

IFSP Guidance



For families and staff to use when developing an
Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP)

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Introduction

Massachusetts Early Intervention (EI) programs provide the majority of services in natural settings, embedded in children and families' daily routines. The Interagency Coordinating Council (ICC)¹ charged the Program Planning Committee with creating a guidance document to assist program staff and families in developing family-centered Individualized Family Service Plans (IFSP).



This document offers definitions, examples and guidance to EI staff and families to help identify and incorporate developmentally appropriate and relevant daily routines into the child's IFSP.

History

The Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH) has supported Early Intervention (EI) programs to effect the shift from services delivered in segregated settings to services delivered in natural settings. The Department's publication, *Enhancing EI*² issued in 1999, offered guidance to

assist programs to work towards implementation of this goal. *Enhancing EI* was updated in June 2001 in preparation for full implementation in April 2002. *Enhancing EI* highlights many examples of innovative "best practices" already in place in Massachusetts.

¹ A group of stakeholders including family members, representatives from State and other public and private agencies serving young children and their families who advise the DPH about Early Intervention in Massachusetts.

² *Enhancing EI* is available through the DPH and EI programs.

What is an IFSP?

The Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) is a written plan for providing Early Intervention (EI) services to an eligible child and the child's family in accordance with federal regulations - Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) - and the Massachusetts Early Intervention Operational Standards.

The IFSP is developed by a team consisting of the family, EI providers, specialty service providers and other individuals as specified by the family. A relevant IFSP captures the changing needs of the child and family and therefore should be referred to often and amended as needed.



Why Deliver Services In Natural Settings?

Federal law requires that EI services be provided in "natural settings." These are places where children would typically spend time and participate in activities if they were not enrolled in EI.

Recent research supports the concept that EI services are most effective when they are embedded in families' everyday routines, activities, and places.

EI services are designed to enhance the child's participation in naturally occurring events, which helps to support his/her growth and development and ability to function within the community.

Children and families do not live in isolation but within their communities. By starting early to identify opportunities for children to learn and practice everyday skills, EI helps to foster inclusion and belonging. Families are supported in maintaining their daily lives and relationships and children are assisted to achieve their fullest potential.

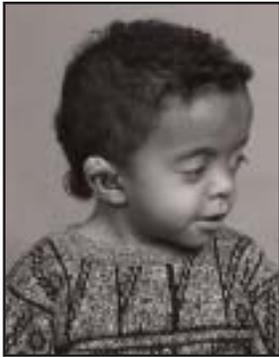
The Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH), lead agency for Part C, endorses these research findings and federal requirements. The DPH provides training and technical assistance for families and EI staff to assist in meeting these goals.

Guiding Principles³

- ◆ All children are unique, with individual strengths and talents.
- ◆ Children grow and develop in the context of relationships with their families and other caregivers.
- ◆ All children have the right to belong, to be welcomed, and to participate fully in typical places and activities within their communities.
- ◆ Children with and without special needs learn important things from one another.
- ◆ Everyday routines, activities, and places offer countless opportunities for children to learn and develop.
- ◆ The lives of families are enhanced when they are successful in maintaining their everyday activities and relationships.

³ *Early Connections for Infants, Toddlers, and Families, the Colorado Department of Education, Early Intervention Supports & Services in Everyday Routines, Activities and Places. (1999)*

IFSP Development: A Partnership



Family Strengths

- ◆ Family members are recognized as skilled allies in enhancing all aspects of their child's development.
- ◆ From the earliest stages of a child's life, the family supports, teaches and advocates for their child.
- ◆ Families have tremendous capacity to support their child's learning and development within the context of their daily interactions and activities.
- ◆ Families want to have fun with their child and do the typical things that families do.
- ◆ Families want to do what is best for their child.
- ◆ Families are resilient and adaptable.

Provider Strengths

- ◆ EI Providers are trained professionals, skilled at facilitating child development, with clinical expertise in a variety of disciplines.
- ◆ EI Providers are trained in the assessment and IFSP process.
- ◆ EI Providers assist families in identifying and prioritizing relevant family needs.
- ◆ EI Providers use caring, flexibility and creativity to support children and families.
- ◆ EI Providers help families find resources in the community to meet their needs.
- ◆ EI Providers have experience working as members of a team.



