

Family Centered Early Supports and Services

A Guide for Families



WELCOME TO FAMILY CENTERED EARLY SUPPORTS AND SERVICES (ESS)!

THE FIRST THREE YEARS OF A CHILD'S LIFE ARE VERY IMPORTANT. Children are growing, learning, and developing at a rapid rate. You are your child's first teacher and are an important part of their development. If your child is eligible, Family Centered Early Supports and Services (ESS) can partner with you to support your child's development. Teamwork between ESS and families makes all the difference!

This booklet provides a brief overview of NH's Family Centered Early Supports and Services (ESS) system. By gaining knowledge and skills you will be able to better support your child's learning and development. This guide also includes questions you can ask your ESS providers as they assist you in helping your child. We have also included resources where you can get more information and support.



WHAT IS FAMILY CENTERED EARLY SUPPORTS AND SERVICES (ESS)?

FAMILY CENTERED EARLY SUPPORTS AND SERVICES IS NH'S EARLY INTERVENTION SYSTEM. Early Intervention is a nationwide program under Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004 (IDEA). Currently all 50 states participate. ESS is NH's Part C Program. ESS serves children birth to age 3 that have a developmental delay, an established condition or are at substantial risk for a developmental delay. The goal of ESS is to support families in helping their children grow and develop, including helping you achieve your own family goals. Your ESS providers will ask you what your wishes and dreams are for your child and what your daily routine is like.

ESS services are provided in a child's natural environment (typically the home or child care setting) by qualified professionals such as physical therapists, occupational therapists, speech pathologists, and early childhood developmental specialists. The activities your child does and/or enjoys everyday are used to help your child learn. Having fun and building relationships through play is an important part of the services and support that ESS provides.

WHO PAYS FOR ESS SERVICES?

WHILE ESS SERVICES ARE VOLUNTARY AND CONFIDENTIAL, you will be asked to provide access to your private and/or public (Medicaid) insurance. It is important that you understand that billing insurance helps fund ESS services. Families are not responsible for payment of ESS services and no family is turned away due to an inability to pay. You are not required to give access to your private insurance, however it is important to give access to your medicaid insurance and update it as needed. Your ESS Service Coordinator can help you if you have questions about access to insurance or insurance billing, or for help in applying for Medicaid.

WHO IS ELIGIBLE FOR ESS?

A CHILD AND FAMILY LIVING IN NEW HAMPSHIRE MAY BE ELIGIBLE FOR ESS if their child is experiencing *developmental delays or atypical behaviors, has a diagnosed or established condition that has a high probability of resulting in a delay, or is at risk for substantial developmental delays* if early supports and services are not provided. ESS is delivered throughout the state through the Area Agency system, administered by the Bureau of Developmental Services of the NH Department of Health and Human Services. There are no income guidelines for ESS.

The following are the eligibility categories for ESS:

- **Established Condition** - a physical or mental condition with a high likelihood of resulting in a developmental delay (even when there is no delay at the time of referral to ESS). Examples include, but are not limited to: autism, lead poisoning, fetal alcohol spectrum disorder, severe toxic exposure, spina bifida, blindness, hearing impairments and Down Syndrome.
- **Developmental Delay** - a 33% delay in one or more of the following areas:
 - Physical Development - This includes movement, balance, fine and gross motor skills, and sensory development such as seeing and hearing.
 - Cognitive Development- This includes skills pertaining to learning and thinking.
 - Communication Development – This includes your child's skills in understanding the spoken word and ability to express themselves verbally.

- Social or Emotional Development - This refers to your child's ability to make and maintain relationships.
- Adaptive Development - This refers to the skills used for daily living, such as dressing, eating, toileting and washing.

○ **Atypical Behaviors** - behaviors documented by the family or others (including the evaluation team) that are outside the parameters of typical child development. Examples include:

- Extreme fearfulness or other modes of distress that do not respond to comforting by caregivers;
- Self-injurious behavior or extremely aggressive behavior;
- Extreme apathy; and
- Unusual and persistent patterns of inconsolable crying, chronic sleep disorder, regression in functioning, absence of pleasure, disinterest in adults and peers and inability to communicate emotional needs.



