

Meeting the identified needs of your child and family in early intervention

Services for families of infants and toddlers with disabilities (early intervention services) are guided by Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). These services are designed to enhance the development of infants and toddlers with disabilities and the capacity of their families to meet their child's needs.

When special education staff in Minnesota provide young children and their families with services, some districts may partner with the Minnesota Department of Education to implement an approach to early intervention known as **Evidence-Based Quality Intervention Practices (EQIP)**. EQIP is a set of evidence-based practices that focuses on building the family's capacity while using a coaching interaction style and providing intervention within daily routines in the child's natural environment. **Evidence-based practices** use interventions, strategies, and activities that have been proven effective through research. If providing early intervention services using EQIP, the members of your Individualized Family Services Plan (IFSP) team will use the following the evidence-based practices, based on research by Drs. Dathan Rush and M'Lisa Shelden,¹ along with other national experts.

Coaching interaction practices

One key element of EQIP is **caregiver coaching**. Coaching is an evidence-based adult learning strategy. Members of the IFSP team will spend time with your family or other caregivers, learning about your observations, concerns, priorities, and dreams for your child. Your caregiver coach will:

- Respect what you already know by recognizing and building on what you are currently doing to support your child's learning and development
- Work with you to develop and implement a joint plan that addresses your needs and priorities
- Consult with other providers on your IFSP team about your child's services and gather ideas from them about how to encourage your child's development

After learning about your priorities for your child, members of your team will offer some evidence-based intervention strategies for you to try. They will model these strategies for you while working with your child. Once you have observed them, they will give you an opportunity to practice the strategies with your child while they watch and provide you with feedback. If you are comfortable with these strategies, you can use them between visits and report back during your next visit. If your priorities or your child's needs change, your IFSP team can meet to consider consultation with other members who can meet you and your child's needs. Depending on the structure of your district's Special Education department, you may be partnered with a **primary coach** to meet your child's and family's needs. The primary coach may serve as your main contact for coordinating services and communication with other providers on the IFSP team.

Family-centered practices

One of the benefits of identifying a primary coach, if your district uses this model, is that you will have fewer providers to interact with on a regular basis. This consistency can help you and your providers to develop a relationship built on trust, mutual respect, and open communication. Research has shown that this

¹ (Rush & Shelden, *The Early Childhood Coaching Handbook*. 2013.)

type of relationship results in improved child and family outcomes. Regardless of whether your district has primary coaches, caregiver coaching uses the following **family-centered practices** to develop and support your relationships:

- Treating your culture and beliefs with respect
- Responding to your family's concerns and priorities
- Providing you with complete and unbiased information that is affirming and useful to you and matches your learning style
- Honoring your family's choices regarding where and how early intervention services will be provided
- Providing you with interactive opportunities to learn and practice new skills to help your child

Natural learning environments

Once you have learned new intervention strategies, your team will help you find ways to incorporate them into your child's and family's daily routines, creating **natural learning environments**. Natural learning takes place when your child is interested, engaged, and participating in their daily routines and activities. Daily routines include activities at home, in a childcare program, and in the community. These natural learning environments provide times to incorporate early intervention strategies into your child's daily life. The activities should be fun and based on your child's and family's interests and traditions. Research shows that children learn and build new skills more quickly when they are introduced and practiced during their ordinary daily routines.

EQIP and your family

EQIP recognizes and builds on your strengths as your child's first teacher. These practices are designed to enhance your competence and confidence – and that of other caregivers – in helping your child develop and learn. EQIP acknowledges the importance of your child's interactions with you and their other caregivers. You play a crucial role in this process by sharing your hopes and dreams for your child, learning how to incorporate new strategies into your child's daily routines and activities, and maintaining a strong collaborative relationship with your team. These practices are designed to empower and support your family and other caregivers while helping your child develop the necessary skills to participate fully and successfully at home and in your community.