



# How to Find Early Intervention Services

*Family-centered services are at the heart of early intervention for children under 3.*

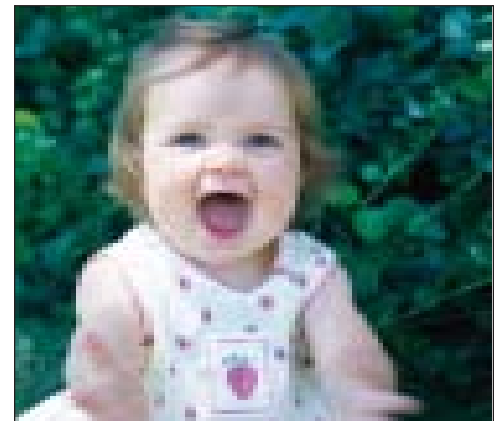
**T**he moment you have a child with a disability, you enter a world of terms, concepts, and laws that may be unfamiliar and confusing. It can feel like you have entered a country where you don't recognize any landmarks and everyone speaks another language.

Fortunately, others who have gone before you have marked the route through this territory. Here is a simple road map\* to guide you along the path of early intervention services.

Like any other trip, this one starts at the beginning—with the discovery that your child has a disability or developmental delay. “Whether the diagnosis occurs at birth or later, eligible children

from birth up to age 3 may receive early intervention services designed to meet their developmental needs and the needs of their families,” said Judy Swett, a PACER advocate.

It is all thanks to the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA 2004). Part C of IDEA includes early intervention services and applies to children from birth to age 3. Part B of IDEA covers education services for those ages 3-21. Regardless of their age, all eligible children may receive services to help them learn and grow. In Minnesota, that includes a free and appropriate public education (FAPE).



To find out if your child qualifies for early intervention services, you can ask your school district for an evaluation. If you prefer, your doctor, child care provider, or other family member may make the request for you.

The evaluation can begin once you give your written permission. At that time, you will be part of a team that is formed to learn about your concerns and your child's needs. Team members typically include an early childhood teacher and other staff as needed.

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Depending on your child's disability, these professionals may include a speech therapist, physical therapist, or occupational therapist, for example. The team then focuses on all areas of your child's development and considers what early intervention services might help your family meet those needs.



At this point, other professionals may join the team, and a service coordinator will be assigned.

“Providing services that are family centered is at the heart of early intervention,” said John Hoffman, coordinator of PACER’s

early childhood program. “Your strengths, resources, needs, priorities, wishes, and concerns as they relate to the development of your child are of primary importance. Through this assessment, services will be determined.”

Once this process is complete, you and the team map out goals for your child for the next year. Early intervention services for children up to age 3 focus on developing basic skills in communication, mobility, cognition, social competence, and self-care. The resulting document

is called an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP).

If your child is 3 or older, a similar process centers on your child's needs and disability as they relate to education. This resulting document is called an Individualized Education Program (IEP).

Regardless of whether your child has an IFSP or an IEP, if he or she receives services from the school district and at least one other public agency, you can have each of those individual plans rolled into one coordinated document. This is called an Individual Interagency Intervention Plan (IIIP).

Once you have developed the road map for your child, you are on your way. If you encounter an occasional bump in the road, assistance is available. You can contact your IFSP service coordinator or IEP case manager to help smooth things out. You also can call PACER Center to learn more about your rights, responsibilities, and resources to help you along your path.

*\* Information in this article applies to families who live in Minnesota. Each state has its own policies under the federal law.*

“If your child is *not* eligible for early intervention services, the team should provide information about other resources in your community, such as Head Start, Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE), and other parent-child community programs,” Swett said. “You also can ask for an independent education evaluation or may request that the team look at your child at a later date.”

If your child *is* eligible for early intervention services, you may continue on the route to planning.

## Learn More!

If you have questions about services for your child with a disability or developmental delay, call PACER at 952-838-9000 or 800-53-PACER (in Greater Minnesota).

◆ Talk with a PACER Center advocate to explore your options, plan for next steps, and develop an effective way to communicate with your child's IFSP or IEP team.

◆ Order *Families are Important*. This 44-page guidebook describes Minnesota's early intervention system and explains how to obtain community services; screen or assess a child for delays or disabilities; develop an Individualized Family Service Plan; and more. One copy is free to Minnesota parents of young children with disabilities. Additional copies are \$7.

