A Family Guide To Understanding The Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP)

Maryland Infants and Toddlers Program

MARYLAND STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Division of Early Intervention and Special Education Services
Maryland Infants and Toddlers Program/Preschool Special Education Services

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The Individualized Family Service Plan

The first booklet in Maryland’s Birth to Kindergarten Parent Information Series, *A Family Guide to Early Intervention Services in Maryland*, was designed to help you understand the Maryland Infants and Toddlers Program. Now that your child’s initial evaluation is complete and your child has been found eligible for early intervention services, it is time to develop the Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) for your child and family.

The overarching outcome for all children is that they have positive social emotional skills and relationships, learn and engage in activities, and use appropriate behavior to get their wants and needs met, so that they are full and active participants in their homes, schools and communities. Early intervention services also support families to: understand their child’s strengths, abilities, and special needs; know their rights and advocate effectively for their child; and help their child develop and learn. The IFSP process identifies individual outcomes specific to your child and family and guides early intervention services to support reaching your outcomes.

**It takes a team.** You know your child best and your local Infants and Toddlers Program team will learn from you how your child interacts, plays and learns, and participates in daily activities such as feeding and dressing, as well as what your priorities and expectations are for your child’s development. Your early intervention service providers will also share information with you about child development and specific techniques to support development. Together, you will identify strategies to use within your daily activities to enhance your child’s participation. You are your child’s first and best teacher. You play a critical role in developing the IFSP. Your commitment, dreams, and desires for your child will help guide the development and implementation of the IFSP, as well as any IFSP reviews and updates. Your commitment, dreams, and desires for your child will help guide the development and implementation of the IFSP, as well as any IFSP reviews and updates.

![IFSP Image](image)

**The Individualized Family Service Plan**

- **Individualized** to meet the unique needs of your child and family
- **Family** as a partner and at the center of the early intervention process
- **Services** to enhance your child’s development and support your family’s needs
- **Plan** of action or the services & supports to be provided to your child and family
The IFSP Process

The IFSP process begins when your child is referred to your local Infants and Toddlers Program due to a concern about his or her development. Your early intervention team has 45 days from the date of referral to complete your child’s screening (if applicable based on local policies and procedures) and evaluation and assessment, and to develop an initial written IFSP. Most services contained in the IFSP document begin no later than 30 days after the IFSP has been signed by you. The completion of the IFSP or the start date for an IFSP service may be delayed by a family reason.

All partners learn to trust and respect each other’s expertise in order to share information and make decisions. **Families and early intervention providers bring unique strengths to this collaborative partnership.** The first IFSP meeting will include you and your service coordinator, and may include staff that helped complete the developmental evaluation and the functional assessment of your child and family. Such staff may participate by telephone or by providing a written report. You may invite others to attend the meeting, including family members, friends, and child care providers that you feel should be involved. Together, you will develop an IFSP that supports you and your family.

**The IFSP process is ongoing.** You and your IFSP team will review the IFSP every 6 months after the initial completion date. You may request a review at any time to make sure the IFSP continues to meet the changing needs of your child and family. Development and review of the IFSP are collaborative processes that take place during IFSP team meetings. You and your service coordinator must be present for all IFSP meetings.

**About Your Service Coordinator**

- Guides you in setting priorities for your child and family
- Coordinates services and supports
- Helps you find answers for your questions
- Offers information on helpful State and community resources
- Finds opportunities for you to connect with other families
- **Is the best person to contact if you have any questions throughout the IFSP process**

**Transition planning** begins when your child reaches age 2, as it is important to start planning early what will happen after your child reaches age 3. You will have the choice to continue services through an IFSP or begin services through an IEP if your child is found eligible for preschool special education.
The Written IFSP Document

The Written Plan of Action for Services and Supports to Be Provided to Your Child and Family

The Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) is both an agreement and a legal document that puts in writing information about your child’s development, your family’s priorities, your child’s strengths and needs, and the outcomes you and the IFSP team would like to have your child achieve. It is the plan of action – the who, what, when, where, why, and how for services and supports to be provided to your child and family. This guide introduces families to the sections of the IFSP document. Your service coordinator and service providers from your local Infants and Toddlers Program will explain the sections in greater detail as you develop the IFSP together.

IFSP Cover Page

CHILD AND FAMILY INFORMATION

The written IFSP document begins with a cover page which includes information about your child and family, and contact information for your service coordinator and IFSP team participants. The IFSP cover page also lists projected meeting dates for your six-month and annual IFSP reviews, and a projected date range for your child’s transition planning meeting.
In order to provide services that will meet your child's needs, it is important that you share all relevant information, as well as any health concerns you may have about your child.

