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The Early Intervention Service

This information sheet outlines the services and support available from the Ministry of Education, Special Education to support you and your child if your child has special education needs and hasn't yet started school.

Our Early Intervention Service provides specialist support for children who have a developmental or learning delay, a disability, a behaviour difficulty or a communication difficulty that significantly affects their ability to participate and learn at home or in an early childhood education setting.

Early Intervention staff can work with you, your child and your family/whānau, and your child's early childhood education service at any time from birth until your child starts school/kura. The service is funded by the Government and is free.

What to do if you think your child needs extra support

Every child learns in a different way and at a different rate. If your child

seems to be learning at a much slower rate than other children or is having difficulty with talking, hearing, moving about or with their behaviour, you can talk to:

- ▶ your doctor
- ▶ staff at your early childhood education centre, if your child goes to one
- ▶ your Plunket nurse or call PlunketLine for free advice on 0800 933 922
- ▶ your iwi health authority
- ▶ someone in your local Special Education office.

You can discuss your concerns with any of these people. Talking to someone can be reassuring. They can tell you if there might be

something that needs looking into and help you work out what needs to happen next.

Can my child get this support?

If your child has a significant development or learning delay, physical disability, behaviour or communication difficulty, Special Education will work with you to figure out what your child's needs are. We can provide support from soon after your child is born or as soon as a difficulty is picked up. If needed, that support can continue until your child starts school.



If you want to clarify your concerns, make a referral or have any other questions, you can ring, email or visit your local Special Education office – whichever is easiest for you. Your early childhood centre is likely to know how to contact us or look under ‘Education’ in the blue pages of your phone book for your local Special Education office.

How the Early Intervention Service works

Early Intervention staff might work with you and your child at home or somewhere that suits you.

People from the team might also work with your child and your child’s teachers at their early childhood education centre, if your child goes to one.

They will usually use play activities to focus on the areas where your child needs extra support.

Young children learn best through play, which is how they learn about the world and how to relate to others. One of the main aims of your child’s Early Intervention team will be to make sure your child has the same opportunities to play, learn and develop as other children.

They can make this happen by:

- ▶ working out what type and how much support your child needs
- ▶ working with you to develop a programme to provide that support
- ▶ keeping an eye on the programme to make sure it helps your child over time and prepares them for school
- ▶ providing you with information and answering your questions.

What happens next

We will talk to you about your concerns and find out more about what your child can do. We might observe your child at home and in their early childhood education centre, if they attend one. We might want to talk with staff at the centre.

The information we learn from this will be used to work out what kind of support, and how much, your child will need to develop and learn.

You will be asked to sign a consent form that gives permission for Special Education staff to work with you, your child and their early childhood education centre. They might also need to speak with other specialists or agencies who are working with you or your child. The consent form explains how private information about your child will be protected, and what to do if you want to make a complaint.

What an assessment involves

Your local Special Education office will be able to give you an idea of when your child can expect an assessment.

The time an assessment takes can vary. It might take place over several sessions and in different places.

The specialist assessing your child might do one or more of the following:

- ▶ ask you about your child’s development
- ▶ carefully watch your child in their different environments, such as their early childhood education centre, at play with other children, and at home
- ▶ talk with your child and with those closely involved with them
- ▶ look at your child’s ability to learn what is being taught in the centre
- ▶ look at the physical environment and at who is available to support them
- ▶ view any information your child’s early childhood educator might have kept about your child’s activities and learning
- ▶ ask you about any other information you might have from health specialists that might be helpful.

What an assessment will tell you

The specialist will be able to tell you whether your child needs:

- ▶ different styles of teaching to support them to learn

- ▶ therapy, such as speech-language therapy
- ▶ special equipment to support them to learn, hear or to help them move around.

Once your child has been assessed, Early Intervention staff will most likely work with you and your child's teachers to develop an Individual Plan (IP).

