

# An Eligible Family's Guide to Alabama's Early Intervention System



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Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services  
Early Intervention Child Find 1-800-543-3098



An *Eligible Family's Guide to Child Find*: The Child Find process guides families through several activities that help them to decide whether their child is delayed in development or if early intervention supports and services are needed.

There are three steps in the EI Child Find System:

**Step 1. IDENTIFICATION:** As a parent, when you suspect that your infant or toddler has a delay or if you know that your child has been diagnosed with a condition that may result in a delay, then IDENTIFICATION has occurred. Physicians and many community agencies can help identify community resources available for children who may need early intervention support and services. These agencies include hospitals, doctor's offices, outpatient or well-baby clinics, child health and Medicaid EPSDT programs, child daycare centers, Head Start programs, local schools, social support agencies and organizations, and other health care providers.

**Step 2. REFERRAL:** When your infant or toddler has been identified as possibly needing early intervention supports and services, the next step is to complete a Child Find Referral. This referral can be completed by calling the Early Intervention Child Find 1-800-543-3098 VOICE/TDD, or it can be completed online at [Never Too Early AL Home Page | Alabama's Early Intervention System](#). You should always be informed and aware that your child(ren) has been referred for Early Intervention. Children should only be referred for Early Intervention services if they are under the age of 3. The following information will be requested to make a referral: your child's name, date of birth, your name, address, and phone number, the name and phone number of your child's primary doctor, and your reason for calling Child Find.

**Step 3. PROCESSING THE REFERRAL:** Once Child Find receives the referral for your child, the information is entered into the GIFTS database and sent to the "District Early Intervention Coordinator" (DEIC) or a Service Coordinator at a local Early Intervention program. This local contact person will call you and provide additional information about AEIS. If you choose to continue, they will assist you in scheduling the initial evaluation and assessment to determine if your child is eligible for Early Intervention services. You may learn more about AEIS online at [ADRS | Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services](#).

**An Eligible Family's Guide to Evaluation and Assessment:** Evaluation and assessment are the activities used to decide if your child is eligible and to gather information to develop the plan for providing necessary support for your child and family. Through evaluation and assessment, your child will be observed and tested to see how he or she is developing, and his or her specific abilities and needs will be identified so that an individual plan can be developed.

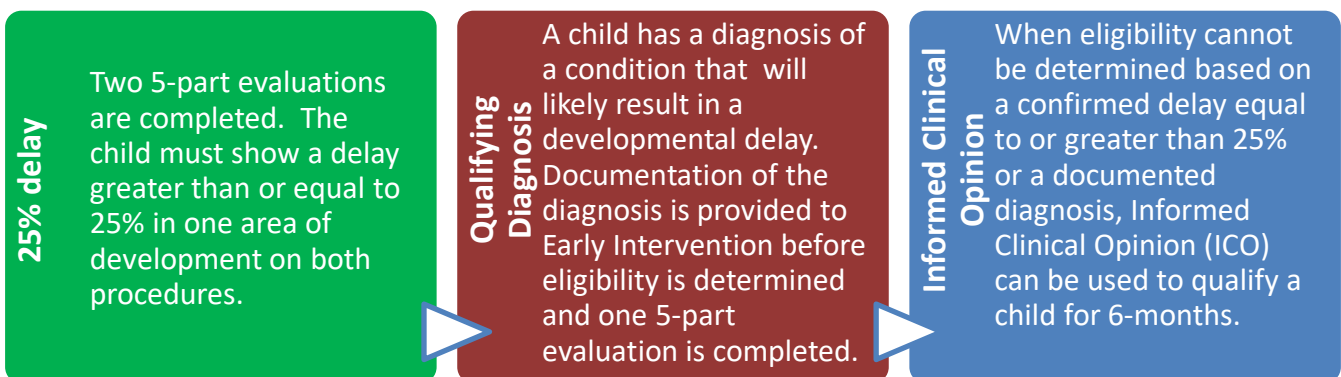
**EVALUATION REQUIREMENTS:** Evaluations are used to decide if your child is eligible for early intervention. The evaluation should:

- provide an opportunity for you to participate;
- be given only with your written permission;
- be completed within 45 days;
- include testing that is done by trained personnel;
- include your family's concerns; and
- include a review of your child's health and developmental records.