**Hints To Help You Prepare:**
- Talk to your child's doctor.
- Ask your service coordinator to help you gather your child's health information.
- Ask about your child's diagnosis and about words and phrases you don't understand.
- Write down your child's health and medical information.

**IFSP PART I, Section A:**

**Information About My Child's Development**

**HEALTH INFORMATION**

In order to provide services that will meet your child’s needs, it is important that you share all relevant information, as well as any health concerns you may have about your child.

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**IFSP PART I, Section B:**

**Information About My Child's Development**

**EVALUATION FOR ELIGIBILITY**

A developmental evaluation to determine eligibility for the Infants and Toddlers Program is conducted to gather information on how he or she plays and learns (cognitive skills), uses and understands language (communication skills), expresses emotions and interacts with others (social-emotional skills), helps with feeding and dressing (adaptive skills), and uses his/her hands and moves his/her body (fine and gross motor skills).

**Your child’s eligibility is a result of the evaluation process and is based on one of the following categories:**
- Has at least a 25% developmental delay, or
- Has atypical development or behavior, or
- Has a diagnosed physical or mental condition with a high probability for developmental delay.
The purpose of early intervention services is to support your child’s successful participation in everyday home and community activities that are meaningful to you and your family. Therefore, it is important to understand your child’s functional abilities within these activities and settings. For each activity, your early intervention team will gather information to understand how your child is interacting and relating to others, how he or she is learning to successfully participate, and what behaviors he or she is using to get wants and needs met. Your insight as to how each activity is going is critical to begin planning appropriate supports and services.

One of the goals of early intervention is to enable families to provide care for their child and have the resources they need to participate in their own desired family and community activities, which includes being able to describe your child’s abilities and challenges and to help her/him to develop.

This section of the IFSP continues the assessment process by identifying your resources, priorities, and concerns related to supporting your child’s development. You may share as much or as little information as you choose.
During the evaluation for eligibility process, the early intervention team looked at your child’s development in five domains. During the child and family assessment process, they gathered information about your child’s functional abilities in everyday activities and routines as well as your family resources, priorities, and concerns.

Children’s functional abilities overlap domains of development so we combine them and summarize all of your child's functional strengths and needs into **three** global outcome areas:

1. Developing positive social skills and relationships,
2. Acquiring and using knowledge and skills, and
3. Using appropriate behaviors to meet needs.

Additionally, together, you and your team will consider and identify how your child's functioning in these three areas compares to other children his/her age. This helps the early intervention team help you support your child’s development and participation in daily activities and helps us to understand how children benefit from participation in the Maryland Infants and Toddlers Program.

This section is the summary of all that has been discovered about your child’s unique strengths and needs. Sources of this information may include conversations with you and other caregivers, observations of your child in daily routines, eligibility evaluations, child and family assessment activities, and outside reports.
The Child Outcomes Summary (COS) process is used in Maryland for measuring the three child outcomes to meet federal accountability reporting requirements for all children receiving services through an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) or a preschool Individualized Education Program (IEP).

The COS is not an assessment. Rather, it provides a way for IFSP teams to summarize the child’s level of functioning in the three outcome areas compared to that of same-age peers, using information from a variety of sources, including but not limited to formal evaluation using standardized tools, parent and provider input, observations, and authentic assessment. This summary occurs when all children enter services at the first IFSP, annually as a means of monitoring progress, and at exit from early intervention services.

The COS process must be completed by the IFSP team and collectively, the team needs to understand:

- the content of the three child outcomes;
- age-expected child development;
- how the child functions across settings and situations; and
- age expectations within the child and family’s culture.

Early intervention personnel can help everyone understand what skills and behaviors are involved with each of the three outcome areas and with what typical development looks like for same-age children. Families and primary caregivers provide the rich information to the rest of the team about the child’s functioning across a variety of settings and about your family’s cultural expectations for child development.

Again, as with any and all parts of your child and family’s participation in early intervention services, your input and involvement throughout the COS process is essential. Together, the team develops a summary statement that describes the child’s functioning compared to same-age peers in each outcome area, based on all the information available. At annual and exit IFSPs, the team will together determine what progress has been made in each outcome area and again summarize the child’s functioning compared to same-age peers.
The child and family assessment activities help your early intervention team to understand how your child is participating in daily activities that are important to your family and to identify activities that you may need support to help your child participate more meaningfully. The Infants and Toddlers Program supports the adults that regularly interact with your child. Individual child and family outcomes are the basis for identifying early intervention supports and services. The **activities you focus on as outcomes serve as a measure of your child’s progress.** Together, you will identify initial strategies that you are currently working on to address the outcomes and then will continue identifying strategies with your team throughout your participation in early intervention services.

