



Early Intervention



EI Clearinghouse Moves to Champaign

The Illinois Early Intervention (EI) Clearinghouse has moved to the Early Childhood and Parenting (ECAP) Collaborative in Champaign from the Illinois Public Health Association in Springfield. From the new location, we will continue to serve parents and EI service providers. The EI Clearinghouse provides information and resources about children’s growth and development and about developmental delays and disabilities for parents and service providers.

You can borrow materials—including books and videos—from the Clearinghouse library at no cost. In addition to lending books and videos, we distribute newsletters and resource lists. Some materials are available in both Spanish and English. Our Web site will also soon provide access to RSS feeds and EI Podcasts for parents and others interested in specific topics. The EI Clearinghouse is a member of Lincoln Trail Libraries System, and we can deliver library materials to you through the statewide library delivery system or by mail.

Our staff also answers questions related to parenting, child development, developmental delays and disabilities, as well as EI services. Illinois residents can call us toll-free at 877-275-3227 or email us through the EI Clearinghouse Web site at <http://eiclearinghouse.org>. Choose “Contact Us” on the home page to send us a question.

Clearinghouse Director Dr. Susan Fowler leads our staff of librarians and subject area experts. Dr. Fowler is a nationally recognized scholar in early intervention. Clearinghouse advisors include Dr. Tweety Yates, Dr. Jeanette McCollum, Dr. Lilian Katz, Dr. Rosa Milagros Santos, Dr. Michalene Ostrosky, and Dr. Mary-alayne Hughes.

The Early Childhood and Parenting Collaborative (ECAP) in the University of Illinois College of Education is well respected both statewide and nationally for understanding early intervention and its impact on families.

The EI Clearinghouse is now housed at the Children’s Research Center in Champaign at the south end of the University of Illinois campus in an area with ample parking. The Illinois Department of Human Services Bureau of Early Intervention funds the Clearinghouse.

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Director's Corner

This issue of *Early Intervention* focuses on “natural environments” because the setting for therapy for families with young children with disabilities or developmental delays is a topic of great interest in our state. We are also pleased to introduce a new series of parent handouts in English and Spanish (see insert) that will be a regular feature of this newsletter. And we welcome your comments and questions! We're so pleased to become the newest member of the Illinois early intervention community. With our colleagues at the Illinois Early Intervention Training Program and Provider Connections, we are committed to making life better for children and families in Illinois.

Susan Fowler



What Is the Role of the EI Service Provider?

Research suggests that when services are provided in a natural environment, the new knowledge or skills can be incorporated into routine activities of everyday life. By observing a child in the natural environment, an EI service provider gains information that can help children meet IFSP outcomes.

An EI service provider...

- Recognizes parents as the child's first teachers. She learns about the child's interests, strengths, abilities, and experiences from their point of view. She then provides parents with strategies that take advantage of opportunities to support the child's development in the course of everyday life.
- Identifies learning opportunities that are interesting and engaging to the child. The goal of the activities is to enhance the child's development.
- Helps parents identify skills that will help the child be more successful in the natural environment.
- Points out barriers to the child's success that a parent might not otherwise have noticed. She assists them in finding strategies that will reduce the barriers.
- Suggests adaptations to materials or routines to increase the child's ability to participate. In this way, she is able to suggest and incorporate many more opportunities for children to strengthen existing skills and to practice and master new skills.

For More Information

Dunst, C. J., Bruder, M. B., Trivette, C. M., Hamby, D., Raab, M., & McLean, M. (2002). Characteristics and consequences of everyday natural learning opportunities. *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education, 21*(2), 68-92.

Dunst, C. J., Trivette, C. M., Hamby, D. W., & Bruder, M. B. (2006). Influences of contrasting natural learning environment experiences on child, parent and family well-being. *Journal of Developmental and Physical Disabilities, 18*(3), 235-250.

Natural Environments

The National Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center (NECTAC) describes natural environments as settings where services are “provided in a location where infants and toddlers of the same age without disabilities would typically be found. This could be in the home, a child care center, a family child care location, Early Head Start, a story hour, or other community-based program. Service providers will work with you to choose learning opportunities for your child within the context of everyday activities such as bathing, changing, dressing, eating, playing, etc. Research has shown that community life provides children with many learning experiences and opportunities and children learn skills best when they are involved in these activities as part of daily life. Time spent at the playground, the library, or playing with friends can encourage a child's development and positive behavior.” (NECTAC: <http://www.nectac.org/topics/inclusion/familycorner/defs.asp>)

Natural Environments: Where *All* Children Belong



Early intervention services for children with disabilities used to be provided in an office, clinic, or a special center. Now, by law, children from birth to 36 months who have or are at risk for developmental delays are entitled to receive early intervention (EI) services in their natural environments. Natural environments are settings that include the same activities and routines that children of similar ages without disabilities take part in. The activities might take place at home or other places the family and the child go during the course of their everyday lives. An EI service provider helps parents adapt daily routines and activities.

What Should I Expect?