In addition, the evaluation should review your child's development in five areas, including:

- Cognitive development — the way your child learns;
- Physical development — including vision and hearing screener
- Communicative development — how your child understands and expresses language;
- Adaptive development — how your child participates in self-help activities;
- Social/emotional development — how your child perceives himself or herself and interacts with others.

**ELIGIBILITY FOR ALABAMA'S EARLY INTERVENTION SYSTEM:** A child can qualify for Early Intervention Services in three ways. They must meet one of the following criteria.



Some of the qualifying diagnoses include, but are not limited to:

- vision or hearing impairments;
- inborn errors of metabolism;
- microcephaly;
- fetal alcohol syndrome;
- Down syndrome;
- cerebral palsy; and
- chromosomal abnormalities.

**ASSESSMENT:** Once your child has been determined eligible, further testing may be needed to determine specific support and service needs. The same guidelines for the evaluation should be used during an assessment and should also include a family assessment if you agree. The family assessment should help identify your family's resources, priorities, concerns, and supports as they relate to your child. The overall assessment should also identify where your child plays and learns, activities your family enjoys, and early intervention supports needed by your child and family to meet the identified needs.

**PROCESS:** During the evaluation and assessment process, you and your child will work with at least two professionals to learn as much as possible about your child's needs. You will be able to discuss the kinds of community resources and supports available. You can bring a friend or other family members who can give more information about your child or who can be there to support you. You can ask questions about the assessment process and how identified resources or services can help you and your child.

To help you prepare for your child's evaluation and assessment, you may want to think about these questions and take any other information with you that will help.

1. What types of things does my child do well? (e.g., communicating needs, playing with others, walking, running, eating, paying attention, separating from mom or dad)
2. What types of activities are important to my child and family? (e.g., visiting parks or libraries, going to church activities, eating out, shopping)
3. What concerns do I have for my child? (e.g., ability to talk or communicate needs, ability to walk or move about, eating or feeding problems, health issues, hearing or vision problems)



4. In what ways does my child do everyday activities, like communicating with me and with others (pointing, using particular words or sounds, using eyes) or moving about (walking, crawling, rolling, using specialized equipment)
5. What things do I want to know about my child? (e.g., their potential for developing specific skills, ability to learn as other children, best approaches for encouraging development)
6. Who would I like to be involved in the evaluation? (e.g., a physical therapist, a speech therapist, a teacher, a nurse)
7. What other information can I provide that will give a more complete picture of my child? (e.g., are there brothers or sisters in the home? How is my house arranged or adapted for my child? What are the best ways of interacting with my child? Who is my child with most of the time - mom, dad, grandmother, babysitter? What are our daily routines, and in what setting is my child most of the day?)
8. What information do I want to share about my family that would help plan services and programs for my child? (e.g., family members who can or usually do help with child care; the need for child care resources; the availability of or need for financial resources such as Medicaid, SSI, or insurance that can help pay for needed services; the availability of or need for transportation for me to use in getting my child to the places where services are provided)
9. What resources and supports in my community would benefit my child and family?

Once the eligibility determination process is completed, you should be told if your child is eligible for Alabama's Early Intervention System. In either case, you have the right to receive a copy of your child's Eligibility Determination Report and answers to any questions. The evaluation and assessment process is a time for learning about your child and the support systems available in your community. It is not a time to pass judgment on you as a parent. It should be a positive experience that will be used in making preparations to help you help your child grow and develop to their maximum potential.

Persons who may help to evaluate or assess your child and family include physicians, nurses, physical therapists, nutritionists, occupational therapists, special educators/instructors, social workers, or speech/language pathologists.

