

<b>DCF</b>	<b>COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS ~ DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES</b>	
	Policy Name: Early Intervention Policy	
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## EARLY INTERVENTION REFERRAL POLICY

### Policy

Early intervention programs provide services to families of children under 3 years of age about whom concerns of developmental delays exist due to identified disabilities or their birth or environmental circumstances. The Department of Children and Families (DCF) regards referrals to early intervention programs as an opportunity to facilitate a connection for families to services they may need to assist their children in coping with developmental delays. DCF informs the family, in writing, that the referral is being made.

### **Federally Required Referrals**

The federal Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act, as amended June 25, 2003, requires DCF to refer to early intervention programs families in which a 51B investigation is supported on a child who is under 3 years of age. In completing this mandatory referral, DCF recognizes its obligation to maintain strict confidentiality regarding family information. For this reason, DCF provides the minimum information necessary to enable the provider to contact the family and assist them in determining whether they can benefit from early intervention services.

### **Voluntary Referrals**

DCF also supports access to early intervention services for any other family with a child under the age of 3 when it appears that such services might be beneficial. Under these circumstances, DCF works with the family to determine whether the family will contact the early intervention services provider directly or whether DCF will complete a referral. Prior to completing a referral, DCF obtains written parental authorization to release information to the early intervention services provider.

### **Procedures: Required Referrals**

1. **Notice to Family.** When DCF supports a 51B investigation involving a reported child under age 3 years, the Investigator orally provides to the parents the following information:
  - Early intervention programs assess children under age 3 to determine whether they are experiencing developmental delays and or are at risk for developmental delays. If the early intervention provider determines the child to be eligible, the family is offered early intervention services.
  - DCF is required by federal law to refer the family to an early intervention program and will be providing an early intervention services provider with the minimum information needed to contact the family. *(NOTE: If known, the Investigator also provides to the family the name and contact information for the early intervention services provider that will be contacting the parent to arrange an assessment.)*
  - Early intervention services are voluntary. Parents have the right to refuse the family's participation in the assessment and may decline any offer of services. If DCF is subsequently notified of the family's refusal to participate when offered an assessment by the early intervention provider or to participate in service provision for which the early intervention provider found the child eligible, DCF may consider the information during any future decision-making.

Information about federally required referrals is also included in the DCF written guidebook for parents.

2. **Referral to Early Intervention Program.** DCF provides a written referral for the child to an early intervention provider that serves the geographical area in which the child resides. The referral includes the following information:
- Child's name, date of birth, address;
  - Parent names, addresses and telephone numbers; and
  - When the child is in placement, name, address and telephone number of the foster/pre-adoptive parent or other provider with whom the child is residing.

A copy of the referral is sent to the parents unless DCF determines that concerns regarding danger and safety to the child or another family member prevent release of the referral information to the parents. If the child is in placement, a copy of the referral is also sent to the foster/pre-adoptive or other provider. *[NOTE: Information regarding the placement provider's name, address and telephone number is deleted from the copy of the referral sent to the parents.]*

The referral letter is prepared by the DCF Investigator except when an emergency response is completed and supported and the decision is made to open a case or DCF services. Under these circumstances, the referral letter is prepared by the DCF Social Worker assigned to complete the assessment.

***Timeframe for Completing the Early Intervention Referral.*** The referral is normally within 5 working days of the Support decision. If a referral to the District Attorney is being completed, the referral is not sent to the early intervention provider nor is a copy mailed to the parents (or the foster/pre-adoptive parent or other provider) until after the notification regarding the investigation outcome is sent to the parents.

***If the child is the subject of more than one supported 51B investigation during a calendar month,*** only one referral is sent. If the child is the subject of one or more supported 51B investigations during a subsequent month, an additional referral is completed.

***If the child about whom the 51B investigation report is supported lives out of state,*** the DCF Investigator informs the parents about early intervention services and provides her/him with information about how to contact the child welfare agency in the state where the child lives for early intervention program and contact information.

In a situation where a reported child under the age of 3 has died referrals to EI should be considered for any other children in the household under age 3.

**Assessment and Service Planning.** When the family of a referred child is assigned for a DCF assessment or has an already open DCF case, the DCF Social Worker obtains a release of information, if not already obtained, from a parent, to allow for communication of results of the early intervention eligibility evaluation. She/he works with the family to determine how the early intervention program's findings and decisions will affect DCF's work with the family. When appropriate, and the family agrees, the DCF Social Worker and/or family invites the early intervention program to participate in service planning with the family and DCF.

3. **Follow-Up.** If DCF receives information from the early intervention program that the family has refused to participate in the assessment or has declined services, the Area Director/designee informs the child's DCF Social Worker (when assigned) who considers the information, in consultation with her/his Supervisor (at a minimum), during decision-making regarding the child and family.

Even when participation in an early intervention assessment or services has been stipulated in the DCF Service Plan, information that the family has refused to participate or declined early intervention services CANNOT be the sole basis for filing a 51A report.

### **Procedures: Voluntary Referrals**

1. **Informing the Family about Early Intervention Services.** Under circumstances other than those described above which require a referral, the DCF Social Worker or Investigator, as assigned, orally provides to the parents of a child under age 3 the following information:

- Early intervention programs assess children under age 3 to determine whether they are experiencing developmental delays or are at risk of developmental delays. Children determined eligible are offered early intervention services.
  - Early intervention services are voluntary. Parents have the right to refuse the family's participation in the assessment and may decline any offer of services.
2. **Completing the Referral.** The DCF Social Worker or Investigator, as assigned, works with the family to determine whether the family will contact the early intervention services provider on their own or DCF will complete a referral.
- **Self Referral:** The DCF Social Worker or Investigator, as assigned, provides to the family the name and contact information for one or more early intervention programs serving the geographical location in which the family resides.
  - **DCF Referral:** The DCF Social Worker or Investigator, as assigned, obtains written parental authorization to release information regarding the child and family. Then she/he provides a written referral to an early intervention provider that serves the geographical area in which the child resides (copy to the family with modifications—described in dictation—if necessary to maintain the safety of the child or another family member). The referral includes:
    - child's name, date of birth, address;
    - parent names, addresses and telephone numbers; and
    - other information as required by the early intervention services provider.