

Fact Sheet: Early Start Overview for Parents



What is Early Start?

This is California's Early Intervention program. It is the process of providing services, education, and support to children under age 3 who need them because of a disability or because they are at risk of developing a disability.

Who provides Early Start in California?

The California Dept. of Education is responsible for Early Start. They contract with the Department of Developmental Services to provide services for most children. Regional Centers provide the case management and pay for services. School districts are responsible for some children in Early Start.

Who may be eligible for Early Start?

Any child under age 3 that has a disability or is at risk of having a disability may be eligible.

This may include children who:

- Were born prematurely or had low birth weight.
- Have extensive medical issues or have been hospitalized for a long period of time.
- Have chromosomal conditions such as Down Syndrome, Rett Syndrome and others.
- Had prenatal exposure to drugs or alcohol.
- Are showing signs of developmental delays.
- Experienced significant birth trauma.
- Experienced neglect or abuse.
- Have limited hearing, vision or use of limbs.

How do I get my child evaluated to see if he or she is eligible for early start services?

If your child is under three years old and you think he or she has a disability or might be at risk of developing a disability, call your local regional center. You can find which regional center serves your area here: www.dds.ca.gov

What happens next?

You will be assigned a service coordinator to walk you through the process. Once you give consent for evaluations, they will be completed to determine eligibility. Then an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) is developed, and services are started. The process must take 45 days or less from the date of the referral.

How do we decide the services my child needs?

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Child Find

Regional Centers and school districts have an obligation to identify children who have or may be at risk of having a disability. This is called Child Find. They work with medical providers, childcare providers, family resource centers and other organizations to help identify children who may be eligible. One or more of these may encourage you to have your child evaluated for Early Start services. You are encouraged to follow through on this evaluation if it is recommended. See our **Child Find** resource for more information.

Resources for more information

Dept. of Developmental Services: www.dds.ca.gov

Family Resource Network: www.frcnca.org

WestEd: www.wested.org