Places where evaluations and assessments may occur include your home, your child's



daycare setting, physicians' offices, community or public health facilities, outpatient or well-baby clinics, maternal and child health programs, Medicaid EPSDT programs, Head Start programs, local educational agencies, private service agencies or hospitals.

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*An **Eligible Family's Guide to the Individualized Family Service Plan:** An Individualized Family Service Plan, or IFSP, translates what is learned from the evaluation and assessment process into a written plan to guide your family, support system, and the EI programs or providers. Parents and professionals can evaluate the plan's effectiveness as it progresses and make changes to the program as necessary. The IFSP document outlines your family's goals for your child's development and how those goals can be achieved.*

**WHAT THE IFSP IS TO ACCOMPLISH:** The Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) is an important plan for your eligible child and family. It guides the activities to help your child develop to their maximum potential. The IFSP also is essential for your family because it includes you. The IFSP process provides:

- **Team Collaboration:** As a member of the IFSP team, you can discuss learning environments, make decisions, and create plans for activities and services that will become your guide.
- **A Partnership:** You will share in the intervention process for your child to the degree that you feel comfortable. Through this partnership, you will help guide the activities that will occur over the following months.

**IFSP PROCEDURES:** The IFSP begins with completing a Voluntary Family Assessment (VFA). The VFA has two parts: the eco-map and the Routines-Based Interview (RBI). If you agree to participate in the VFA, the service coordinator will guide you through completing the eco-map and RBI.

- The eco-map is a picture of who lives with you and your child in the home. This picture should also show the people and agencies involved or supporting you and your child.
- The RBI is a semi-structured assessment to help families identify functional goals or outcomes for the IFSP. Service coordinators are trained to guide parents through a discussion of different times of day (e.g., wake-up, diaper change, meal-prep, dressing, breakfast, etc.) and identify changes they feel will help improve that time of day for themselves, their child, and others present during that time. The RBI also provides an opportunity for the caregiver to prioritize their concerns. This helps the IFSP team provide information, resources, or support in the areas you have identified in order of importance.

The written IFSP should be reviewed at least every six months, and a new plan will be developed annually. Three groups of people should be involved in the IFSP process. These groups include you, the people who have provided the evaluations and assessments, and the people who are involved in helping you and your child, including your service coordinator, therapists, teachers, physicians, social workers, nurses, and others who are important to your child's development, such as family members.



**WHAT THE IFSP CONTAINS:** Your child's IFSP should contain a description of your child's strengths and needs; a description of your family's resources, priorities, and concerns, if you so desire; written desired outcomes that can be evaluated; a description of where supports and appropriate services will be provided; a written plan for the transition to other services/programs when appropriate; and the names of service providers (people who are involved in your child's services) and the service coordinator.

As the parent, you play an important role in planning for your child. After helping in the evaluation and assessment of your child, you should begin preparing for the next step, which is the development of a plan to help guide you and others. To help in planning for the development of the Individualized Family Service Plan, you may want to think about these questions:

*What are the naturally occurring times of day for you and your family? (e.g., How does your day begin? Who is present during different times? How does your child participate at different times of the day? What can they do independently?)*

*What do you want for your child and family? (e.g., What new skills do you want to learn? What new skills do you want to help your child to develop? What assistance do you need in helping your child? What would you like to happen differently for your child and family? How much support will you need?)*

*Would you like to invite others to attend the IFSP planning meeting? (e.g., a family member, a friend, child care teacher or babysitter, another parent who has a child with a disability, or a professional who has worked with your child.)*

*Are there any changes about to happen in your child's or your family's life for which plans need to be made? (e.g., a new childcare provider, a new doctor, the birth of a child, a change in residence)*

Remember, this planning process is for you and your child. You are the one who should make the decisions about what is best for your child and family based on the information you have been given during the evaluation and assessment process. Don't hesitate to express your concerns or doubts about what is happening during the planning process.

**SUPPORTS:** Early intervention supports and services should be defined on each





child's Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) and should be designed to strengthen the development of the child and build the caregiver's capacity to meet the needs of their child and family and to help their child achieve the outcomes they have identified.

