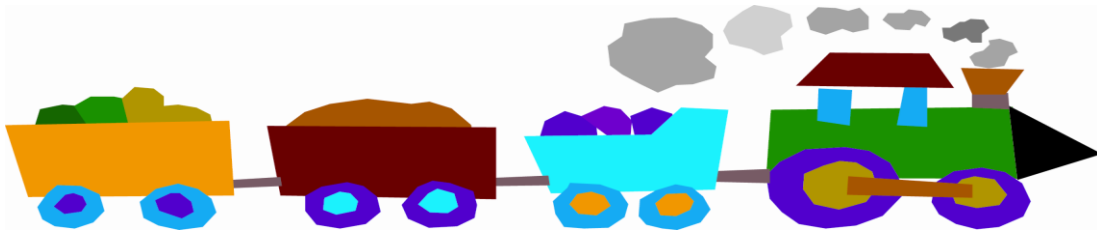


Understanding the First Steps Early Intervention System

A Family Handbook

Provided by First Steps of Southern Indiana serving Clark, Crawford, Dubois, Gibson, Floyd, Harrison, Orange, Perry, Pike, Posey, Scott, Spencer, Vanderburgh, Warrick & Washington counties.



REFERRAL AND INTAKE

Physicians, social services agencies, MCHWIC, other parties, child care centers, Department of Child Services or families themselves may make referrals. Although there are various ways a child may be identified as in need of First Steps early intervention services, all referrals will be processed through an identified System Point of Entry (SPOE). For First Steps of Southern Indiana, the System Point of Entry is located in Corydon, Indiana at Blue River Services, Inc. The address is P.O. Box 547, Corydon, IN 47112. The phone number is 1-800-941-2450.

Once First Steps receives a referral, an Intake Coordinator begins the process of evaluation with your family to determine whether or not the child is eligible for First Steps services. He/she will schedule a visit with you to talk about why your child was referred, inform you of your rights, and together help you decide whether to proceed with eligibility determination. The Intake Coordinator will also explain the eligibility determination process, assessment, and development of the initial IFSP process noting that it must be completed within 45 calendar days.

The Intake Coordinator will ask for your written consent to begin the process and to gather medical information. He/she will also inform you of other programs such as Hoosier Healthwise, Children's Special Health Care Services (CSHCS), and will assist with completion of the application if needed. He/she will also discuss other components of the First Steps system such as Service Coordination, assessments, cost participation, other various funding options, early intervention services and support, and transition.

Since Indiana First Steps is a *Cost Share Program*, your Intake Coordinator will begin discussing Cost Participation, a sliding scale fee program. You will be asked to verify your family's income. You may request that expenses related to the medical and/or personal care of a family member be considered in the calculation of your family income and co-payment amount. Expenses that may be deducted from the family's gross income must be out-of-pocket expenses for which the family will not be reimbursed. Such expenses would include: health insurance copayments and premiums, prescriptions, and hospital expenses for any household member. Your co-pay would be based on this adjusted income for your family.

Most importantly, the Intake Coordinator will listen to you and assist you in identifying priorities, concerns, and resources for your child and family.

EVALUATION AND ASSESSMENT

Evaluation is the process that determines whether a child is eligible for services. An assessment will look at the child's strengths and needs in all five areas of development: Communication, social-emotional, self-help, cognitive, and motor development. Two members of the Assessment Team will complete an assessment in your child's natural setting (usually home or childcare) that will help you and other members of the team learn more about your child's strengths and needs and to help the team to understand what your child can do now and what he or she is ready to learn.

ELIGIBILITY

To be able to receive Early Intervention services in the First Steps system, a child must be determined eligible. The eligibility process includes a review of documentation of your child's current development and his/her medical history. The Assessment Team includes members who can evaluate records and information to address your concerns for your child, such as language development or motor development. The team will also include the child's physician and other professionals who work with your child or family.

Families who are eligible to participate in the Indiana First Steps System have children under the age of three (3) who:

- *Are experiencing developmental delays (25% or -2 standard deviations from the mean in one or more developmental domains) or*
- *Are experiencing developmental delays (20% or -1.5 standard deviations from the mean in two or more developmental domains) or*
- *Have a diagnosed physical or mental condition that has a high probability of resulting in a developmental delay. [A child with a diagnosis may be eligible and not currently in need of services; in that case, the family will receive information on their rights, the child's current developmental level, community supports/services, and how to contact the system should they have further concerns or the child's status changes.]*

ELIGIBILITY AND PLANNING FOR THE IFSP

If a child is determined eligible, the family and Intake Coordinator will begin planning for the Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP). This is the family's written plan for services. The evaluation may serve as the starting point for the IFSP. If your child is determined not eligible for services, the Intake Coordinator will help you identify other services available in your community.

IFSP DEVELOPMENT

Since you may have specific concerns about development because of assessment results, or your own worries for your child, your family's priorities, concerns, and resource needs guide the IFSP. A summary of your child's present levels and strengths are also included on the IFSP.

The initial IFSP team reviews evaluation and assessment information as well as family priorities, concerns, and resources. The IFSP team, including you, work together to determine the outcomes/changes you would like to see. The team develops the strategies and activities necessary to address the outcomes, and list what the family and team will be working on. *The IFSP must include:*

- *Services to be provided*
- *Name of service coordinator*
- *When services will be provided*
- *How services will be provided*
- *When services will begin*
- *How long services will be provided*
- *Who will provide the services*

Whenever possible, the natural environment, or places that your child and family already go, will be where your child receives early intervention services. This may be at home, childcare, or wherever works best for your family.

