EARLY START INFORMATION PACKET

Revised: August 2025

DDS Department of Developmental Services

WELCOME FROM THE REGIONAL CENTER

Dear Parents & Families,

As the Executive Director of Far Northern Regional Center, it is a privilege to welcome you to the Early Start Program. We are honored to serve the communities of Shasta, Butte, Tehama, Modoc, Lassen, Siskiyou, Glenn, Trinity and Plumas counties.

At Far Northern Regional Center, we believe that every child deserves the opportunity to reach their fullest potential. Children achieve remarkable progress when provided the necessary supports at a young age. To accomplish this for all children in our communities, we collaborate closely with our local community partners to identify and serve children and families who benefit from our assistance in accessing resources and services. Our primary goal is to serve you and provide family interactive interventions that allow your child will make significant developmental progress and succeed in achieving their maximum potential.

Far Northern Regional Center service coordinators work closely with your family to design your child's individualized intervention program and assist you in your journey navigating service delivery systems. We recognize that raising a child with developmental needs may be challenging, and we are committed to providing resources and guidance every step of the way. Our dedicated staff, some of whom have personal experience with early intervention services, take pride in empowering you as you navigate services for your child. We are grateful for the opportunity to partner with you and your family to help your child thrive.

Thank you for entrusting us in providing you with the resources to support your child in reaching their developmental milestones. We look forward to working together and supporting your family's journey.

Sincerely,

Melissa Gruhler

Executive Director

Far Northern Regional Center

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A note about printed versions:

If you print this information packet, you can still access all the website links. When you see a blue underlined website link, you will also see a black square called a QR Code. QR Codes can be scanned using the camera on your cell phone or tablet. Once you scan the QR Code, you will be able to view the website that goes with that QR Code. Follow the instructions below for how to use a QR Code.

1. Open the camera app on your cell phone or tablet.
2. Hold your camera over the square.
3. Make sure you can see the QR code on your screen.
4. A link to the website will show up on your screen.
5. Touch the link to go to the website.

When you scan this QR Code, you can go to a website with the latest edition of the Early Start Information Packet:

SCAN ME

WELCOME TO EARLY START SERVICES

All babies and toddlers develop differently, in the best possible way. We know that parents have questions about their child's development. Early Start was created to support young children like your child in their first 3 years of life. Its other purpose is to support loving parents and caregivers like you.

Early Start will help you make the most of your child's first 3 years of life. It will help you meet your child's unique needs. It also can help your child learn the skills that you think are most important.

Being the parent of a young child can be hard. If you are worried about your baby's development, it's easy to get overwhelmed. The good news is your baby is still the same baby you brought home from the hospital. You know more about your baby than anyone else in the world. Early Start provides a family-friendly point of contact so you can find out if your baby or toddler needs help. It will also help you get the services for your baby or toddler to develop in the best possible way. It will connect you with other parents like yourself. You can build a team of professionals who will help you support the growth and development of your child.

It is common for children to develop more slowly than usual. About 1 in every 6 children in the United States has a developmental delay. Early Start helps infants and toddlers, from birth to 3 years, who have developmental delays or disabilities. Early Start can bring you greater understanding of your child's needs to learn, grow and develop. Early Start services are intended to help eligible children learn new skills, overcome challenges, and increase success in life.

If you or your doctor think that your child may have a disability or delay, this information will help you learn about Early Start.

You can find more answers in the Frequently Asked Questions about Early Start.

WHO IS THIS PACKET FOR?

This packet is for parents and other caregivers of infants and toddlers who may have, or are known to have, developmental delays or disabilities.

Professionals and others can use this information to help support families and their young children.

Using this guide
This guide is divided into six sections to make it easier to use.

Depending on your interest, you can begin reading at any section.

Part 1: General Information
Part 2: Applying to Early Start
Part 3: Navigating Early Start
Part 4: From Early Start to School
Part 5: Know Your Rights
Part 6: Contacts and Resources

PART 1: GENERAL INFORMATION

What is a developmental delay?

Developmental delays are common. As many as 1 in 6 children has a delay. Children develop different skills at different times. If a child is not doing things that most children can do at a certain age, they may have a developmental delay.

Developmental delays can occur in one or more of the following areas:

- Thinking and learning (cognitive)
- Talking and expressing self (expressive communication)
- Understanding language (receptive communication)
- Feeling, expressing, and interacting with others (social and emotional)
- Everyday living skills like eating, dressing, caring for self (adaptive)
- Walking, moving, seeing and hearing (physical and motor development, including vision and hearing)

What is a developmental disability?

A developmental delay can also be a sign of a developmental disability. In California, developmental disabilities are considered lifelong and must exist before age 18. The following conditions are considered to be a developmental disability:

- Autism
- Cerebral palsy
- Epilepsy
- Intellectual disability
- Other conditions that require treatment similar to a person with intellectual disability that is not solely a learning, mental health or physical disability

What is Early Start?

Early Start is a system that provides early intervention services in California for families with infants and toddlers who have developmental delays or disabilities.

Early intervention services help babies and young children learn basic and new skills that typically develop during the first three years of life.

What is the Lanterman Act?

The Lanterman Developmental Disabilities Services Act is a California law that promises services and supports to people with developmental disabilities and their families. In the law, a statewide network of 21 community-based, non-profit agencies known as regional centers, was created.

You can read more in the Consumer Guide to the Lanterman Act.

