



**ANNOUNCEMENT: ELS/EI-06 #04
CHILD DEVELOPMENT OFFICE
BUREAU OF EARLY LEARNING SERVICES
DIVISION OF EARLY INTERVENTION**

**ISSUE DATE: 7/24/2006
EFFECTIVE DATE: 7/24/2006**

SUBJECT: Natural Environments

TO: County MH/MR Administrators/County Mental Retardation Coordinators/County Early Intervention Coordinators/Early Intervention Providers

**FROM: Harriet Dichter
Deputy Secretary, Office of Child Development**

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Harriet Dichter".

PURPOSE:

The purpose of this announcement is to reaffirm procedures for providing Early Intervention services in natural environments. Previous procedures were established by the Office of Mental Retardation. These procedures meet statutory requirements established in Public Law 108-446, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), enacted on December 3, 2004.

BACKGROUND:

The Pennsylvania Early Intervention system is implemented in compliance with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) as amended by Public Law 108-446, 'Early Intervention Program for Infants and Toddlers with Disabilities' Part C and the Pennsylvania Early Intervention Services System Act, Pennsylvania Act 212-1990.

Over the past 15 years, statutory amendments have been made to the IDEA on the requirements for natural environments. In October 1991, Part C of the IDEA was reauthorized as P.L. 102-119 and stated 'that to the maximum extent appropriate to the needs of the child, Early Intervention services must be provided in natural environments, including the home and community settings in which children without disabilities participate,' and that, 'natural environments' means settings that 'are natural or normal for the child's age peers who have no disabilities.' Statutory amendments of 1997, under P.L. 105-17, added two requirements related to the provision of Early Intervention services in natural environments. First, it required that states develop policies and procedures to ensure that, to the maximum extent appropriate, Early Intervention services are to be provided in natural environments and occur elsewhere only if Early Intervention cannot be achieved satisfactorily in a natural environment.

Second, it required that each Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) identify the natural environments in which services are to be provided and a justification of the extent, if any, to which a service will not be provided in a natural environment and location in which it will be provided.

Under current IDEA Amendments, P.L. 108-446, additional language was added under the requirement related to states policies and procedures. The new language states, “The provision of Early Intervention services occurs in a setting other than a natural environment that is most appropriate, *as determined by the parent and the individualized family service plan team only when Early Intervention cannot be achieved satisfactorily for the infant or toddler in natural environment*”.

DISCUSSION:

To the maximum extent appropriate, supports and services shall be provided in natural environments. Services shall be provided in communities or locations where the child lives, learns, and plays on a daily basis in order to enhance the child's participation in family routines and in the activities and routines that occur in a variety of community settings where children and families spend time. Each IFSP identifies the natural environments in which services are to be provided and a justification of the extent, if any, to which a service will not be provided in a natural environment and location in which it will be provided. Only when the child's and family's outcomes cannot be achieved satisfactorily for the child in the natural environment can the provision of Early Intervention services be considered in a location other than the child's natural environment. These determinations are made by the parent and the IFSP team through an individualized assessment.

The IFSP is developed to determine the supports and services to be provided to children from birth to age three and their families. The plan is based on the concerns, priorities and resources of the family and, determined by a family directed assessment of what the family believes is important to enable their child's participation in activities or routines that take place within the family's naturally occurring settings. Planning is based on outcomes that the families and IFSP team members agree will be functionally suitable to promote the child's increased competence, participation and learning and the family's capacity to support the child. When developing the IFSP, the following shall be addressed:

Developing the IFSP

- (a) Assessment should include:
 - (1) The family's identification of their priorities, concerns and resources
 - (2) The identification of the child and family's daily routines and interests
- (b) Establish outcomes specific to the child and family that:
 - (1) Enhance child competence
 - (2) Enhance family capacity
 - (3) Increase the number of settings for child/family activities
 - (4) Are measurable
- (c) Environments and activities based on:
 - (1) Part of child's and family's routines
 - (2) Typical of same age peers
 - (3) Respect for religious, ethnic and cultural practices
- (d) When determining services and supports for the child and family the IFSP team must consider implementation of the IFSP in as many activity settings, as appropriate, that will allow learning opportunities for a child in a natural environment (home, community activity settings). Appropriate services and supports should be focused on:
 - (1) Placing an emphasis on functional competence
 - (2) Increasing the child's participation in natural environments
- (e) The IFSP team will determine what supplemental supports will be provided in order for the child to achieve the outcomes listed in his/her initial IFSP. To the extent appropriate, the IFSP must include:
 - (1) Medical and other services that the child needs but are not required under Part C
 - (2) The funding sources to be used in paying for those services or the steps that will be taken to secure those services through public or private sources.

Justification for Services Not Provided in a Natural Environment

- (a) If the IFSP team members agree to the provision of supports and services in locations other than in a child's natural environment(s) the team must show sufficient documentation, during the initial writing of the IFSP, that supports the team's decision that the child's and family's outcomes cannot be met by providing supports and services in the natural environment (s) of the child and family. As part of the initial IFSP and at the six-month review or at the request of the family, the IFSP and justification are considered, documented on the IFSP, and include:
 - (1) How services provided in locations other than a natural environment will be generalized enough to support the child's future ability to function in his/her natural environment; including:
 - (2) A plan with timelines and the supports necessary to allow the child's and family's outcomes to be satisfactorily achieved in his/her natural environments (as an addendum to the initial IFSP).
- (b) A review of the IFSP must be continued during the period that a child and family are receiving Early Intervention supports and services. This method should be repeated until the child and family can receive supports and services that are naturally provided in their everyday lives (home and community activities).