- **At Risk for Substantial Developmental Delay** - experiencing 5 or more of the following factors. These factors could affect your child or you (the parent) or a combination of your child and/or you.

Documented conditions, events, or circumstances affecting the child including:

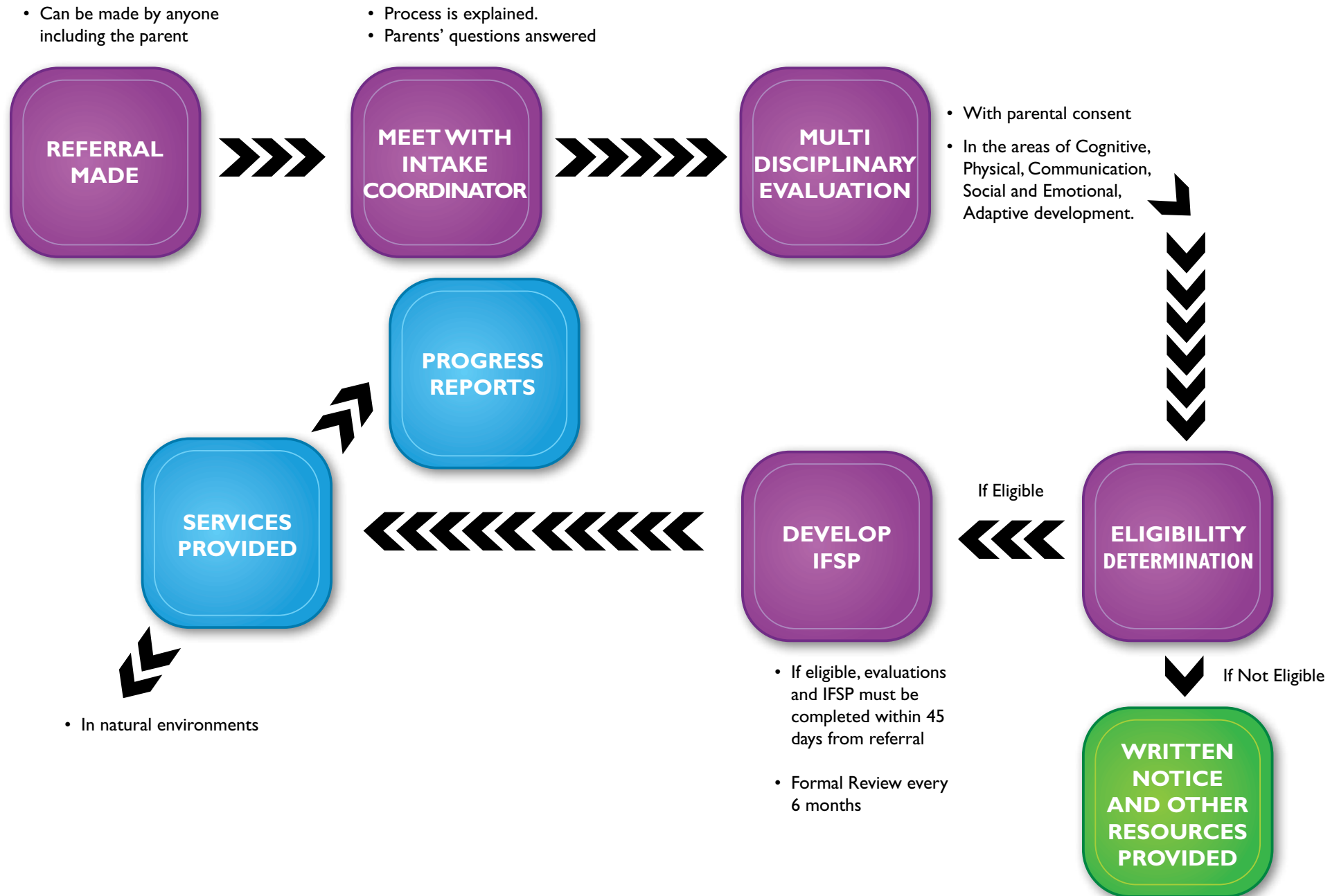
- Birth weight less than 4lbs
- Respiratory distress syndrome
- Gestational age less than 27 weeks or more than 44 weeks
- Asphyxia (loss of oxygen at birth)
- Infection
- History of abuse and neglect
- Prenatal drug exposure due to mother's substance abuse or withdrawal
- Prenatal alcohol exposure due to mother's substance abuse or withdrawal
- Nutritional problems that interfere with growth and development
- Inter-cranial hemorrhage grade III or grade IV
- Homelessness