### Hot Fun in the Summertime

**K**ids and summer fun go together like peanut butter and jelly. Make the most of this season by planning some special outings to places that are especially welcoming to families and young children with disabilities. Here's a summer sampler of events, activities, and ideas.

#### *Simon Technology Center*

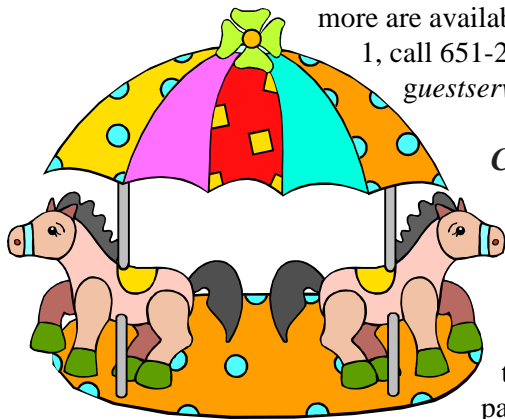
**FREE!** Here are two opportunities to explore toys and software at PACER.

◆ Come to the Early Childhood and Toy Expo **July 30, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.** Young children and infants with disabilities and their families are invited to play with and evaluate toys from the Toy Industry Foundation.

◆ Visit the Simon Technology Center during Open Hours (**Tuesdays, noon to 6 p.m.; Saturdays, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.**) and try out the latest software for children with disabilities.

Call 952-838-9000 or visit [www.pacer.org](http://www.pacer.org) for details.

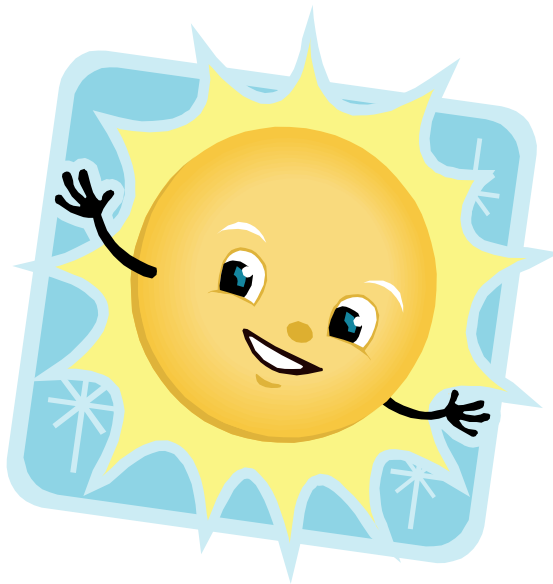
**Fairs and festivals.** County fairs, art fairs, musical festivals, and more abound across the state. Don't forget about Minnesota State Fair, Aug. 25 – Sept. 5. Assistive listening devices, sign language interpreters, and more are available. To request a copy of the Fair's accessibility guide after July 1, call 651-288-4448 (voice), 651-642-2372 (TTY), or send an e-mail to [guestservices@mnstatefair.org](mailto:guestservices@mnstatefair.org).



**City parks** around the state offer a variety of local activities, from family-friendly bandshell concerts, to picnic sites, to boat rentals. Check with your local Park & Recreation Department for details.

**State parks.** Trails, beaches, boating, camping, cabins, tours, and more are available at parks across the state. Enjoy the sights and sounds of nature at your own pace. Some state parks are fully accessible to people with physical disabilities. Learn more at [www.dnr.state.mn.us/open\\_outdoors/parks/highlights.html](http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/open_outdoors/parks/highlights.html).

**Story times.** Many libraries and bookstores offer free story times for young children. Some include bilingual programs or sign language interpreters. Check your local newspaper or call your neighborhood library for more information.



### It's Summertime...and the Readin' is Breezy

*You can use books and other activities to build your child's literacy skills.*

Summer is a perfect time to roll out the charming, heartwarming books of early childhood. Babies start learning from the minute they are born. Reading to them regularly throughout their infancy and childhood helps them gain the literacy skills they will need to read, write, speak, and listen to the best of their ability.