"I wanted somebody to guide and walk me through Early Start because I didn't know where to go next and what to do." - Parent

Who is the Department of Developmental Services?

The California Department of Developmental Services (DDS) works to ensure Californians with developmental disabilities have the opportunity to make choices and lead independent, productive lives as members of their communities in the least restrictive setting possible. DDS is the state department that:

- Provides leadership, technical assistance, and policy direction
- Oversee the coordination and accountability of the delivery of services
- Manage the state-operated services
- Contract with the 21 California regional centers to provide services
- Resources

What is a regional center?

Regional centers are local agencies that arrange services for children and adults with developmental disabilities and their families. There is a regional center in each area across the state of California and you will work with the regional center that's closest to where you live. Regional centers will:

- Assess for a developmental delay or disability
- Determine eligibility for access to services
- Provide case management and coordination of services
- Oversight of service providers
- Implement state and federal policies

Although all regional centers have similar programs, each regional center may do things differently to meet the needs of their local communities. It will be helpful to learn how your regional center works.

You can find your regional center by entering your zip code into the Regional Center Look Up Tool.

"The regional center is here to make life easier. Make the journey for family members easier and simpler to navigate. We are here to support you." – Regional Center Professional / Staff Member

Who qualifies for Early Start?

Any child under 3 years of age may be eligible if they have:

Developmental Delay: If the child has a developmental delay of at least 25% in one or more of the following:

- Cognitive (thinking and learning)
- Expressive communication (talking and expressing self)
- Receptive communication (understanding language)
- Social and emotional (feeling, expressing, interacting)
- Adaptive (everyday living skills like eating, dressing, caring for self)
- Physical and motor development, including vision and hearing (walking, moving, seeing, and hearing)

Established Risk: If the child has an established risk condition of known cause, with a high likelihood of delayed development. Established risk conditions may include children who:

- Have genetic conditions that are associated with delays in development (e.g., Down syndrome, Fragile X syndrome, among others)
- Have fetal alcohol syndrome
- Have limited hearing, vision, or use of limbs

At Risk: If the child is likely to have a developmental delay due to a number of risks that have been confirmed by a professional. At risk or high-risk conditions may include children who:

- Were born very early (less than 32 weeks gestation) and had very low birth weight
- Had extensive health problems or had long hospitalizations
- Had a prenatal exposure to drugs or alcohol
- Experienced significant birth injury
- Experienced neglect or abuse

[See Glossary for more information]

Family income and immigration status does not impact qualifications for Early Start services.

What is provisional eligibility?

Children may meet the conditions for provisional eligibility if:

- Child is under 5 years old
- The disability is not only physical in nature
- Child has significant limitations in two of the following areas of life activities:
    - Dressing and feeding (Self-care)
    - Listening and talking (Receptive and expressive language)
    - Learning, thinking and problem solving (Cognitive milestones)
    - Walking and moving (Mobility)
    - Making choices, telling you what your child wants (Self-direction)

Children who receive services through provisional eligibility can receive Lanterman Act services until age five. Prior to your child's fifth birthday, the regional center will complete assessments to determine whether your child has a diagnosed developmental disability as defined in the Lanterman Developmental Services Act. If your child does not meet the eligibility criteria, services will end at age 5.

How can Early Start help my child?

Early Start supports parents and caregivers like you by providing services. Some of these services are provided directly to your child. You may also receive services to help you learn how to support your child's development and needs. *[See Part 3: Navigating Early Start]*

In some cases, Early Start services may be provided by your local school district or county office of education. Families whose children have hearing loss, a visual impairment, or a physical disability may get Early Start services through their local school district or county office of education. In some areas of California, families may receive services from both the local school district and the regional center.

Early Start through regional centers:

- Children with developmental delays or conditions that may result in developmental delays or disabilities

Early Start through your local school district or county office of education:

- Children who do not have a developmental delay or disability but are:
  - Deaf or have a hearing loss
  - Blind or have a visual impairment
  - Have a physical disability

"Get prepared for your IFSP meeting. Write down your thoughts on questions such as: What are your child's needs? What are your concerns? What are some things that can help your child and your family?"
– Family Advocate

What kinds of services can I receive from Early Start?

Early Start can provide a wide range of services. The services you and your child get depend on the needs of your child. Children may get different services because they have different needs. *[See Glossary for definitions of these services]*

Here are some of the common services provided by qualified professionals:

- assistive technology
- audiology
- family training, counseling, and home visits
- feeding therapy
- health services
- infant development services
- medical services for diagnostic/ evaluation purposes only
- nursing services
- nutrition services
- occupational therapy
- physical therapy
- psychological services
- service coordination (case management)
- sign language and cued language services
- social work services
- specialized instruction
- speech and language services
- transportation and related costs
- vision service

Is there a cost to me for Early Start services?

You may be asked to see if your family's medical insurance or another resource will pay for some of the services. Needed services not covered by insurance can be purchased or provided by the regional center. There are resources available to see if you are qualified for little to no cost health care services like Medi-Cal.

PART 2: APPLYING TO EARLY START

I think my child has a condition or developmental delay that may require Early Intervention Services. What do I do?

It starts with a phone call or a written referral to the regional center. Anyone can make a referral to a regional center. This includes your child's doctor, childcare provider, or *you*.

Once a referral is made, the regional center will reach out to discuss the Early Start program and intake process which includes an evaluation for eligibility.

The evaluation for Early Start eligibility can only start with the signed consent of the parent or guardian.