Any EI services listed on the IFSP should meet specific guidelines. These guidelines specify that the services:

- be tailored to meet the specific needs of your child;
- be designed to enhance your child's development and build your capacity to meet your child's unique needs;
- be discussed and selected by you and the team together;
- be provided under public supervision;
- be provided by qualified individuals; and
- be provided in a natural environment in which infants or toddlers without disabilities participate to the maximum extent appropriate in meeting your child's needs.

**Qualified Personnel** to deliver early intervention includes audiologists, family therapists, nurses, nutritionists, occupational therapists, orientation and mobility specialists, pediatricians and other physicians, physical therapists, psychologists, social workers, special educators, developmental specialists, speech-language pathologists, and others who meet qualifications under Alabama's Early Intervention System.

**SERVICES:** The following services should be available for eligible infants and toddlers as determined necessary through the process of evaluation/assessment and IFSP development:

- |  |                                       |
|--|---------------------------------------|
| 1. Assistive Technology                      | 9. Psychological                      |
| 2. Audiology                                 | 10. Physical Therapy                  |
| 3. Family Training, Counseling & Home Visits | 11. Service Coordination              |
| 4. Health Services                           | 12. Signed Language and Cued Language |
| 5. Medical Services                          | 13. Social Work                       |
| 6. Nursing                                   | 14. Speech-Language Pathology         |
| 7. Nutrition                                 | 15. Special Instruction               |
| 8. Occupational Therapy                      | 16. Transportation                    |
|  | 17. Vision                            |

\* Health Services are those that must be included in the plan [IFSP] because they



*are necessary to enable the infant or toddler to benefit from the other early intervention services. Part C services are not services that are surgical or purely medical, are not devices necessary to control or treat a medical condition, or are not medical health services such as immunization and regular well-baby care.*

In preparing for the IFSP process, you may want to gather information pertinent to your child's needs. Such information may include the following:

- Activities that are important to your family
- Community resources, agencies, and groups that offer support to your child and family
- Special appliances, equipment, or supplies that your child uses
- A nutrition care plan and eating schedule



An **Eligible Family's Guide to Service Coordination**: Service coordination is provided through the Early Intervention System to offer support and guidance for your family. Your service coordinator is your contact person who will help you locate resources, find community support, and receive services.

**ROLE OF THE SERVICE COORDINATOR**: Service coordinators generally help families build on their strengths. They help families identify their own needs, access needed resources, make informed decisions, and assume as much responsibility as possible.

**SERVICE COORDINATION ACTIVITIES**: There are four main activities that your service coordinator will do to help you with your child's early intervention program:

- **Consultation** - Your service coordinator will work closely with you and other service providers to help you find resources and ensure that information is shared. They'll also ensure everyone understands the goals for your child's development.
- **Training or Teaching** - Your service coordinator will help you learn how and where to look for resources in your community, ask questions, be a team member, and tell whether progress is being made. Your service coordinator can also help teach others about your child and family to ensure everyone works together toward the same goals.
- **Assessment and development of an Individualized Family Service Plan** - Your service coordinator will help to assess your child and family's needs and then help to design, organize, and review the activities needed to meet those needs (e.g., eco-map and RBI). After plans have been made, the service coordinator will assist with finding possible support and services and filling out necessary forms.
- **Coordination** - Your service coordinator will ensure that services, appointments, and activities are coordinated in the best interest of your child and family. Your service coordinator is the contact person for your family and other service providers and is the link between resources, services, and support.



**SERVICE COORDINATOR REQUIREMENTS:** The person who is your service coordinator must meet federal and state requirements. Service coordinators must understand what makes a child eligible for AEIS, federal and state regulations, resources available in your community, services, payment systems, and other important information about Alabama's Early Intervention System (AEIS).