Literacy isn't just about reading. It also includes talking to your child about the objects in his or her world, responding to coos and cries, singing songs, encouraging the use of crayons and other writing tools, and more. In other words, opportunities for literacy are everywhere you go!

No matter what your child's developmental delay or disability, you can integrate many literacy-rich experiences into every part of your child's day. For example, in addition to reading to your child every day, you can:

*Talk and sing to your child while you go about daily tasks.*

- ◆ Name clothing, body parts, food, colors, shapes, numbers.
- ◆ Describe the different qualities of things: soft/hard, tall/short, smooth/rough, hot/cold, etc.
- ◆ Talk with your child about the weather, scenery, vehicles, and other things you see and hear when you are in the car.
- ◆ At bath time, join your child in singing a favorite song and splashing in the tub.



#### **Build Your Child's Literacy Skills with Let's Talk Activity Cards**

Words are all around you—in the kitchen, family room, store, or park. PACER Center's *Let's Talk* activity cards provide an enjoyable, easy way to use everyday moments and places to help improve your child's vocabulary and speaking skills—the first steps in learning to read.

Designed for children ages 2 to 6, the illustrated, easy-to-read cards include simple directions. One set is free to Minnesota parents of young children with disabilities. Additional sets are \$4. To order, call PACER at 952-838-9000 or 800-537-2237 (toll free). Or visit [www.pacer.org](http://www.pacer.org).

*Show that you value reading.*

- ◆ Let your child see you reading.
- ◆ Make catalogs, books, and magazines available throughout your home.
- ◆ Visit the library regularly. Obtain a library card in your child's name.
- ◆ Give books as gifts for special occasions.

*Readin' is Breezy...  
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*Readin' is Breezy...*

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*Encourage writing:*

- ◆ Keep crayons, pencils, markers, pens, and paintbrushes easily available.
- ◆ Let your child help you make a grocery list or sign a birthday card.
- ◆ Put your child's drawings on the refrigerator at child's-eye level.

Depending on your child's need, you may benefit from assistive devices that can help build literacy skills. PACER's Simon Technology Center offers free consultations by appointment to explore devices, hardware, and software that can open the world of reading and writing to your child. For example, you and your child may benefit from:

- ◆ "Page fluffers," small felt discs that separate the pages of a board book for easier turning
- ◆ Multimedia software that allows you to create digital books specific to your child's interests or needs
- ◆ Hardware tools such as alternative keyboards that allow a child with limited motor skills to more easily use the computer
- ◆ Voice output devices to help a non-verbal child communicate
- ◆ Workshops to explore various technologies

Literacy skills are vitally important for *all* children. Children with disabilities may need additional support and encouragement to help them reach their potential. Fortunately, opportunities for literacy enrichment abound.

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## Grandparents Play a Special Role

Climbing up on a grandparent's lap for a snuggle and a good story is one of the great pleasures of childhood. It is more than cozy; reading to young children helps them build literacy skills and self-esteem.

If you are a grandparent but do not live close enough for regular story times, you can still help your grandchildren develop their literacy skills.

- ◆ Read a book together over the phone
- ◆ Send a book—and an audiotape of you reading it
- ◆ Tell stories about when you were their age

You may also want to join PACER's Grandparent-to-Grandparent Program. In addition to meeting others who have grandchildren with disabilities, you'll find strategies that can help you support your children and grandchildren in many ways.

Learn more! Visit [www.pacer.org](http://www.pacer.org), or call PACER at 952-838-9000.

## Technology Can Improve Literacy

Looking for tools to help your child with a disability develop literacy skills?



Contact PACER's  
Simon Technology  
Center!

Consultations  
(by appointment)  
are **free!**

Call 952-838-9000  
or visit  
[www.pacer.org/stc](http://www.pacer.org/stc).



## Words from the Wise

*Parents of children with disabilities share lessons learned about relationships, communication, and life.*

**Lauren:** I thought my husband wouldn't help me with our child with a disability. So I took charge of all the decisions. I eventually learned that he thought I *wanted* to do it all and I wouldn't *let* him help, so he didn't participate. Once I realized that maybe he wasn't participating because I didn't leave him any openings, I sat on my hands...literally. Then he started filling the silence with what he was thinking.