How do I discuss my worries with my doctor or my local regional center?

The regional center will discuss your concerns with you, and share information about the Early Start program and the evaluation process to determine eligibility. A developmental evaluation will completed in all developmental domains (cognitive, social/emotional, fine and gross motor including hearing and vision, expressive and receptive communication, and self-help/adaptive skills).

Use this resource to explore if there are reasons or concerns you have about your child's development.

Is there helpful information I should share with the regional center?

The regional center uses a family-directed approach to gather information about your child and family to see if your child is eligible for Early Start services. Regional Centers use this information to see what services you and your child need, so all information about your child is helpful. You can provide valuable information to help the regional center understand your child's strengths and needs, and your concerns as a parent. You can also provide information from other sources.

For example:

- Information about the pregnancy and birth
- Copies of any health benefits or insurance cards
- Any hospital and/or medical records
- Any evaluation reports (e.g., screening results, evaluations done by a psychologist, a physical therapist or other health professionals)
- Reports or concerns from Early Head Start, Home Visitors, Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), or Day Care

All the information you provide is confidential. It won't be shared with anyone without your permission.

During an evaluation, a child development expert will describe the evaluation process to you. The expert may be a child psychologist, a speech and language pathologist, an occupational therapist, or another child development professional.

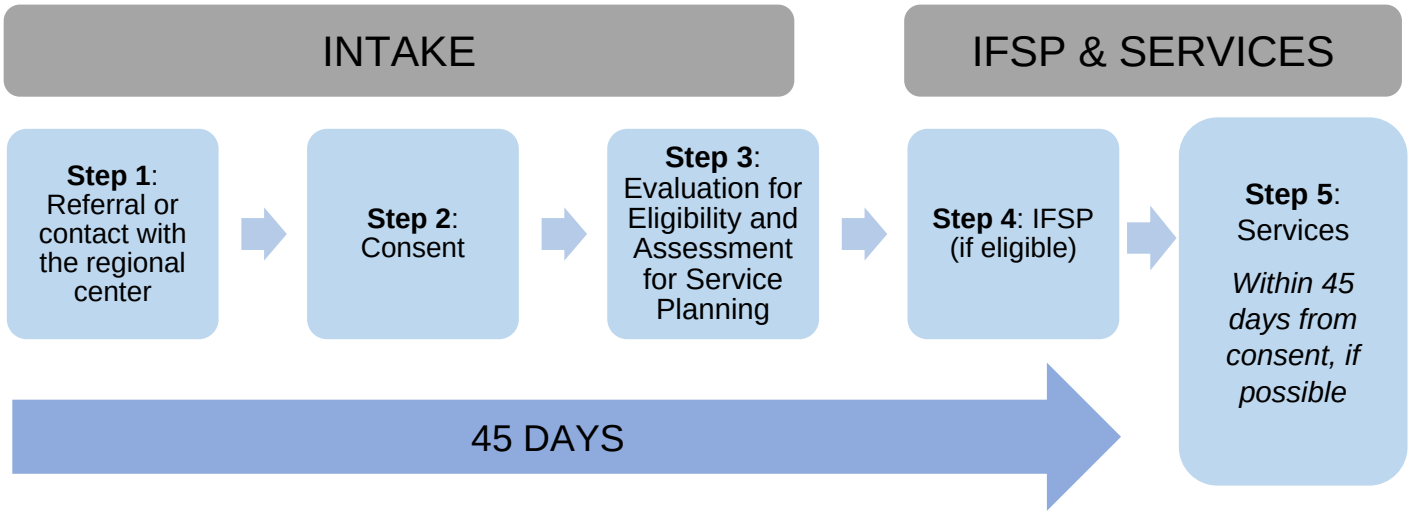
During the evaluation, this person may:

- Play with your child as part of the evaluation to identify his/her strengths and potential needs
- Observe you playing and interacting with your child
- Ask you questions about your child, your family, and the pregnancy and birth

The assessment results of your child will be compared to other children of the same age who do not have developmental delays or disabilities. If your child's results show a delay in any one area of development, your child may be eligible for Early Start services.

What happens when I call the regional center?

There are 5 steps after the first contact with the regional center. Steps 1 through 3 are called "Intake" and must be completed within 45 days or sooner when contacting the regional center. Steps 4 through 5 are called "Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) and Services." Services should begin as soon as possible once your child is eligible for Early Start.



Step 1: Referral or contact with the regional center

Once you call the regional center, you will be assigned a Service Coordinator or Intake Specialist who will assist with scheduling evaluations and guide you through the eligibility process. You should share any records of other assessments and diagnoses with the Service Coordinator or Intake Specialist. If found eligible for services, your Service Coordinator will help get and advocate for services and supports that help you and your family access Early Start services.

Step 2: Consent

Signed consent is necessary for an eligibility evaluation. You (or the person who can legally make educational decisions for the child, if a parent is not available) must sign a consent form that says you agree to have your child evaluated.

