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What is Early Intervention and Why is it Important

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IDEA Part C services, also known as the Early Intervention Program for Infants and Toddlers with Disabilities, play a crucial role in providing developmental interventions and family-centered supports for infants and toddlers with disabilities or developmental delays. The American Academy of Pediatrics reports that 1 in 6 children has a developmental delay or disability. Early Intervention programs *provide evidence-based services* to infants and toddlers using a family-centered model that builds the competency of parents to support the needs of their children. Services are tailored to each child's unique needs and encompass various disciplines, including Physical Therapy, Speech-Language Pathology, Occupational Therapy, Nursing, Social Work, Behavioral Specialists, Nutritional Specialists, and Developmental Therapy Specialists.

The significance of IDEA Part C services lies in their ability to significantly improve children's developmental trajectories, enhancing their long-term outcomes and contributing to their overall well-being. Utah ranks last (50th) out of all 50 states for mothers who report poor mental health, and for parents of children under the age of 3 who report that they are not coping well. Persistent “toxic” stress, such as poverty, food/housing insecurity, abuse, neglect, or severe maternal depression can damage the developing brain, leading to lifelong problems in learning, behavior, and physical and mental health. Research has consistently demonstrated that Early Intervention can lead to improved cognitive, language, and motor development, reducing the need for more intensive special education or adult disability services later in life. One national study of children who participated in Early Intervention found that roughly 1/3 of infants and toddlers who received services did not have a disability at entry into kindergarten. Additionally, Early Intervention has been shown to enhance social-emotional skills, promote school readiness, and strengthen family relationships, contributing to a child's overall success in adulthood. Additionally, family-centered services, supports, and coaching help parents develop skills to engage and support their child's development and well-being.

Rigorous, long-term research conducted by the Center for the Developing Child at Harvard University has shown that Early Intervention has the following evidence-based outcomes:

- 1 in 3 infants and toddlers who received Early Intervention services did not later present with a disability or require special education.
- Neural circuits, which create the foundation for learning, behavior, and health, are most flexible or “plastic” during the first three years of life. Over time, they become increasingly difficult to change, therefore earlier intervention is more likely to be successful when delivered in that developmental window.
- Children who receive Early Intervention services achieve better outcomes in cognitive, language, and motor development. Additionally, Early Intervention has been shown to enhance social-emotional skills, promote school readiness, and strengthen family relationships contributing to a child's mental health and overall success in adulthood. Research has demonstrated that interventions are likely to be more effective and less costly when provided earlier in life rather than later.

- Early Intervention not only impacts the child but empowers the family through education, coaching, and guidance in resources to help them better understand their child's needs and abilities. Early Intervention providers are at the forefront in supporting families through the initial diagnosis, teaching family-based interventions, and shaping their views on delay and disability.

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