The people who might work with your child

Early Intervention teams include a range of specialists. These people might work with you, your child and their early childhood education centre:

- ▶ **advisers on deaf children (AODC)** can help if your child is deaf or hearing impaired and needs to use hearing aids or special equipment. They can provide information about the full range of options for developing language and communication, including New Zealand Sign Language. They might work with you and your child and give your child's teacher advice on learning programmes and equipment
- ▶ **Early Intervention teachers** specialise in child development and learning. They can advise on what your child needs to be learning and what you and your child's teachers need to focus on.

They might also work directly with your child

- ▶ **kaitakawaenga** or Māori cultural advisors can work together with your child's team and your whānau to assist everyone to work in culturally appropriate and responsive ways
- ▶ **psychologists** can help work out what might be contributing to your child's difficulty and what support they'll need. They can help you and your child's teachers develop strategies to improve their social and other skills
- ▶ **speech-language therapists (SLTs)** can help if your child has difficulties talking, listening, and understanding and using language. They will assess your child's abilities in order to work out what kind of support they need. Speech-language therapists might work directly with your child as well as offer advice to both you and your child's teachers. They might also provide a programme of activities for each of you to work on with your child.

If needed, our Early Intervention teams will work closely with specialists from the Ministry of Health, such as audiologists, physiotherapists, paediatricians, dieticians and occupational therapists, to support your child.

About Individual Plans (IPs)

Most children with special education needs will have an Individual Plan.

This is a written plan that outlines your child's goals and how long it should take to reach those goals. It will describe the teaching strategies, resources and support needed to help your child meet those goals.

As a parent, you play a very important part in the team that develops your child's plan. You have a say in who you want at IP meetings. You can have as few or as many people as you wish. The team will meet to develop an Individual Plan using information from the assessment report. During this meeting you'll help identify your child's strengths and set short and long-term goals together.

The Individual Plan will also help identify:

- ▶ teaching practices that will support your child to learn
- ▶ resources, materials and any extra or specialised equipment your child needs
- ▶ the best way to provide personal care if your child needs this
- ▶ how you and other family members can support your child's learning at home
- ▶ the time it's likely to take for your child to reach their goals and ways to check and make sure they're making enough progress.

“My hopes and dreams for Patrick are the same as for my other children – that he reaches his full potential and he's happy and well balanced. I don't ever want to limit him to what I think he might be able to do. I want to keep dreaming big.”

Jenny

Your child's IP should be reviewed at least twice a year by all members of your child's team. This meeting will help review and record your child's progress and agree what the next goals will be. You will receive a copy of the updated plan after each meeting.

Your involvement in decisions

Your child's best interests will be at the heart of all the discussions we will have with you. It's important that we work together to decide on your child's goals and the best ways to support your child to reach their goals.

However, Special Education will decide on the *amount* of support your child receives as this depends on available resources (specialists

and funding) and on how many other children require support and their levels of need.

What other support is available for your child

If your child's needs are not high enough for our Early Intervention Service then we will talk to you about other options and other places you can go to for support, such as Plunket or Barnardos.

The Incredible Years programme

If your child is experiencing behaviour difficulties you can look into the Incredible Years programme. This programme aims to strengthen families by improving parenting skills and helping children develop problem-solving skills.

If you go on this programme, some of the skills you'll learn include:

- ▶ how to play/spend special time together
- ▶ praising and rewarding children
- ▶ communicating positively
- ▶ setting limits
- ▶ managing disobedience and selectively using distractions, ignoring, time out and other strategies
- ▶ helping children to problem-solve.

Contact your local Special Education office if you want to learn more about the Incredible Years programme.

Contact us

If you're unclear about any part of our service or have questions about the support your child receives, please ask. Start by talking with those who work most closely with your child. You can also talk with staff at your local Special Education office or call the Special Education information line on 0800 622 222.

You can get more detailed special education information on our website: www.minedu.govt.nz/Parents/YourChild/SupportForYourChild/ExtraSupport.

If you're deaf or have a hearing impairment, you can also contact Special Education through the New Zealand Relay Service on 0800 4 711 711 or go to www.nzrelay.co.nz.

Your feedback is important. By letting us know what's going well – and what we can do better – we can improve what we do to support all children with special education needs.

Contact details for the people on my child's Early Intervention team:

My local Special Education office:

New Zealand Government

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