Step 3: Evaluation for Eligibility and Assessment for Service Planning
Once consent is obtained, your child will be evaluated to determine if they are eligible for Early Start services. The person conducting the evaluation will describe what happens at every step of the process. The evaluation can include:

- Review of records or reports from prior assessments and diagnoses
- A developmental evaluation in lieu of diagnostic assessment by the regional center
- Other evaluations or assessments that are needed to determine eligibility and services needs

You may also see other regional center staff, including social workers, psychologists, health professionals, and other specialists. They will work with you as a team in the intake and evaluation process. This team, called the IFSP team, includes at least one doctor, a psychologist, and an Intake or Service Coordinator. *[See Part 1: Who qualifies for Early Start?]*

Step 4: Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP)
If your child is eligible for Early Start services, you and your Service Coordinator along with other members of the IFSP team will develop an IFSP. This plan will include your child's strengths and needs, your concerns, and the Early Start services your child will receive. *[See Part 3: What is an IFSP?]*

Step 5: Services
Once the IFSP is developed, the Early Start services will start as soon as possible but no later than 45 days from when you consented to the services identified in the IFSP. You will work with your Service Coordinator and IFSP team to decide on the best services for your child that fit your family's needs. The services should occur in "natural environments". These are familiar places like your home or other community settings.

If the regional center is not responding within this time frame, you should continue calling your Service Coordinator or Intake Specialist and writing down the dates of your calls. You should also write down what the Service Coordinator or Intake Specialist told you to document your contact with the regional center. If the regional center delays this process, you can file a complaint with the regional center director and/or with DDS. *[See Part 5: Know Your Rights]*

"When families go through intake they're in a time of incredible stress and transition. Parents are overwhelmed in the beginning because they're dealing with all this new information. Some families may have language barriers and need support in their language."
– Family Advocate

You can watch a short video that describes the intake process, called Story of Max.

Are there others who can help me?

You can receive help from:

Family Resource Centers: Your Service Coordinator or Intake Specialist will ask you for consent to share your contact information with a family resource center in your area. These are centers that may be staffed by parents of children with disabilities and are familiar with the process to access early start services at your regional center. They can give you resources and support. They can connect you with other families who are going through the same journey as your family. They know a lot about:

- What it feels like to be worried about your child
- Early Start
- Other local resources that can help you and your child
- Different developmental delays and disabilities

Throughout California there are Family Resource Centers.

You can also find more information on the Family Resource Center page on the DDS website.

Baby Line: This is a hotline that can provide information about Early Start. You can call: 800-515-BABY (800-515-2229)

211: Many counties in California have a 211 hotline. 211 can provide resources for many different types of needs, including referrals for infants and toddlers. You can contact them by dialing “211” or going to the 211 website.

First 5 California: First 5 California is dedicated to improving the lives of California's young children and their families through a network of education, health services, childcare, and other crucial programs. You can find more information by visiting the First 5 California website.

Your local school district or county office of education: Some children receive Early Start services through their school district or county office of education instead of the regional center. Schools may provide Early Start services to children who only have:

- vision
- hearing
- severe orthopedic impairment
- any combination of these impairments

If your child has any or all of these conditions, your local regional center will help you connect with your school district for Early Start services.

My child is not eligible for Early Start services at this time. What are my options?

Find other programs: You can ask your Intake Specialist or Service Coordinator about other programs that can help your child.

- You can contact your local Family Resource Center for information about other programs *[See Part 6: Contacts and Resources]*

Dispute Resolution: If you don't agree with the decision regarding your child's eligibility, you can dispute the decision. The form to file a dispute resolution will be included with your denial letter. You can dispute by choosing any of the following:

- Request a mediation conference; or
  - A mediation conference is an informal way to resolve a disagreement with the regional center with the help of a neutral party.
- Request a due process hearing; or
  - A due process hearing is where a judge decides if the regional center made a mistake in their decision.
- File a state complaint.
  - A state complaint is a written complaint submitted to the California Department of Developmental Services.

Re-apply: You can apply again later if your child still needs help.

If your child is not eligible for Early Start, the regional center will provide resources for other available programs in the area that may be able to help you.

More information can be found in the Parents' Rights: An Early Start Guide for Parents.

PART 3: NAVIGATING EARLY START

My child qualifies for Early Start services. What is next?

To receive Early Start services, you will work with your Service Coordinator. Your Service Coordinator may be the person that was assigned to your family at the time of intake or you may be assigned a new Service Coordinator.

How can the Early Start Service Coordinator help me?

You and your Service Coordinator are a team. Your Service Coordinator is your link to Early Start services. Your Service Coordinator will coordinate and advocate for Early Start services and supports for your child and family.

Your Service Coordinator can:

- Help you get ready for your IFSP meetings
- Help you get the services and supports listed in your IFSP
- Help you access services through your insurance, county, or other resources

You can ask for a different Service Coordinator if you don't feel that this person is a good match for your family.

What is an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP)?

The IFSP is a written plan for providing services to your child and family after your child has been found eligible for Early Start services.

How is the IFSP developed?

The IFSP is developed by a team at an IFSP meeting. The team members include you, your other family members, your Service Coordinator, and the people who assessed or are providing services to your child. You are the most important member of the IFSP team. You can also invite other people, such as a doctor, or a friend for support. You can also invite an advocate to help you express your views and wishes and to help you stand up for your rights, if you feel this is needed.

It is important that everyone involved understands everything that is being said at the IFSP meeting. If someone says something that you don't understand, ask them to explain it. You can ask for an interpreter if you or your family members use another form of communication other than English. Your Service Coordinator will provide you with a copy of your IFSP.