Developing a Family-Centered IFSP

- ◆ The IFSP process includes discussions with the family, observations of the child, a formal eligibility evaluation and ongoing assessments.
- ◆ The IFSP Team is comprehensive and may include any person who is involved with the child and invited by the family. Possible team members may be members of a child's family (including siblings and extended family members), EI service providers and specialty providers, childcare providers, doctors or family friends.
- ◆ Families are encouraged to talk about their daily routines and identify ways in which they would like support in the context of their lives, culture, and community.
- ◆ The child's IFSP should include not only "functional outcomes," (i.e. "What would I like for my child to accomplish in the next six months?") but also define strategies and activities which will help incorporate these outcomes throughout the child's typical daily routine.
- ◆ The role of the EI service provider is to facilitate the development, completion and implementation of the family's IFSP, and ensure services are delivered in a way that is supportive rather than disruptive of family values, priorities and routines.



Including Everyday Routines, Activities and Places in Your Child's IFSP

The IFSP team works collaboratively to create family-centered strategies by identifying ways to embed services into a child and family's daily routines, activities and places. Service providers make every effort to be flexible about the times and places in which they provide services to meet the identified outcomes.

The following definitions and questions (in italic type) can be used to help describe family routines for inclusion in the IFSP. **These questions are "conversation starters" and are not meant to be an exhaustive list.**

<i>Family Routines...</i>	<i>Daily Activities...</i>	<i>Everyday Places...</i>
<p>...are the usual events that are part of a family's schedule. Examples might include mealtime, bathtime, storytime, bedtime etc.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ <i>What does your typical day look like?</i> ◆ <i>What are the things you do every day, some days, occasionally?</i> ◆ <i>Do you spend most of your time at home? By choice or because you need help in taking your child/ren out?</i> ◆ <i>Who spends time with your child/ren on a regular basis? How is their time spent?</i> ◆ <i>Who gets up with your child/ren?</i> ◆ <i>Who puts your child/ren to bed?</i> ◆ <i>Who prepares breakfast, drives/walks child/ren to school?</i> ◆ <i>Does your child/ren take a nap? What time?</i> 	<p>...are what a family does during a typical day. Examples might include at-home play activities, visits to the playground, food shopping, visits to family or friends, or trips to the library or a museum etc.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ <i>What are some of the things that you and your family do on a typical day?</i> ◆ <i>Is your schedule the same each day or do you have specific days for specific activities?</i> ◆ <i>What are the special activities that you do together as a family?</i> ◆ <i>How do your activities change during the weekend?</i> ◆ <i>Is it easy or difficult for your child/ren enrolled in EI to be included in these activities?</i> ◆ <i>Are there activities that you would like to participate in, but find that you are unable to at this time? What are the barriers to participating?</i> 	<p>...are the places that families frequent. Examples might include the home, childcare, neighborhood and community programs, places of worship, the playground etc.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ <i>Where do you go with your child/ren during a typical day?</i> ◆ <i>What's hard or easy about taking your child/ren to the supermarket, library, place of worship, etc.?</i> ◆ <i>Would you like support from EI to access these places?</i> ◆ <i>Are there ways for EI to provide services in any of these everyday places?</i> ◆ <i>Would you like information about new opportunities/places for your family that are available in your community?</i>

IFSP Checklist

The following checklist can be used upon completion of the ISP document to decide if the essential components of the IFSP have been included. IFSP development is an ongoing process. It may be reviewed at anytime.

Does the IFSP:

- Recognize your child's individual strengths, talents and developmental needs and support them in the context of your family day
- Identify opportunities where learning can occur within your family's daily routines
- Specify ways that services can be provided in everyday routines, activities and places
- Include specialized expertise in adapting and accommodating routines activities and places to support your child's full participation and learning?
- Recognize the role played by your child's siblings, care providers, extended family members and friends.
- Plan for developmentally appropriate services and strategies that are relevant to your family's life

References:

A Guidebook, "Early Intervention Supports & Services in Everyday Routines, Activities and Places in Colorado" Early Childhood Connections for Infants, Toddlers & Families.

First Steps Magazine. State of Indiana, winter 1998, focus on: Natural Environments.

Service Guidance, Natural Environments Intervention guidance for service providers and families, April 1999, Connecticut Birth to Three System.