The EI service provider may bring in toys or adaptive equipment but most often uses items in your home or in places where you would like to go with your child. By observing your child in a natural environment, she can help your child meet IFSP outcomes. The EI service provider can also support your child's caregiver if your child goes to child care. She can suggest ideas to help provide a good learning environment for your child. Here are some things to expect:

- Plan to discuss your priorities for your child's learning. Parents know which activities or routines are most important for their child.
- Talk about some places where you spend time with your child. Talk about other places you would like to go—the grocery store, park, or library. How do you want to spend your time there? She may go with you to these places. She can help you come up with ideas that will help your child take part successfully in those settings.
- Ask for other information and advice about new ways that you can support your child's development. It is likely that she will also encourage you to access resources in your community that will be helpful to you and your child.

How Can I Help?

Participate! Working with the EI service provider is key. She gathers information by talking with you and other family members. She also learns by interacting with and observing your child in everyday activities.

- Get to know your EI service provider. Make him or her feel welcome.
- Share information about routines and family traditions.
- Talk about the places you and your child go. Include any early childhood programs your child attends.
- Describe the people with whom you and your child frequently interact.
- Share your thoughts about your child's strengths and abilities, interests, and likes or dislikes.
- Learn activities to promote your child's development. Include these activities in daily routines.

 For more information on Natural Environments, see the Illinois Early Intervention Clearinghouse Web site at <http://eiclearinghouse.org>.

Any opinions, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this publication are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Illinois Department of Human Services, Bureau of Early Intervention.



Resources on Natural Environments

The following books, articles, and videos are available from the Early Intervention Clearinghouse. Request them through your local public library, email us through the Clearinghouse Web site at <http://eiclearinghouse.org>, or call us at 877-275-3227.

Books & Articles

Strategies to Help Children with Special Needs Enjoy Successful Community Outings. Alan Harchik & Patricia Ladew. (2008). *Exceptional Parent*, 38(12), 75-77.

Noting that even uneventful days at home can be challenging for a child with a developmental delay, the authors discuss how parents can help their child have positive experiences with people and places in their community.

Natural Environments and Inclusion. Susan Rebecka Sandall & Michaelene Ostrosky (Eds.). Denver, CO: Division for Early Childhood of the Council for Exceptional Children, 2000. (Call # HQ 778.5.N285).

This short book addresses the importance of natural environments and inclusion. Chapters include “It’s Only Natural...to Have Early Intervention in the Environments Where It’s Needed” and “Interest-Based Natural Learning Opportunities.” The last chapter titled “Resources within Reason: Natural Environments and Inclusion” includes lists of books, videos, and Web sites.

Natural Environments: A Letter from a Mother to Friends, Families, and Professionals. Lorna Mullis. (2002). *Young Exceptional Children*, 5(3), 21-24.

A mother of a son with Down syndrome discusses how her family and child care providers work with him in natural environments to support his learning in daily



Natural Environments in the Community

Stores	Library story hours
Playlands	Dance classes
Children’s museums	Gymnastics/tumbling
Outdoor concerts	Petting zoos
Play groups	Camping
Churches	Fishing
Parades	Gardening
Fairs	Playgrounds
Picnics	Swimming pools
Movies	Time for Mommy & Me
Shopping	Water Babies
Eating out	Athletic events
Visiting friends/relatives	

activities. She urges other parents to keep trying until they find the right match that works for their family.

Video

Being a Kid: Services and Supports in Everyday Routines, Activities, and Places. 6-minute videotape. Western Media Products, 1999. (Call # HV 888.5 .B422 1999)

This video was part of a national teleconference on natural environments. It shows a family and therapist working collaboratively to integrate therapy goals into daily routines at a neighborhood playground.

Web Resources

Family-guided Approaches to Collaborative Early-intervention Training and Services (FACETS). This Web site features family stories, along with other information and training for supporting children’s development in natural environments. The materials were created for family members, EI service providers, and administrators.

<http://facets.lsi.ku.edu/html/fafamilies.shtml>

Natural Environments: The Places Where Young Children Learn Best. This brochure, produced by a Parent Information Center, suggests questions that parents can ask when choosing a natural environment setting for their child.

http://www.wpic.org/PDF/Disability_Brochures/NaturalEnvironments09_05.pdf

Seven Key Principles: Looks Like/Doesn’t Look Like. This NECTAC fact sheet provides examples of what services provided in natural environments should “look like” in practice.

http://www.nectac.org/~pdfs/topics/families/Principles_LooksLike_DoesntLookLike3_11_08.pdf

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Illinois Calendar

January 28-30, 2010
Chicago

Opening Minds: Early Education, Child Care, and School-Age Conference

Contact: Chicago Metropolitan Association for the Education of
Young Children, <http://www.chicagometroaeyc.org/opening-minds>

February 20, 2010
Sterling/Rock Falls

North of Eighty: Conference for Parents of Children with Hearing Loss

Contact: http://morgan.k12.il.us/isd/outreach_events.html

March 20, 2010
Mt. Vernon

South of Seventy: Conference for Parents of Children with Hearing Loss

Contact: http://morgan.k12.il.us/isd/outreach_events.html

May 1, 2010
Springfield

Illinois Family Leaders Collaboration Fourth Annual Parent Conference

Contact: Mary Smith at STARNET, mk-smith@wiu.edu

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