

Natural Environment

Natural Environment (34 CFR §§ 303.26, 303.126, and 303.344(d))

Natural environments

Natural environments means settings that are natural or typical for a same aged infant or toddler without a disability, may include the home or community settings, and must be consistent with the provisions of § 303.126.

Early intervention services in natural environments

Each system must include policies and procedures to ensure, consistent with §§ 303.13(a)(8) (early intervention services), 303.26 (natural environments), and 303.344(d)(1)(ii) (content of an IFSP), that early intervention services for infants and toddlers with disabilities are provided—

- (a) To the maximum extent appropriate, in natural environments; and
- (b) In settings other than the natural environment that are most appropriate, as determined by the parent and the IFSP Team, only when early intervention services cannot be achieved satisfactorily in a natural environment.

Content of an IFSP

(d) *Early intervention services.* (1) The IFSP must include a statement of the specific early intervention services, based on peer-reviewed research (to the extent practicable), that are necessary to meet the unique needs of the child and the family to achieve the results or outcomes identified in paragraph (c) of this section, including—

(i) The length, duration, frequency, intensity, and method of delivering the early intervention services;

(ii)(A) A statement that each early intervention service is provided in the natural environment for that child or service to the maximum extent appropriate, consistent with §§ 303.13(a)(8), 303.26 and 303.126, or, subject to paragraph (d)(1)(ii)(B) of this section, a justification as to why an early intervention service will not be provided in the natural environment.

It is the responsibility of each direct service provider providing early intervention services under Part C and AEIS to comply with the federal definition and requirements of natural environments. Therefore, the procedures supporting the statute and AEIS's policies for assuring early intervention services are provided in natural environments are as follows:

1. To the maximum extent appropriate, the direct service provider must deliver early intervention services which support the infant/toddler and family in their natural environments such as the home, or other neighborhood/community settings in which children without disabilities participate.

2. In determining natural environments, the IFSP team, including the parent will decide settings that are natural and routine for the family to receive early intervention services. To make this decision, the

IFSP team, including the parent, will consider that natural settings may vary from child to child and family to family. Family cultural norms and values should always be given the highest consideration. Service settings may **not** be selected based solely on factors such as category of disability, severity of the disability, configuration of the delivery system, availability of services/space, or administrative convenience. (According to federal regulations, the parent cannot choose a setting for a service based solely on their preference, their convenience or preferred mode of service; e.g. a clinic. Part C, Early Intervention, cannot pay for services which are solely based on these criteria.)

3. The IFSP team will work in partnership with the family in the selection of location(s) in which a service will take place and what supplemental supports may be necessary in order for the infant/toddler and family to achieve the outcomes listed on the IFSP.

Justification Statement:

The IFSP team, including the parents, must take the following steps (service coordinator will document these steps in notes in child's file):

1. Review efforts to provide services in the natural environment. Effort is defined as a minimum of three (3) months attempt to provide a service in the natural environment.
2. Determine why these efforts were deemed unsuccessful. (Did the IFSP team consider additional procedures/strategies, modifications of procedures/strategies or a different natural environment setting to work on the IFSP outcomes?)
3. Determine how skills addressed in a segregated setting will be generalized to everyday activities and location. (How will skills addressed in a segregated setting be utilized throughout the day and week? How will caregivers continue skills demonstrated in the segregated setting in other settings?) These strategies become part of the procedures for this service on the IFSP.
4. Review the natural environment regulations under Part C.
5. Review the benefits of receiving services in the natural environment.
6. Review the justification statement during any IFSP review of the service and IFSP outcome that requires the justification statement, but no later than 6 months after the justification statement was added to the IFSP. (A documented determination is required to continue providing services in a setting other than the natural environment-meaning all of the above steps must be completed once again.)
7. Determine that services should now be able to be successfully provided in the natural environment.