### IFSP PART III: My Child and Family Outcomes

**CHILD AND FAMILY OUTCOMES**

The child and family assessment activities help your early intervention team to understand how your child is participating in daily activities that are important to your family and to identify activities that you may need support to help your child participate more meaningfully. The Infants and Toddlers Program supports the adults that regularly interact with your child. Individual child and family outcomes are the basis for identifying early intervention supports and services. The activities you focus on as outcomes serve as a measure of your child’s progress. Together, you will identify initial strategies that you are currently working on to address the outcomes and then will continue identifying strategies with your team throughout your participation in early intervention services.

### IFSP PART IV: Our Early Intervention Supports and Services

**SUMMARY OF EARLY INTERVENTION SERVICES**

Supports and services are determined following the development of functional IFSP outcomes. They are designed to enhance your family’s capacity to support your child’s learning and development through functional participation in family and community activities. Each agency or person who has a direct role in the provision of early intervention services is responsible for supporting your family to achieve the outcomes in the IFSP.

You have a crucial role in the provision of early intervention services. Your team of professionals will use coaching methods to partner with you to identify intervention strategies that you and your family are able to use within your daily routines and activities.
TRANSITION BEFORE AGE 3:

Transitions before age three are generally less formal and may include transitioning home after being in the hospital, or to a new child care provider, when a parent starts a new job, or transitioning to other community supports with typical peers if your child and family no longer need early intervention services. You and your team can anticipate your child's reactions to these changes and plan for appropriate responses and support.

TRANSITION AT AGE 3:

Formal transition activities are required as your child is close to turning 3 years old. Starting at age 2, your service coordinator will begin discussing the transition process. You will be part of a transition planning meeting to plan, make decisions, and act on what happens next for your child and family. **This transition planning meeting must occur not less than 90 days and not more than 9 months before your child's third birthday.** At this meeting, it is the responsibility of the IFSP team to develop a transition plan. Developmental and educational information may be shared without parental consent between the local Infants and Toddlers Program and the local school system in order to support the child’s progress through a seamless system of services, including transition planning. Information regarding community options and service delivery models for continuing to receive early intervention services or to begin receiving preschool special education services will be provided unless your family does not want to consider either of these choices.

To determine if your child continues to need early intervention services or special education services, your child must be evaluated to establish your child's eligibility for preschool special education and related services. If additional assessments are necessary to determine eligibility, you must provide written permission. After your child has been determined eligible, at an Individualized Education Program (IEP) team meeting, it is your choice whether your child remains in the local Infants and Toddlers Program and continues to receive services through an extended IFSP or transitions to preschool special education and related services through an IEP. Prior to your child's third birthday, he or she may have caught up to same-age peers and met the outcomes on the IFSP.

This is a very exciting time, even though you may be sad to leave your early intervention services and supports. Your service coordinator may help your child access community services and supports with typical peers so that your child maintains his or her newly acquired skills.

TRANSITION AFTER AGE 3:

Transition planning is also required after the age of three in preparation for moving from services on an extended IFSP to preschool special education services through an IEP. **This transition planning meeting is held no later than 90 days prior to the beginning of the school year following the child's fourth birthday.** Families may request services from an IEP any time after an extended IFSP is in place, in which case a Transition Planning Meeting should be scheduled at such time. For additional information, refer to **A Family Guide to Next Steps: When Your Child In Early Intervention Turns Three**, part of Maryland’s Birth to K Parent Information Series.
Regardless of when your child transitions (before, at, or after age three), the discussion needs to include planning notes and next steps, including who will do what to support you and your child to the new setting or situation.