SERVICE COORDINATION

Each child will have a Service Coordinator who is specially trained to coordinate the various services your child receives. Your service coordinator may act as a resource guide, advocate, etc. His/her job is to make sure that all of the early intervention services in the IFSP are provided and work well together. The Service Coordinator will review outcomes continuously for appropriateness and relevance. If your child needs additional services, he/she will help your family access these.

You and your Service Coordinator will be in contact with each other at least once a month. The Service Coordinator will conduct quarterly and six month reviews and facilitate the development of a new IFSP annually.

EARLY INTERVENTION SERVICES

Early Intervention Services that are available to you and your child include:

- **Audiology:** An audiologist will test your child's ability to hear different sounds. They can determine, through a variety of tests, if your child has a hearing loss and what the degree of loss may be.
- **Developmental Therapy:** The Developmental Therapist is trained in infant/toddler development in areas of communication, motor skills, cognition, self help and social skills. Developmental therapy includes designing learning environments and activities to meet the individual developmental needs of your child. This would include working with you to develop activities that will promote development in your child that you and other caregivers can do throughout the day with your child.
- **Family education, training, counseling** and home visits are provided to assist the family in understanding the special needs of the child and enhancing the child's development. Early Intervention providers credentialed at the specialist level may provide these services.
- **Health Services:** Health services may be necessary to enable a child to benefit from other early intervention services during the time the child is receiving the other early intervention service.
- **Nursing Services:** Nursing services are individual interventions conducted with the child and/or family that support the other early intervention services and ensure that the medical and health needs of your child are included in your child's IFSP as appropriate.
- **Nutrition Services:** The Nutritionist is concerned with your child's food and nutritional requirements for good health.
- **Occupational Therapy:** The Occupational Therapist helps your child master basic skills for daily living and independence. These areas are termed "fine motor" and "adaptive" skills.
- **Physical Therapy:** The Physical Therapist focuses on your child's gross motor skills or the ability to move and effectively use his/her legs, arms, and head.
- **Psychological Services:** The Psychologist is concerned with your child's learning and social/emotional development. Psychological services primarily focus on working with problems in a child and family's living situation, which affect the child's utilization of early intervention services.
- **Social Work:** Social Workers provide family counseling, work with parent groups, coordinate services, and help to link families to other community resources and services.
- **Speech Therapy:** Communication development occurs in two primary ways: receptive skills (what your child understands) and expressive skills (your child's ability to communicate with you in a variety of ways).
- **Vision Services:** For children with visual impairments, professionals specially trained in mobility (getting around safely and independently) may work with your child.
- **Service Coordination** is the only one, consistent service that ALL families with a child eligible for early intervention receive. Your service coordinator is responsible for:
 - Helping you obtain the services you need.
 - Coordinating early intervention services with other services your family is getting.
 - Making sure your child and family get all the services in your IFSP.
 - Making sure services are delivered on time.
 - Helping you find service providers.
 - Informing you about advocacy services.
 - Making sure six month reviews and annual evaluations of your IFSP are completed.
 - Helping you make any changes to your IFSP that may be needed between the six month reviews and annual evaluations.

WE NEED YOUR HELP

LOCAL PLANNING AND COORDINATING COUNCIL OF SOUTHERN INDIANA

Each regional First Steps Cluster has a Local Planning and Coordinating Council (LPCC) organized for the purpose of implementing and overseeing the early intervention system in the cluster. Through the LPCC, community resources are identified and service providers are invited to coordinate available early intervention services for children.

Each LPCC has a coordinator and members composed of local providers, parents and community leaders. Members may include parents of children with developmental delays and/or disabilities, service providers, community agencies, WIC, MCH, Head Start, local public schools, local Department of Child Services, and other interested parties. We highly value parents input and you are encouraged to participate on the LPCC.

The First Steps of Southern Indiana Cluster LPCC meets quarterly on the second Thursday of the following months: March, June, September, & December at 11:00 a.m. EST and 10:30 CST in Ferdinand, Indiana at 1710 Community Drive. The meetings usually last about 1 to 1-½ hours. Please call the LPCC Coordinator 1-800-941-2450 to verify the date and time of the meeting and for more information.

A typical meeting includes: System Point of Entry Reports (includes data, numbers served, achievement of outcomes, etc.), Discussion of information that may affect implementation of the First Steps System, LPCC Coordinator's Report (includes activities, events, achievement of outcomes, etc.), State updates, Site Updates (includes county specific information, staffing, numbers served, etc.), Information sharing about upcoming and needed training.

In addition to the LPCC meetings, each county or group of counties has a subcommittee meeting that meets on a regular basis to ensure local parent and community input into the cluster planning process. Please see your service coordinator or check the First Steps of Southern Indiana website at www.firststepsbrs.org for information and times.

We also need parents to participate on our Transition Committees that meet on a quarterly basis. These meetings are held on the East side of the Cluster in Evansville, and the West side in Palmyra; and usually last 45 minutes to one hour. We need your input regarding your experience with transitioning out of First Steps and how can we improve our processes.

Parents are encouraged to give input into the First Steps process through several different avenues. Not only by attending at any of the above mentioned meetings, but by completing and returning Consumer Satisfaction surveys.
