

# 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>.

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Illinois  
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Illinois Early Intervention Clearinghouse  
Early Childhood and Parenting Collaborative  
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign  
Children's Research Center  
51 Gerty Dr. • Champaign, IL 61820-7469  
Telephone: 217-333-1386 • Fax: 217-244-7732  
Toll-free: 877-275-3227 (Voice/TTY)  
Email: [Illinois-eic@illinois.edu](mailto:Illinois-eic@illinois.edu)