Documented conditions, events, or circumstances affecting the family including:

- Developmental disability
- Psychiatric disorder
- Family history of lack of stable housing
- Education less than the 10th grade
- Social isolation
- Substance addiction
- Age of either parent is less than 18 years
- Parent/child interactional disturbances (example: failure to bond by parent or child)
- Founded child abuse or neglect



FAMILY CENTERED EARLY SUPPORTS AND SERVICES AT A GLANCE



HOW DOES THE PROCESS START?

ANYONE WHO HAS A CONCERN ABOUT A CHILD'S DEVELOPMENT CAN MAKE A REFERRAL TO ESS, including, and especially, you, the parent. ESS is a resource for you. If someone other than you makes the referral, you will be notified that a referral has been made and will be asked for consent to proceed before any evaluations are done or services provided.

If you think that your child and family may be eligible, then you should make a referral to the ESS Intake Coordinator at your Area Agency. Local Area Agencies are responsible for providing ESS services. Sometimes as parents we are unsure of whether or not we should make a referral or if there "really is a concern". Parents should feel comfortable in trusting their instincts and just as comfortable contacting ESS to help in better understanding their child's developmental needs.

AREA AGENCIES

Region 1 – Northern Human Services

Region 2 – PathWAYS of the River Valley

Region 3 – Lakes Region Community Services

Region 4 – Community Bridges

Region 5 – Monadnock Developmental Services, Inc.

Region 6 – Gateways Community Services

Region 7 – Moore Center Services, Inc.

Region 8 – OneSky Community Services, Inc.

Region 9 – Community Partners

Region 10 – Region 10 Community Supports Services, Inc.

For more information on the Area Agencies, please visit <http://www.dhhs.nh.gov/dcbcs/bds/agencies.htm>



Once a referral has been made (once the phone call has been received by the Area Agency), ESS has 45 days to complete an evaluation, determine eligibility and, if your child is eligible, develop an Individualized Family Support Plan (IFSP).

WHAT HAPPENS AFTER A REFERRAL TO ESS IS MADE?

AFTER A REFERRAL IS MADE TO ESS, the Intake Coordinator at the Area Agency will contact you to get more information about you and your child, explain the process to you, and schedule an intake visit.

The Intake Coordinator will set-up a convenient time to meet with your family at your home or another location to gather more information about your child and family and to complete the necessary paperwork to move forward in the process. Typically during the intake visit, a multi-disciplinary evaluation visit is scheduled. Take time and ask any questions that you have. The Intake Coordinator is there to help and support you. The Intake Coordinator is also the interim Service Coordinator until your child is found eligible and an ESS Service Coordinator is assigned.

WHAT IS SERVICE COORDINATION?

ONE OF THE IMPORTANT ROLES OF ESS IS TO HELP YOU **CONNECT** with the supports and services that you and your child need and to ensure your family understands their rights in services. This is known as Service Coordination. ESS Service Coordinators are there for you, assisting you in the process and connecting you to resources.

WHAT IS A MULTI-DISCIPLINARY EVALUATION?

AT THE INTAKE VISIT, the Intake Coordinator will ask for your written consent to evaluate your child. No evaluations can be done without you first giving written permission.

