



WHAT IS EARLY INTERVENTION?

Introduction

All children grow and develop at different rates, but when a child has a condition such as OI,

parents have additional worries about developmental delays. Early intervention programs are available to identify and treat very young children in an effort to minimize the long-term impact on the child of any developmental delay.

What is early intervention?

Early Intervention is a federal program that originated in the 1975 Education of All Handicapped Children Act. In its current form as Part H of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), the law helps states provide services to babies and toddlers under the age of 36 months who have been diagnosed with a disability, who are not learning and growing at the same rate as other children their age, or who are at risk of having developmental delays in their learning and growing. These programs are not specifically designed to treat OI, but children with OI usually qualify for services. To learn more about IDEA, check out the website at www.ideapractices.org.

Why is early intervention so important?

Research has shown that the time between birth and age 36 months is a critical developmental period in a child's life. These months offer a window of opportunity that will not be available later. Early intervention programs minimize and in some cases prevent delays in development of infants and toddlers with disabilities. They can decrease the need for special education and related services when a child enters school, and increase independence. Children whose special needs are identified and addressed during these crucial early years have a greater chance of reaching their full potential.

Are all early intervention programs the same?

Federal law allows each state to customize their Early Intervention program to match available resources, so there is significant difference between the states. Eligibility requirements and fee schedules also differ from state to state. Information about programs offered by your state can be found on the Families & Advocates Partnership

For Education web site www.fape.org. In most situations children with OI will qualify.

How does early intervention work?

Children qualify for inclusion in an Early Intervention program either because they are on the state's list of automatically eligible conditions or after being assessed by a specialist. In most jurisdictions, OI, because it is a genetic condition, automatically qualifies the child for services. Programs are designed to provide support for the child's strengths and therapy to improve the child's weaknesses. In some areas, services are offered at your home, while other localities may require going to a center. A comprehensive early intervention program addresses five areas of development, with specific services customized to meet each child's particular need:

- √ Cognitive development: how a child thinks/learns,
- √ Physical development, including vision and hearing: usually involves physical therapy,
- √ Language, speech, and communication,
- √ Social-emotional development, and
- √ Adaptive/self-help skills development.

What kinds of services will a child need?

Children who have OI often benefit from physical and occupational therapy at an early age, particularly to address delays in gross motor development. Some children, because of muscle weakness associated with OI, may also need speech therapy. Children with bone deformity may need assistance developing fine motor skills.

Talk to your pediatrician, geneticist or OI specialist about how an early intervention program might benefit your child.

How can I learn more about services in my hometown?

Support for locating services and navigating through the application process can be found from a number of sources including your pediatrician, local department of health, and local public school system. Other organizations such as Families and Advocates Partnership for Education: (www.fape.org), Family Voices (www.familyvoices.org), PACER (pacer@pacer.org), and Kinderstart (www.kinderstart.com) all offer useful information for families of children with OI. 