



## The Importance of Early Intervention

*"Our daughter Audrey (18 months) was born with a genetic retinal disease called Leber's Congenital Amaurosis. At 2 months we began to worry because she hadn't started smiling and didn't look into our eyes (something we eagerly anticipated). We saw a pediatric ophthalmologist and the roller coaster ride began. We've learned so much about Audrey's eye condition, her development, parenting, but mostly ourselves. Our hearts have grown tremendously from being her parents and are filled with love and gratitude for the many blessings of our lives, especially having her as our child."*

*Ashley, mother of Audrey*

Understanding the importance of early intervention requires a glimpse at its history. In 1986, additional Federal legislation expanded services to infants and toddlers with the passage of PL 99-457. For the first time infants from birth to three years of age with disabilities were eligible to receive early intervention services from their local education agency (LEA). This legislation created what is known as the Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP), with the goal to address family concerns in relationship to their child's

development. The spirit of this law as described by a contributor to the legislation is summed up in this statement.

*"The IFSP is a promise to children and families—a promise that their strengths will be recognized and built on, that their beliefs and values will be respected, that their choices will be honored, and that their hopes and aspirations will be encouraged and enabled." –Lisbeth Vincent, Ph.D.*

Up until the age of three the IFSP is the document that charts parent concerns, provides services and identifies outcomes that support their child's development. As your child approaches three years of age (2 years 9 months) you will begin the process of transition from the Individualized Family Service Plan to an Individualized Education Program (IEP) that addresses your child's particular strengths and the areas of development that may need more educational support.

In the IFSP process a service coordinator will schedule and facilitate a meeting every six months. (In California the service coordinator will come from the Regional Center or the School District.)

## What the IFSP meeting includes:

- Both child and family goals-- focuses on the child's and family's natural environment
- Child's current levels of development
- Family's resources, priorities and concerns
- Goals for the child and family with procedures for reaching goals
- Frequency of services
- Documents in the family's native language
- Someone to translate to the family's native language
- Involvement of all team members
- Others with knowledge or expertise about the child (may include a physician for example)

From the Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) process your child moves to the IEP. During the transition meeting you will have the opportunity to meet the team of professionals that will guide you through their evaluation of your child's current services. This team will make recommendations for any additional educational assessments to better understand your child's needs. It will be valuable for you to ask that a professional in the field of visual impairment be present on this team. Once these assessments are completed and shared with you, the IEP meeting will be scheduled to review the recommended services and possible

preschool programs that may best meet your child's needs.

### ***A Parent's Perspective From Maria, parent of Victor, a 9 year old child with history of Retinopathy of Prematurity.***

*"Early Intervention has helped me to understand my child's needs and the services required to meet those needs. As a parent of a child with vision problems I appreciate the reminders from early intervention, that children with low vision have some delays in reaching their developmental milestones. It gives you a sense of belonging- knowing that someone else cares. Early intervention is here to help you."*

## RESOURCES

**"Handbook on Developing Individual Family Service Plans and Individual Education Programs in Early Childhood Special Education"** California Department of Special Education, Sacramento 2001  
[www.scoe.net/seeds/pdf/developing.pdf](http://www.scoe.net/seeds/pdf/developing.pdf)

**"Moving on at Age Three: A Transition Guide for Parents"** Harbor Regional Center  
[www.HarborRC.org](http://www.HarborRC.org)

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