The Council for Exceptional Children's Division of Early Childhood identifies Recommended Practices in eight different topic areas, including transition, at http://ectacenter.org/decrp/topic-transition.asp. Practice Guides for families are available in print format for hard copies and in digital formats for reading on mobile devices and linking to videos and other resources. The practice guides:

- Explain the importance of the practices;
- Illustrate practices with vignettes and videos;
- Describe how to do the practice;
- Include indicators to know a practice is working; and
- Provide links to related resources.
This section is where you provide informed written consent before early intervention services begin, at every IFSP review meeting, and when the content of the IFSP is changed. It is important to read every statement and ask questions if there is anything that may be confusing.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:
- Have I received a copy of the Parental Rights: Maryland Procedural Safeguards Notice from my local Infants and Toddlers Program?
- Have my rights in the early intervention system been explained?
- Do I understand which services will be delivered to my family?
- Do I understand that these services are provided at no cost to me?
**ABOUT MEDICAID (MEDICAL ASSISTANCE)**

- Services through local Infants and Toddlers Programs in Maryland are provided at no cost to families.
- If your child is eligible for Medicaid (Medical Assistance) and you provide written consent, the local Infants and Toddlers Program may bill Medicaid for specific services for your child.
- If you provide written consent annually for billing purposes, your local Infants and Toddlers Program will ask you for your Medical Assistance number.
- Your consent allowing the Infants and Toddlers Program to bill Medicaid will not prevent your child or any other Medicaid-eligible individual in your family from receiving the medical care they are receiving now or will receive in the future.

**IFSP PART VII, Section B: Medical Assistance (MA) Consent**

**AUTHORIZED(S)**

- Parents or caregivers must be informed before the provider agency, physician, or other person, other than the provider, will sign their name personally to the information provided by the Maryland Department of Health (MDH), the state agency responsible for the administration of the Medical Assistance (MA) Program, in conformity with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Prior to providing consent, you understand and agree that in writing that you authorize your child’s name to be listed in the MA application and the medical assistance information that will be included in the MA application.

In order to provide early intervention services to your child, the provider agency may need:

- Services authorized because they may be deemed necessary by the provider agency and will be paid for under the MA program.
- Services that are necessary to maintain your child’s health and well-being.
- Services that are necessary to prevent the loss of eligibility for other services (e.g., home- and community-based services).
- Services that are necessary to support your child’s development.
- Services that are necessary to support the family’s ability to maintain the child’s health and well-being.

As the parent, you have the right to challenge the decision to decline MA services. If your child receives MA services and you provide written consent, the provider agency may bill Medicaid for specific services for your child.

**PRIOR WRITTEN NOTICE**

Parents are essential team members in early intervention and have the right to be fully informed in order to make choices and decisions about the supports and services your child receive. Prior written notice is the legal requirement and provision to support your informed involvement in early intervention services. The local Infants and Toddlers Program must provide prior written notice to families whenever the IFSP team is proposing, refusing, about to start, or about to change early intervention services. This page of the IFSP provides the written notice to begin, continue, modify, or end IFSP services, based on the IFSP team discussion.
Early Childhood Outcomes and School Readiness

An important outcome of early intervention services is to narrow the gap in development that exists between infants, toddlers, and preschoolers with special needs and their same age peers. The IDEA requires that all states measure the effectiveness of early intervention and preschool special education services by reporting on three early childhood outcomes: children have positive social-emotional skills and relationships, children acquire and use knowledge and skills to successfully participate in daily activities, and children use appropriate behaviors to meet their needs, leading to increased independence.

We know that if children make developmental progress in these three child outcomes, they will be ready for school and ready to take the next step in all of their environments. The three broad outcomes are comprehensive, functional, and look at development as an integrated process.

THE 3 EARLY CHILDHOOD OUTCOMES FOR SCHOOL READINESS

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<tr>
<th>Early Childhood Outcome 1</th>
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<th>Early Childhood Outcome 3</th>
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<td><strong>Children have positive social relationships</strong>&lt;br&gt;This involves skills such as:&lt;br&gt;• Relating with adults&lt;br&gt;• Relating with other children&lt;br&gt;• For older children, following group rules</td>
<td><strong>Children acquire and use knowledge and skills</strong>&lt;br&gt;This involves skills such as:&lt;br&gt;• Thinking, reasoning, remembering&lt;br&gt;• Problem-solving&lt;br&gt;• Using symbols and language&lt;br&gt;• Understanding physical and social worlds</td>
<td><strong>Children use appropriate behavior to meet their needs</strong>&lt;br&gt;This involves skills such as:&lt;br&gt;• Taking care of basic needs&lt;br&gt;• Getting from place to place and using tools&lt;br&gt;• Contributing to own health and safety</td>
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The ultimate goal for all children is to be full and active participants in their homes, schools, and communities now and in the future. Preschool services build on natural learning occurring during the early years of life. The supports and services provided can help you to help your child make powerful connections by taking advantage of opportunities presented through daily routines and activities both at home as well as within an early childhood program.
Your early intervention service providers will work with you and your child on outcomes to enhance your child’s development. As a partner in the Infants and Toddlers Program, it is very important to be an active participant in every visit. Your early intervention service provider will demonstrate new strategies and techniques when they are working with your child. Make sure you understand what they are doing so that you can practice the skills and incorporate them into everyday routines and activities. The majority of your child’s growth will occur while you are working with your child between sessions. Be sure to share your child’s progress with your service coordinator and service providers so that you can plan together any changes in strategies that need to occur. Good luck on your early intervention journey!