**Chris:** When our son with disabilities was sick in the hospital, it was a very stressful time for us. I think one thing that helped was just recognizing that there were going to be "break downs" and that we were not both required to be the strong one all of the time. We had one particularly low period, when neither of us could really function or be there for the other person. At that point we had to rely on other people, not each other, and then come back together when we were a bit stronger.



**Abby:** When our son was diagnosed with learning disabilities at age 6, it was a dream that was squashed. My husband's first comment was, "Will this go on his permanent record and follow him through college?" Len is always looking at the future, I'm looking at today. I'm outgoing, want to talk about issues, and am not afraid to deal with conflict, especially during IEP meetings. He's analytical, quiet, and reserved. He has attention deficit disorder himself, so he's not always with you where you are in the conversation. It can create conflict. We still try to talk through it and try to have each other recognize when we might be hurting each other's feelings.

**Jill:** I think it helps to understand three things: 1) There are *many* acceptable ways to deal with situations; 2) the behavior that comes naturally to you may not fit your partner; and 3) your partner's feelings are as legitimate as yours. For example, when we lost our baby girl, I needed to talk, talk, talk about it. My husband coped by trying to block it out. Fortunately, there were people in our lives who helped us identify and name those differences. I found I could safely pour out my heart to a friend and my mother-in-law, but just "be there" without words for my husband. Eventually, as a couple, we mellowed to a meeting point where we could share our individual perspectives as *individual* perspectives.

## Tell Us What You Think

How can we make *Early Childhood Connection* most useful to you? Please rate the articles in this issue, and tell us what you'd like to see in the future. Thank you!

	Didn't read	Poor	Okay	Good	Great
How to Find Early Intervention Services	1	2	3	4	5
It's Summertime...and the Readin' is Breezy	1	2	3	4	5
Hot Fun in the Summertime	1	2	3	4	5
Words from the Wise	1	2	3	4	5
Resources	1	2	3	4	5

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Your child's age & disability: \_\_\_\_\_

Mail to: ECC, PACER Center, 8161 Normandale Blvd., Mpls., MN 55437, or fax to 952-838-0199.

E-mail: [pacer@pacer.org](mailto:pacer@pacer.org).

**Jeanne:** My advice is to be proactive. Before you have a problem, work on or participate in classes around communication. When I remarried, I knew blending a family could be traumatic, so we took a marriage and family course on communication for blended families. It was great and saw us through many a bump in the road. It helped us find support from other families. Also, don't isolate yourself. Talk with others, and you will find out there are more people like you than different from you. You will learn some great tips!

### Improve Your Communication Skills

Whether you are talking with your spouse, a relative, a doctor, or an educator, good communication skills can help things go smoothly.

"What you say is part of communication," said Carolyn Anderson, a PACER advocate. "But how you say it, and how effectively you listen are equally important." She and others teach those skills at a variety of PACER workshops focused on communication with educators. Participants learn how to understand and improve their own communication styles; use effective communication techniques; help ensure an appropriate education for their child through communication; improve their listening skills; and resolve differences.

Visit [www.pacer.org](http://www.pacer.org) for a schedule of communication workshops. Look for PACER's new booklet on effective communication and partnership skills this fall.



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PACER is a coalition of organizations founded on the concept of Parents Helping Parents. PACER strives to improve and expand opportunities that enhance the quality of life for children and young adults with disabilities and their families. Partial funding for this Early Childhood Project is provided by Minnesota Department of Children, Families & Learning.

## RESOURCES

### Log on to [www.pacer.org](http://www.pacer.org)

If you have a child with a disability, you probably have many questions. PACER is your answer place. Visit [www.pacer.org](http://www.pacer.org) for an extensive directory of links to helpful Web sites.

While you are there, also check out PACER's programs and services:

- Early Childhood Program, for information on services, workshops, and more for parents of young children with disabilities. [www.pacer.org/parent/childhood](http://www.pacer.org/parent/childhood)
- Health Information and Advocacy Center, a central resource for support, advocacy, and information about the health care system. [www.pacer.org/health](http://www.pacer.org/health)
- Simon Technology Center, for technology information, consultation, and services to help children and adults with disabilities. [www.pacer.org/stc](http://www.pacer.org/stc)

You also can call PACER at 952-838-9000; 952-838-0190 (TTY); or 800-537-2237 (Greater Minnesota).