A team of providers from at least two different fields (for example; an occupational therapist and a speech therapist) conducts the multi-disciplinary evaluation for eligibility for ESS. The evaluation team will use one of two approved evaluation tools (Hawaii Early Learning Profile (HELP) or Infant Toddler Developmental Assessment (IDA)) to assess all areas of your child's development, to identify strengths and weaknesses and gain a total picture of your child's development.

The evaluation will include an assessment of the following areas:

1. Physical Development
2. Cognitive Development
3. Communication Development
4. Social or Emotional Development
5. Adaptive Development

Even if you do not have any concerns about all of the areas of your child's development, the evaluation will assess each of the 5 developmental areas. It is important to capture your child's strengths as strength in one area can help in another area. Make sure to ask the Intake Coordinator if you have further questions about the evaluation process or developmental areas.

The evaluation usually takes 1-2 hours to complete and review the results. In most cases, the day the evaluation is completed, you will learn whether or not your child is eligible for ESS.

WHAT INFORMATION SHOULD I SHARE WITH ESS DURING THE INTAKE AND EVALUATION PROCESS?

AS THE PARENT, you are the most important member of your child's team. You will be present during the entire evaluation and are encouraged to participate and share as much as possible with the other members of the team. The ESS providers will ask you questions about your child's development and may even ask for your help in working with your child during the evaluation. You may also invite any person you wish to the evaluation either to support you or because they know your child and have valuable information to share with the evaluation team. You know your child best and your ESS team looks forward to you sharing your daily routines, priorities, goals, dreams, concerns and what you feel your child and family will benefit from.

The information that you share about your child and family is essential to having successful family outcomes. The more information that you are able to provide to the team, the more ESS will be able to assist you in supporting your child's development.

Examples of Sharing Topics:

- **Your child's likes/dislikes**
- **Things that frustrate your child**
- **Ways you are able to calm your child**
- **Describe your child's behavior**
- **Information about changes to your family**
- **Things your family enjoys doing together**

Once the evaluation is completed, the ESS team will discuss whether your child is eligible for services. To determine this, the IFSP team will review the results of the evaluation and other information that you have shared with them.

If you have questions about why your child qualifies for services, ask the ESS evaluation team. They are happy to answer your questions and address any concerns.

WHAT IF MY CHILD IS NOT ELIGIBLE FOR ESS?

IN THE EVENT THAT YOUR CHILD DOES NOT MEET THE ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA FOR ESS, you will be provided with written notice explaining the findings of the evaluation and recommendations of the team. This will also include the names, addresses and phone numbers of other supports, services and advocacy groups within the community that can help meet the needs of your family. They will also inform you that you have the right to challenge the determination of eligibility results and offer you the steps on how to do this.

WHAT HAPPENS IF MY CHILD IS FOUND ELIGIBLE FOR ESS?

IF YOUR CHILD IS FOUND ELIGIBLE FOR ESS the team will schedule a meeting with you and your family to develop an Individualized Family Support Plan (IFSP). IFSPs are developed by IFSP Teams. The IFSP Team includes you, the ESS Service Coordinator, other therapists/providers who will be providing services to your child and anyone else that you would like to be on the team.

The IFSP must be developed and signed by you, the parent within 45 days from the date your child was referred to ESS. Because of the time requirements, some ESS programs complete the evaluation, determine eligibility and write the IFSP during the same visit. Other ESS programs complete the evaluation, and then schedule a visit for developing the IFSP. Either way, please feel free to ask questions, talk with each other and plan for your child. If you do not feel comfortable completing all these steps in one meeting, you can ask to schedule another meeting to write the IFSP. It is important to know that ESS cannot provide services without your written consent and services will not begin until you sign the IFSP.



WHO IS THE IFSP TEAM?

IFSP Team members include:

- Family
- ESS Service Coordinator
- ESS Service Providers
- Any other persons chosen by your family

WHAT DOES AN IFSP INCLUDE?