1. Your child will grow and develop in ways that will amaze you.
2. Involve your whole family in your IFSP.
3. Your service coordinator is a listener, resource, and support to your family.
4. Trust the coaching model. You work together to identify meaningful strategies.
5. There are times when it is important to just be a family.
6. Connect with other parents.
7. Celebrate your child’s strengths, talents, and interests.
8. Remember to take care of yourself as well as taking care of your child and family.
9. Leaving your local Infants and Toddlers Program is not as scary as it seems.
10. You are the expert about your child.

Parent IFSP CHECKLIST

- I understand why my child is eligible for the Infants and Toddlers early intervention program.
- I invited family members, friends, and/or child care providers to my IFSP team meeting.
- My first IFSP was completed within 45 days after my referral.
- My first services began within 30 days after my IFSP was completed.
- I shared information about my family and child, and stated my hopes and dreams.
- My IFSP team considered my recommendations. I was an equal and active member of the IFSP team.
- My IFSP recognizes my child’s unique strengths and developmental needs.
- My IFSP identifies opportunities where learning can occur within my family’s daily routines.
- My IFSP describes ways that services can be provided in my child’s daily routines, activities, and places.
- My IFSP supports my family in accessing community resources and supports.
- My IFSP identifies my service coordinator and other service providers.
- I was comfortable asking questions during my IFSP meeting and during early intervention services.
- I received a copy of my child’s IFSP.
- I have provided written permission for services to begin.
- My early intervention appointments have been scheduled at a mutually agreed upon time and place.
- My first IFSP review will be in 6 months, but I may ask for a review at any time.
More Resources for Families

For additional information, contact your:

**Local Infants and Toddlers Programs**

- Allegany County: 301-759-2415
- Anne Arundel County: 410-222-6911
- Baltimore City: 410-396-1666
- Baltimore County: 410-809-2169
- Calvert County: 410-414-7034
- Caroline County: 410-479-3246
- Carroll County: 410-876-4437, ext. 2277
- Cecil County: 410-996-5444
- Charles County: 301-609-6808
- Dorchester County: 410-221-1111, ext. 1024
- Frederick County: 301-600-1612
- Garrett County: 301-533-0240
- Harford County: 410-638-3823
- Howard County: 410-313-7017
- Kent County: 410-778-7164
- Montgomery County: 240-777-3997
- Prince George’s County: 301-925-6627
- Queen Anne’s County: 443-758-0720, ext. 4458
- Somerset County: 410-651-1616, ext. 239
- St. Mary’s County: 301-475-5511, ext. 32223
- Talbot County: 410-820-0319
- Washington County: 301-766-8217
- Wicomico County: 410-677-5250
- Worcester County: 410-632-5033
- Maryland School for the Blind: 410-444-5000
- Maryland School for the Deaf: 410-480-4545

**Online Resources from the Division of Early Intervention and Special Education Services**

**Maryland Learning Links** offers information and resources related to Early Intervention and Special Education in Maryland. Whether you are a parent, teacher or provider, you are sure to benefit from the site’s comprehensive and user-friendly blend of knowledge and real-world practice, all of it built on the belief that every child can learn and achieve both inside and outside the classroom. *Maryland Learning Links was developed and produced by the Maryland State Department of Education, Division of Early Intervention and Special Education Services, in collaboration with the Johns Hopkins University, Center for Technology in Education (https://marylandlearninglinks.org/birth-to-kindergarten/).*

**Maryland Public Schools.** The Maryland State Department of Education, Division of Early Intervention and Special Education Services provides leadership, support, and accountability for results to local school systems, public agencies, and stakeholders through a seamless system of coordinated services to children and students with disabilities, birth through 21, and their families (http://marylandpublicschools.org/programs/Pages/Special-Education/index.aspx).

A Spanish translation of this guide is available online at **Maryland Public Schools** (http://marylandpublicschools.org/programs/Pages/Special-Education/info.aspx).

**Additional Information**

Maryland State Department of Education
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410-767-7770 phone | 410-333-8165 fax | 1-800-535-0182 toll free