The IFSP includes information about:

- Your baby or toddler's development
    - Strengths: What they do well
    - Needs: What is delayed or hard for them
- With your agreement, additional items may be included
    - Concerns and priorities: Identify what your concerns and priorities are related to your child's development.
    - Resources: Private insurance, other public benefits, extended family, etc.
    - Outcomes: Goals for your child and family, what you would like to accomplish
    - Transitions: How you will be supported when your child is turning three and exiting out of Early Start services

An IFSP will have information about services:

- What services will be provided
- Who will provide the services
- When they will start
- How they will be provided, which could in person or through remote electronic communication if that is your family's preference
- For how long and how often the services will be provided
- Who will pay for them
- The changes the team expects to see for your child and how progress towards those changes will be measured

How are services determined?

Services are determined by the IFSP team by reviewing the results of assessments, discussions about the families concerns, priorities and the development of family and child outcomes. Once the outcomes are developed, the team will discuss the services needed to achieve those outcomes. The service coordinator is responsible to ensure that those identified services and supports are occurring for your family. Some services may be funded by another entity (like your insurance or Medi-Cal) and not by the regional center.

Can the IFSP change?

The IFSP can and should change as your child develops new skills or if your family has new concerns regarding your child's development. You can request to change the IFSP after you have signed it. The IFSP can be changed at any time when there is a need to do so.

What is the IFSP timeline?

Your first IFSP, including evaluating your child's skills and identifying services, must take place **within 45 days of your first contact with the regional center**. After that, you will have an IFSP review at least every three months or more frequently as you request. These meetings are important because very young children grow and change quickly. This means that your child's and family's needs may change quickly as well. You can also have an IFSP meeting anytime there are new needs, or if something changes.

"Helping families understand all the services that are potentially available is really important. How these services connect to their child's need…If there is a need, we have something that we can support them with."
– Regional Center Professional / Staff Member

Why is it important to sign the IFSP?

Before your child's services can begin, you must agree to the plan by signing the IFSP. If you disagree with anything in the IFSP, there are things you can do to settle your disagreement. You may note those disagreements on the IFSP and begin any services for which you are in agreement. You can ask for additional clarification from your service coordinator or your service coordinator's supervisor. If these disagreements cannot be resolved, you have the right to request formal dispute resolution procedures. For more information go to *Part 5: Know Your Rights.*

Mediation

- You can ask for a meeting to discuss your disagreements with a neutral "mediator" to help resolve the disagreement.
- Information about mediation can be found on the DDS website.

Due Process

- You can ask for a "due process hearing".
- Information about due process hearings can be found on the DDS website.

State Complaint

- You can also file a "state complaint" if you think there has been a violation of federal or state laws and regulations.
  Information about filing a complaint with the state can be found on the DDS website.

"Parents need to know what services are available. We just want a detailed explanation of Early Start services and all the possibilities."
– Parent

PART 4: FROM EARLY START TO SCHOOL

What supports may be available to my family when my child turns 3?

Early Start ends at age 3. This is called transition. Although transition happens at 3 years old, you and your Service Coordinator will start preparing for it at least 6 months earlier. The services provided through the regional center are called Lanterman Act services, or sometimes referred to as Lanterman services.

Below you will see the different stages to prepare you for the journey through Early Start and beyond. Many of these services require an assessment to see if your child is qualified.

Stage in Life	**Birth to Age 3** *(Early Start)*	**Birth up to Age 5** *(Provisional Eligibility)*	**Ages 3 up to 22** *(Adolescents and Young Adults)*
Provided through the Education System	Early Start	Early Start and/or Special/Early Education	Special/General Education (K-12)
Provided through the Regional Center System	Early Start, Provisional Eligibility or Lanterman services*****	Provisional Eligibility or Lanterman services*****	Lanterman services*****

Your child may qualify for Lanterman Services at any age and services will continue for life.
[See Glossary for definitions]

How do I plan for transition out of Early Start?

At least 90 days before your child turns 3, you and your service coordinator will meet someone from your child's school to put together a transition plan. This is called a transition planning conference. This plan will include:

- The steps to getting special education services, if needed
- The steps that need to occur for determining eligibility for Lanterman services and/or
- If your child is eligible for other public services like:
  - Local community programs (Head Start, First 5, Help Me Grow, etc.)
  - Health Insurance
  - Privately funded

Some children will continue to be eligible for regional center services, but others will not.

At age 3, your child may be on one of three paths:

Eligible for both regional center and special education services	Eligible for only special education services	Not eligible for regional center or special education services

Eligible for both regional center and special education services:
Your child may be eligible for both regional center and special education services from the school district. The school provides services for educational benefit only. The regional center provides services to support the person's participation in home and community life. If this is the case, your child will now have two plans: an Individualized Education Program (IEP) for school and an Individual Program Plan (IPP) for the regional center.

- Some children may not clearly meet eligibility for regional center services at age 3 but may qualify for services with the regional center under provisional eligibility.

Eligible for only special education services:
Your child may be eligible for special education services but not for regional center services, because your child does not qualify for Lanterman Services or Provisional Eligibility. If this is the case, your child's services will be planned in an IEP meeting. This will happen around the time of your child's third birthday.