THE IFSP IS A LEGAL DOCUMENT – serving as an agreement between ESS and you, the parent. The IFSP is the road map for ESS services; it guides the IFSP team in providing the necessary supports and services to your child and family. The IFSP will describe the strengths of your child and family and help guide you toward achieving the goals that you have.

The IFSP must contain the following information:

- A statement of your child's present level of physical development, cognitive development, communication development, social/emotional development and adaptive development.
- A statement of major outcomes expected to be achieved by your child and family, along with strategies and ways progress will be measured so we know how your child is doing.
- A statement of exactly what services will be needed to meet the needs of your child and family.
- The natural environments in which the supports and services will be provided. The “who will do it, what will be done, where it will happen, and how often” of the plan including the projected start date for each service and duration.
- A summary of documented medical services your child may need such as hospitalization, surgery, or medication and to the extent possible, available funding sources. If you do not have Medicaid, but think you may be eligible, ESS can assist you with the application, help you connect with special medical services if this is appropriate, or assist you in accessing other low cost health resources.

- The name, telephone number, agency and location of the service coordinator and the names of all of your team members.
- Beginning at 24 months, the steps that will be taken to support the transition from ESS to the school district, Area Agency services for children 3 years and older and community programs available to help your child and family.
- Your Signature - Services cannot begin or be changed without your signature. You must agree for services to begin and agree that you understand your rights.

The IFSP is intended to address your family's needs as well as your child's needs, so you will be asked about your family's strengths, needs and concerns. These may seem like strange questions but ESS wants to get to know you and help integrate services and supports into the activities you already enjoy. If you are willing to share this information, the IFSP should include a statement of your family's strengths, needs and concerns relating to promoting your child's development. Your Service Coordinator will also give you a copy of the *Know Your Rights* manual, if you haven't been given one. The *Know Your Rights* manual contains information about parental rights that are guaranteed by Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004 to families with children eligible for ESS.

WHAT TYPES OF SUPPORTS AND SERVICES ARE AVAILABLE FOR MY CHILD AND FAMILY?

THE IFSP TEAM WILL LOOK AT ALL OF THE FOLLOWING supports and services that may help your child achieve the IFSP goals:

- Service coordination
- Special instruction
- Speech-language pathology
- Physical therapy
- Occupational therapy
- Family training, counseling and home visits
- Health services that enable a child to benefit from the other supports and services provided by ESS
- Medical services for diagnostic and evaluation purposes only
- Assistive technology- including evaluation for, providing the acquisition of, and training for the family and child
- Audiology services- including evaluation, medical referrals and prevention of hearing loss
- Psychological services
- Social work services
- Vision and mobility services
- Transportation and mileage reimbursement when appropriate to receive early intervention services

WHERE WILL MY CHILD RECEIVE SERVICES?

ESS SERVICES ARE PROVIDED IN A CHILD'S NATURAL ENVIRONMENT. This means any place where young children live, work and play. This includes, but is not limited to, your home, a child care setting, a park, and/or the grocery store and more.

You may have heard other families talk about their child having therapy 3 times a week at a clinic or hospital. This is called a "medical" model of treatment and is very different from the services you will receive through ESS. One of the goals of ESS is to teach you, the parent, ways to best meet the developmental needs of your child. ESS will combine their skills with your knowledge of who your child is and how your family works, and share ways to implement support for your child's developmental needs into your daily routine.

SO, WHO WILL BE WORKING WITH ME AND MY CHILD?

ESS PROVIDERS ARE DEVELOPMENTAL SPECIALIST WITH MANY DIFFERENT PROFESSIONAL BACKGROUNDS. ESS providers often work together providing each other strategies in one domain while providing therapy in another. Their approach is to work with you, the family, to address your child's developmental needs. ESS providers are trained to support the whole child. All areas of the child's development is important. An ESS provider uses play to build developmental skills. Ask questions about the techniques a provider is using. They are a resource to you and expect to be asked why they do what they do.

