there to help, and you're not in this alone. Every milestone, every goal achieved is a reason to celebrate. Early intervention made all the difference for my child, and I hope it does the same for yours.