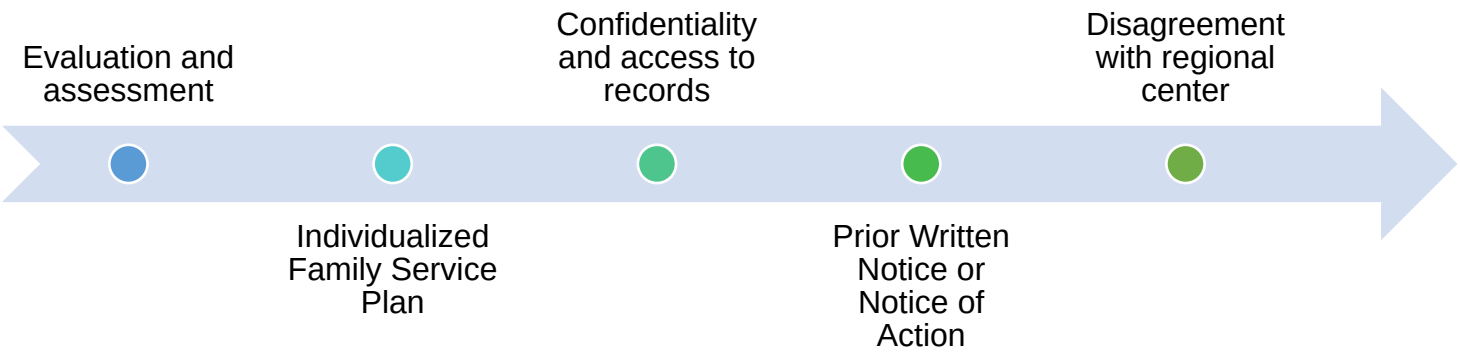
Not eligible for regional center or special education services:
Your child may no longer have a significant developmental delay or disability because they have caught up with other children their age in development. If your child still needs help, but their needs are not significant enough to be eligible for Provisional Eligibly, Lanterman services or special education, your Service Coordinator can help you explore resources in your community to support your child's developmental needs.

On any of these paths, your child could receive services from other resources and participate in local community programs at the same time, alongside their peers with and without disabilities. Your Service Coordinator will help you find and access these programs when you develop your transition plan.

You can watch a short video that describes the intake process, called Story of Max.

PART 5: KNOW YOUR RIGHTS

What are my rights as a parent or caregiver?
As a parent, you have rights in the regional center system that include:



Evaluation and assessment
You have the right to:

- Request an evaluation for your child
- Have the evaluation process explained to you
- Consent to an evaluation
- Refuse an evaluation
- Participate in your child's evaluation
- Be a part of any discussion about your child's eligibility and/or services

In addition, the evaluations must:

- Be in the language of your choice, whenever possible
- Be appropriate for your child
- Be conducted by a professional who is qualified to do that evaluation
- Be conducted in settings that are familiar to your child
- Include a review of other records and evaluation reports
- Cover all areas of development

"It would be nice to know that we have the right to have this information, that it's there for us, that it's available for us in any way, shape or form, that it should be easily understandable to all of us."
– Parent

Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP)

You are an equal and valued member of your child's IFSP team. This means you have a right to:

- Attend the IFSP meeting and help develop the IFSP document
  - The IFSP meeting cannot occur without you
- Invite people to the meeting, such as other family members, friends, service providers and advocates, etc.
- Consent to the IFSP
  - Services cannot begin without your written consent
  - You also have the right to change your mind
- Have services provided in "natural environments" – places that are familiar to your child, like your home
  - If the service can't be in a natural environment, you must be told why
  - You can receive services through remote electronic communication such as telehealth video calls (such as Zoom or Skype)
- Have your child's IFSP shared with other agencies, only with your permission and signed consent.
- Receive a "Notice of Action"
  - This means you will receive prior written notice if the regional center denies or changes a service
- Have the IFSP explained or translated into your language of choice, whenever possible
  - You can have the document translated into your preferred language and/or have an interpreter present at the review meeting

Confidentiality and access to records

Your child's regional center records are confidential and must be kept private. This is part of a law called the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). These records cannot be shared with anyone without your permission. You have the right to have this law explained to you.

You can ask your Service Coordinator for a copy of your child's records. It is a good idea to do this in writing. If you ask for the records, you must receive a copy **within 5 business days**.

You can also ask to meet with the Service Coordinator to discuss the records. That meeting must take place **within 5 business days**. If you feel there is incorrect information in the records, you have a right to ask for that information to be changed or removed.

Prior Written Notice or Notice of Action

Sometimes you and your regional center may not agree. If this happens, the regional center must give you a prior written notice. For example, you and your regional center may not agree about your child's eligibility for Early Start services, you and your regional center may not agree about the type of or amount of services your child receives or where those services are provided.

The Notice of Action tells you what the regional center wants to do. It must tell you the following:

- The action the regional center will take
- The date the action will occur
- The reason for the decision including the facts and the law or policy that supports that decision
- Information about how to appeal the decision

Disagreement with the regional center

Although you, your Service Coordinator, and the regional center are a team, there may be times when you disagree. This may happen if the regional center:

- Says your child isn't eligible for Early Start
- Suggests services you don't want or don't think your child needs
- Denies or refuses to provide the services you want or think your child needs
- Wants to change or stop services you think your child needs

The regional center must provide Prior Written Notice of what they want to do. You can then choose how to settle your disagreement.

Often the best way to solve a disagreement is by talking with your Service Coordinator. There may have been a misunderstanding, or you may want to provide new information about your child. Your Service Coordinator can also help you understand what the regional center can and can't provide. Although this should not delay services, you may have to try getting a generic service first. This is when the service is paid for by another system like your medical insurance or the school district.

If you don't want to talk to your Service Coordinator or talking hasn't worked, you can choose other options. Your child's services will continue while you are settling your dispute. This is called "**stay put**". Your options for dispute resolution include informal and formal options.