WHAT IS MY ROLE IN ESS VISITS?

THE PHILOSOPHY OF HOW ESS DELIVERS SERVICES IS A FAMILY CENTERED APPROACH – making parent

participation critical. You will have the opportunity to learn specific treatment techniques as well as what milestones to look for as your child progresses.

As a member of the IFSP team, it is important that you understand the process and feel comfortable working with the other members of your team. If you do not understand something, you are encouraged to ask questions.

Here are some things to think about:

- During your visit, make a list of questions that you may have while participating in the session.
- Do you understand everything that is being explained?
- Do you know why they are doing a particular activity with your child?
- Would it be helpful for you to receive handouts describing how to do a technique with your child?
- If you do not feel comfortable performing something that a specialist showed you, ask for another demonstration.
- Practice strategies with your therapist during the visit. How do you learn best?
- Ask for examples of ways that you can incorporate the strategies and techniques into your day and how to make it fun.

- Do you want to involve other family members? Ask how to do this.
- Try out what has been suggested. What is working? What needs some refining? What is absolutely not working?
- How do you feel watching another person work with your child? Express feelings to the therapist.

WHAT IF MY CHILD'S THERAPY IS BEING PROVIDED IN A CHILD CARE SETTING?

BECAUSE ESS IS PROVIDED IN NATURAL SETTINGS, some children may receive their services while they are at child care and you are not available to participate. Each time an ESS provider works with your child, the provider will write notes to show what your child has been doing and the progress your child has made. Copies of these notes may be provided to you. Ask your ESS Service Coordinator for a copy of these notes. You can get these notes even if you are there during the session. You should feel comfortable asking your ESS Service Coordinator and/or providers for handouts describing how to do a technique with your child or other information so that you may continue to support your child at home.



HOW WILL I KNOW WHAT PROGRESS MY CHILD IS MAKING IN THEIR THERAPY AND SERVICES?

EACH TIME AN ESS PROVIDER WORKS WITH YOUR CHILD, they are assessing your child's abilities and providing services and supports to help your child continue to grow. The provider will write notes to show the progress your child has made. As your family changes and your child is capable of doing new things, you may also want to change the outcomes that you are working toward.

There is a **formal review of the IFSP every six months** where the IFSP team will have an opportunity to discuss the IFSP and make any changes that are necessary to facilitate the achievement of developmental milestones and goals. At any time, you or any other member of the IFSP team can request an IFSP meeting/review. The IFSP team can review the current IFSP; discuss any changes, and how the changes affect your child and family's goals. Updated goals and plans will be added to the IFSP for you to review and sign.



HOW OFTEN IS MY CHILD REEVALUATED?

YOUR CHILD'S SERVICE PROVIDERS WILL BE CONTINUALLY ASSESSING YOUR CHILD'S PROGRESS.

Consultation with a specialist may occur if there are concerns about a specific area of development. The decision to conduct a formal multi-disciplinary evaluation is made by the IFSP Team. Talk with the rest of the IFSP Team if you would like to request your child have another multi-disciplinary evaluation.

The IFSP will be reviewed every six months and modified for the achievements that your child has made. You are an integral part of the review and no changes to the IFSP can be made without your written consent.

WHAT HAPPENS WITH ALL THE INFORMATION ESS HAS ABOUT MY CHILD?

SINCE THIS IS A FEDERAL PROGRAM, the state is required to collect certain information and report on the number of children being served and how programs are carrying out their work. This helps the state make sure that children are seen quickly and that services and supports are effective. ESS services are confidential and child and family specific information cannot be shared without your prior written consent.

Your ESS Service Coordinator may ask for your written permission to talk and share written information with other professionals (such as doctors, local schools districts, and other community-based programs) regarding your child. You will be asked to sign a written release before any information is shared. It is important that services and resources be coordinated as much as possible to make sure your child and family's needs are met.

WHAT HAPPENS IF I MOVE?

