

## PROVIDING SERVICES AND SUPPORT TO CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

### Early Intervention: Helping Families Meet Their Child's Needs

In early intervention having families and professionals work together as a team is the best way to help a family meet their child's needs. The method known as the primary service provider approach was developed after years of working with families who have young children with developmental delays or disabilities.

When families learn new ways to work and play with their child during normal daily activities and

routines, then the new skills can be practiced with the child many times every day. The child and family do not always need to see many different specialists, but those specialists are available when needed. You and your primary service provider can decide when you need specialists to help you. This will usually happen when you need help in deciding what to work on next.

An important part of early intervention services is regular communication among the team members, which includes parents. Professionals suggest new activities and share information with the family and other people who are with the child on a daily basis.

Along with the family, professionals from different fields (for example, early childhood educators, parent educators/home visitors, speech, occupational and physical therapists, social workers, nutritionists, etc.) teach, learn, and work together to reach an agreed upon set of goals (also known as outcomes) for the child and family.

Team members play several roles. Usually one member (the primary service provider) will provide direct services and support to the family and other regular caregivers. Other

team members consult with both the family and each other. They do this by sharing their knowledge and experience and by helping each other, and the family and other



*Juan Pablo Ramos with sister Erika at the petting zoo*

caregivers, learn new ways to help the child.

Goals (outcomes) for the child are developed through team agreement under the guidance of the family. Outcomes are based on the strengths and needs of the child and family.

Current studies have shown this way of providing early intervention works very well with young children and families.

#### Early Intervention Service Providers Believe In:

- Families and Professionals Working Together
- Helping the Family Meet the Child's Needs
- Regular Communication Among Team Members
- Combining Activities Within Normal Daily Routines
- Goals (Outcomes) Based on Child's and Family's Needs and Agreed Upon by All Team Members

# Working With Your Primary Service Provider

Because your family has the most influence on the way your child grows and learns, the job of your primary service provider is to support you, and other important people involved with your child and family. Your primary service provider will give you suggestions about ways to work and play with your child in places where your child would be if he or she did not have special needs. This will help you help your child learn new things every day.

For the child, receiving services and support in this way means *being* with the people who your child wants and needs to be with and *doing* what the family wants and needs to do.

For the family and other care providers, services and supports provided by the primary service

provider helps them develop the skills and confidence needed to try new ways to help the child learn new things.

During regular visits, your primary service provider's job is to give you emotional support, help your family secure material support, and give you and the other important people involved with your family information and, "suggestions for eating, dressing, playing with toys, sitting independently, or whatever the outcomes for the child are."

"The purpose of the visit is to ensure that the family has all the support they need to meet their priorities. So, home visitors [primary service providers] will encourage family members, listen to them, make sure their basic needs are met, and provide them with information. One

way to provide information might be to show them things to do with the child. But such a demonstration or "model" is only one of many ways of supporting families" (McWilliam, 1999).

It is important to remember that, although your family will be working with one primary service provider, the other team members will also provide support, consultation, and direct services based on what you, and the rest of your child's team, decide is needed to reach your child's and family's outcomes.

**Reference:** McWilliam, R. A. (1999). *It's Only Natural... to Have Early Intervention in the Environments Where It's Needed. Young Exceptional Children Monograph Series No. 2.*

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## Critical Concepts in Early Intervention

### Culturally Competent, Family-Centered Care

- Every family is unique.
- Honors the diversity of families.
- The family is the expert on the child and the constant in the child's life.
- Families are equal team members and the final decision makers.

### Natural Learning Environments

- Opportunities for learning occur as part of typical life activities both routine and spontaneous.
- The professional's role is to assist care providers to support or increase the child's participation in existing or desired activities.
- Focus is on activities and locations that are interesting and important to the child and family.

### Functional Outcomes & Meaningful Activities

- Supports are designed to achieve outcomes that make a meaningful difference in the life of the child and family.
- Supports occur within and are a part of everyday life.
- Intervention is based on scientific research and analysis.