**SERVICE COORDINATOR ACTIVITIES:** Your service coordinator will tailor their activities to meet your needs and desires. You will help decide what you want your service coordinator to do, when to do it, how long to do it, and what the results should be. Here are some of the things your service coordinator can do:

- Be available to discuss your child, your concerns, and how well things are going.
- Help you make decisions about your child's needs, your preferences for the types of supports and services needed, and the methods of receiving them.
- Help you decide what information you want, how much you want at once, and how you want it (for example, through observing activities, reading material, watching videos, or talking with other parents or professionals).
- Help you decide how much responsibility you want at any one time and for any activity that may be needed. (For example, you may want to be totally in charge of certain activities when you feel confident that you can handle the situation, or you may not be able to handle any extra work at certain times.)
- Help you explore any of your family's resources that may be helpful in providing for your child (such as transportation, location of EI activities, or financial or emotional support).
- Help you plan timelines for getting things done and decide who should do them (by sharing information, calling upon resources for help, delivering services, and obtaining needed equipment). This is a basic part of the Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) process.
- Help you make appointments, if necessary, for services or family support and help you coordinate schedules so that EI appointments don't interfere with other important activities.



- Help you locate activities for your child and family.
- Help you plan for changes by discussing options, visiting new programs, and making plans to prepare your child, family, and the new service providers for the change.
- Help you understand what is happening with your child by helping you find answers to questions you have about your child and helping you talk with others who are involved with your child and family.

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**[nevertooearlyAL.org](http://nevertooearlyAL.org)**



*An Eligible Family's Guide to Child and Parent Rights: Children and parents served through Alabama's Early Intervention System (AEIS) have certain rights protected under state and federal regulations. These rights are in place to ensure that early intervention supports, services, activities, and procedures are delivered in the best interest of the children and families served.*

**CHILD AND PARENT RIGHTS IN ALABAMA'S EARLY INTERVENTION SYSTEM:**

Informed Consent:	You should understand all the information you are given about early intervention and give your written permission for services. Your permission is voluntary, meaning you do not have to give permission if you have concerns or questions, and you can cancel your permission at any time.
Evaluation:	Once referred through Alabama's Early Intervention System, your child is entitled to have an evaluation within 45 days to help determine if they are eligible.
Assessment	Once determined eligible under Alabama's Early Intervention System, your child and family are entitled to have ongoing assessments conducted to determine your child's unique needs, your family's resources, priorities and concerns related to your child's development, and the nature and extent of early intervention support and services needed.
Written Prior Notice	Service providers must give you written notice before services can be changed or refused.
Review of Records	As a parent, you can review your child's early intervention records.
Confidentiality of Records	You must give your written permission before your child's records can be shared with other individuals or agencies.
Individualized Family Service Plan	Once your child has been determined eligible, he or she is entitled to have an Individualized Family Service Plan developed within the 45-day timeline.
Mediation	This is a voluntary process, and an impartial mediator is available to you if you have issues that need to be resolved.
Impartial Due Process Hearing	You have the right to have a hearing if there are any disputes.
Impartial Resolution of Complaints	You have the right to ask for any issues to be resolved when you believe federal laws or regulations have been violated.
Surrogate Parents	Eligible children whose parents cannot be identified or located or who are wards of the state have the right to have a surrogate parent represent them in all matters pertaining to Part C.



Once your child has been referred to Alabama's Early Intervention System through Child Find, your rights under these procedural safeguards should be explained to you by the DEIC or service coordinator within your local community.

### **INFORMATION TO ASSIST YOU IN UNDERSTANDING YOUR RIGHTS:**

- Did you receive a written copy of your rights?
- Did a DEIC or service coordinator provide a detailed explanation of your rights and the procedures to use in fulfilling your rights?
- Did the DEIC or service coordinator review and explain permission forms to sign, giving your consent for your child to be evaluated and for the evaluation information to be given to service providers as appropriate?
  - Permission to Evaluate
  - Permission to Release Information (e.g., for Pediatrician, childcare, or local education agency)
  - Permission to bill public or private insurance
- Did you receive the written results (Eligibility Determination Report) of the evaluation and assessment conducted on your child and family?
- Did you receive a copy of the Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) developed with you for your child and family?
- Did you receive any other information relating to early intervention services for your child that you requested?

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