IF YOU MOVE TO ANOTHER PART OF NH your ESS Service Coordinator will assist you in making sure your records are transferred to the new ESS program. They can help you with introductions and a seamless connection. Part C (Early Intervention) is a nationwide program. If you are moving to another state, your ESS Service Coordinator will assist you in connecting to the Part C Program in that state.

WHO DO I CALL IF I HAVE QUESTIONS ABOUT ESS?

YOUR ESS SERVICE COORDINATOR IS A RESOURCE FOR YOU REGARDING ESS SERVICES, your rights, as well as other community services. They are there to help you and your child. If you have questions about your rights, the yellow *Know Your Rights* book that you received at intake and at every IFSP review is a great resource. If you have further questions, contact your ESS Program Director or Area Agency contact.

WHAT HAPPENS IF MY CHILD NO LONGER NEEDS ESS SERVICES?

SOMETIMES IT IS DETERMINED THAT A CHILD NO LONGER NEEDS ESS SERVICES because they have reached all of their goals. If it is determined that your child no longer requires ESS, you will receive prior written notice that ESS will be ending and have a meeting to plan for transition out of ESS. During this meeting, your Service Coordinator will help you to develop a plan for the transition from ESS and provide you with available community resources and who to contact if you feel that your child may benefit from services at a later date.

Also, if at any point you feel that your child no longer needs ESS, you may voluntarily stop services. However, eligibility for ESS ends when your child turns 3 regardless of whether your child has reached all of their goals.



MY CHILD IS 2 AND MY SERVICE COORDINATOR WANTS TO START PLANNING FOR MY CHILD'S TRANSITION. WHAT IS THAT?

ELGIBILITY FOR ESS ENDS WHEN YOUR CHILD TURNS 3. In order to make sure that your child's developmental needs are met and that there are no gaps in services, your ESS Service Coordinator will start helping you to plan for your child's transition out of ESS when they turn 2 years old. The transition planning will be a part of your child's IFSP and will help guide you in making the best decisions for your child when he turns 3. As part of the transition planning process, your ESS Service Coordinator will discuss what community options, including preschool special education services, may be available for your child.

The ESS Service Coordinator will also talk with you about continued Area Agency services. Children who qualify may have access to Area Agency services after the age of 3 including Family Support. Ask your ESS Service Coordinator for more information about Area Agency service eligibility and the process for determining whether or not your child is eligible.

WHAT HAPPENS ONCE MY CHILD TURNS 3?

IT IS IMPORTANT TO KNOW THAT ONCE YOUR CHILD TURNS 3, they are no longer eligible for services under ESS and those services will stop on your child's 3rd birthday. Once your child turns 3, there may be community-based services that can support your child's and family's needs including community preschool programs, outpatient therapy programs and continued Area Agency services. Some children may qualify for preschool special education services from their local school district. Not all children who receive ESS qualify for preschool special education. As part of the transition planning process, your Service Coordinator will discuss these options with you and help you to review and plan for all your options.



RESOURCES FOR FAMILIES

PARENT INFORMATION CENTER

Provides telephone assistance and free training for families about ESS and special education
603-224-7005 or toll-free at 1-800-947-7005
or visit our website at www.nhspeciald.org.

NH FAMILY VOICES

Supporting families with children with special health care needs
Toll Free In State: (800) 852-3345 X 4525
or (603) 271-4525
<http://www.nhfv.org/>

FAMILY CENTERED EARLY SUPPORTS AND SERVICES, BUREAU OF DEVELOPMENTAL SERVICES

271-5060 or on the web at
<http://www.dhhs.state.nh.us/dcbcs/bds/earlysupport/index.htm>

FAMILY RESOURCE CONNECTION

Statewide library and clearinghouse providing information, resources, and support concerning aspects of caring for, educating and raising children
TOLL- FREE (NH only) 1-800-298-4321
<http://www.nh.gov/nhsl/frc/index.html>

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STATE OF NEW HAMPSHIRE
**American Recovery
and Reinvestment Act**