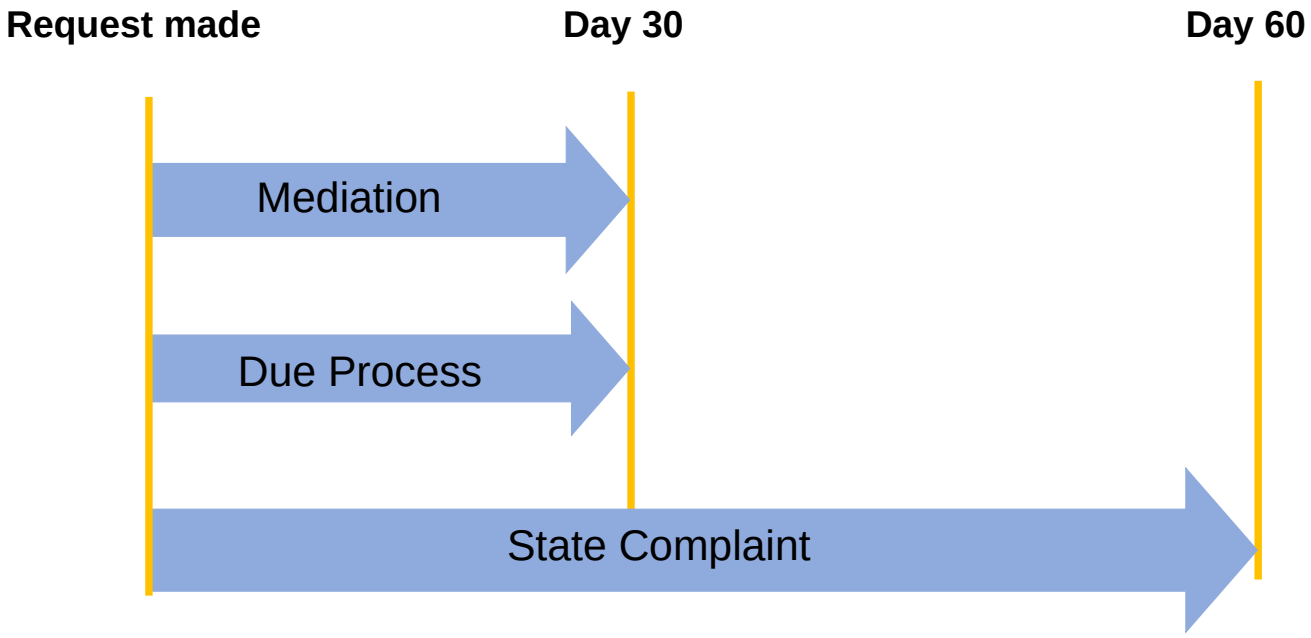
Informal Options

- Writing or talking to your Service Coordinator's supervisor, Early Start Manager or regional center leadership
- Appealing the decision with the leadership of the regional center to review the situation and reverse the denial

Formal Options:

- Ask for a Mediation Meeting where someone who is impartial, called a 'mediator', helps you and the regional center reach an agreement. The mediation session must occur within 30 days of a mediation request.
- Ask for a Due Process Hearing where you and the regional center meet with a judge who decides if the regional center should reverse their decision
    - If you ask for a due process hearing, the judge must make a decision within 30 days of your request
    - You can file a request for due process, but you can also ask for informal options or mediation while you are waiting for the hearing
    - In some cases, you might be able to resolve the disagreement before the hearing
    - If you can't reach an agreement with the regional center before the hearing, the timeline doesn't change
    - Everything still must happen within 30 days of your request for due process
- File a complaint with the state and ask DDS to review the situation if you think the regional center didn't follow the law.
    - The state has 60 days to review your complaint
    - You can file a complaint up to 1 year after the disagreement (in some cases longer)
    - If you are seeking reimbursement for services that should have been provided, or corrective action, then complaints can be made up to 3 years after the disagreement

[See Glossary for definitions]



Who can help me with an appeal or complaint?

It is a good idea to talk to an advocate or attorney before filing a complaint, asking for mediation, or filing a request for due process. There are agencies that can help you understand the law and your rights. They may also be able to represent you if needed.

These are some agencies that can help you:

- Office of Clients' Rights Advocacy (OCRA): This is a program of Disability Rights California. They can provide legal advice and representation. There is a OCRA attorney for each regional center's geographic area.

- Disability Rights California (DRC): This is an agency appointed by the federal government to protect and advocate for the rights of Californians with disabilities. They can help you understand the law and your rights.

- The State Council for Developmental Disabilities (SCDD): This is a federally funded program that supports people with disabilities. They can help you learn about the regional center system and can advocate for services. There are 13 local offices throughout California.

PART 6: CONTACTS AND RESOURCES

Contacts

To locate your regional center, visit the DDS website and type your zip code in the search window.
To search Los Angeles County zip codes, click the 'LA County' tab.

Important Contact Information

My Regional Center

Name:

Phone:

General Email:

My Service Coordinator

Name:

Phone:

Email:

My Service Coordinator's Manager

Name:

Phone:

Email:

My Local Family Resource Center

Name:

Phone:

Email:

Website:

The Department of Developmental Services (DDS)

DDS website

Early Start Information page of the DDS website

Baby Line: 800-515-BABY (800-515-2229)

Office of Clients' Rights Advocacy (OCRA)

State Offices

OCRA website

Northern California: 800-390-7032 (TTY: 877-669-6023)

Southern California: 866-833-6712 (TTY: 877-669-6023)

My Local Office of Client's Rights Advocacy

Phone:

Email:

Disability Rights California (DRC)

DRC website

Phone: 800-776-5746

TTY call: 800-719-5798

State Council on Developmental Disabilities (SCDD)

SCDD website

Phone: (916) 263-7919

Toll Free: (833) 818-9886

My Local Office of State Council on Developmental Disabilities

Phone:

Email:

Local Resources

Resource Link	Contact	What Will I Find Here?
Local Resources		
National Head Start Association, Head Start Locator	https://rrnetwork.org/family-services/find-child-care	The **Head Start Center locator** helps you to connect with Head Start programs near you. Select a zip code, city, or state to search.
California Child Care Resource and Referral Network	https://rrnetwork.org/family-services/find-child-care	Enter your zip code to find your local child care resource and referral agency. A childcare specialist there will work with you to find care that best meets your needs, and create your personalized childcare plan.
California State Library, Local Library Locator	https://www.library.ca.gov/branches/	Locate your neighborhood library and find out about story time activities for young children offered free of charge.
California Department of Health, WIC	https://www.myfamily.wic.ca.gov/	Find out about practical nutrition information and everyday healthy living tips for you and your family. Access nutrition experts and support and information about breastfeeding
Far Northern Regional Center Family Wellness	Email: familywellness@farnorthernrc.org Call: 530-222-4791	The Family Wellness Program addresses the whole family to improve outcomes for young children through networking, training and other support services.
Chico Area Parks and Recreation District (CARD)	https://www.chicorec.com/	Cost effective recreation opportunities for all ages in the Chico and surrounding areas.
Redding Recreation	https://www.cityofredding.org/departments/parks-and-recreation/recreation	Fun and affordable recreation programs for all ages in the Redding and surrounding areas.
Exceptional Connections (Family Resource Center serving Modoc and Lassen Counties)	https://www.lassencfr.com/Resources/EXCEPTIONAL-CONNECTION/index.html	Provides a variety of information, resources and advocacy to support the positive growth and development of children.

For more information about Early Start

California Resources:

Resource Link	Contact	What Will I Find Here?
Early Start page on the DDS website	Department of Developmental Services – Early Start Phone: 800-515-BABY Email: earlystart@dds.ca.gov	Many Early Start resources including frequently asked questions (FAQs) and a regional center Lookup Tool to find Early Start services near you
Early Start Frequently Asked Questions	Department of Developmental Services – Early Start	Answers to Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) about Early Start
Reasons for Concern that your Child or a Child in your Care May Need Special Help	Department of Developmental Services in collaboration with California Department of Education	A 2-page, detailed information sheet with facts on your child's development
The Central Directory of Early Start/Early Intervention Resources	California Early Intervention Technical Assistance Network (CEITAN) Phone: 916-492-4012	Includes information on where to get help, who is eligible, how to be referred to Early Start, and who provides Early Start services

California Resources, Continued:

Resource Link	Contact	What Will I Find Here?
Family Resource Centers Network of California website	Family Resource Center Network of California Phone: 916-993-7781 Email: info@frcnca.org	Links to all 47 Early Start Family Resource Centers and a glossary of terms
Disability Rights California website	Disability Rights California Phone: 800-776-5746 TTY call: 800-719-5798	Information on the rights of families when accessing and using Early Start, including eligibility and transition; and state laws on how Early Start services should be provided
A Resource Guide for Parents of Infants and Toddlers Who Are Deaf or Hard of Hearing	California Department of Education	A brief introduction to the complete Resource Guide that contains comprehensive information from the parents' perspective about the languages, communication tools, and educational approaches used in Deaf Education

National Resource:

Resource	Contact	What Will I Find Here?
Center for Parent Information and Resources: Resource Library	Center for Parent Information and Resources Phone: 973-642-8100	Information about early intervention and special education for the entire United States but not specific to California

For more Information about transition from Early Start

California Resources:

Resource	Contact	What Will I Find Here?
Handbook on Transition from Early Childhood Special Education	California Department of Education Phone: 916-319-0800	Provides information and resources to navigate the transition from Early Start to special education for preschool-aged children
Effective Early Childhood Transitions: A Guide for Transition at Age Three — Early Start to Preschool	Department of Developmental Services Phone: 800–515–BABY (800–515–2229) Email: earlystart@dds.ca.gov	The guide identifies both required elements for transition and recommended practices to support families and their children as they successfully navigate transition from Early Start to other services at age three
Video: Transitioning out of Early Start: From the IFSP to IEP/ IPP	Parents Helping Parents Phone: 855-727-5775	A video on transition from Early Start
Handout: Early Intervention	State Council on Developmental Disabilities- San Bernardino Office Phone: 909 890-1259 Email: sanbernardino@scdd.ca.gov	A handout that covers the transition process and timeline

California Resources, Continued:

Resource	Links & Contact	What Will I Find Here?
First 5 California website	Phone: 916-263-1050 Email: info@ccfc.ca.gov	First 5 California is dedicated to improving the lives of California's young children and their families through a comprehensive system of education, health services, childcare, and other crucial programs
211 website	Phone: 211	2-1-1 is a free information and referral service that connects people to health and human services in their community 24 hours a day, 7 days a week

For more information about school age and adult services

California Resources:

Resource	Links & Contact	What Will I Find Here?
Family Involvement & Partnerships webpage	California Department of Education Phone: 916-319-0800	Resources and support for parents, guardians, and families of children with disabilities
Regional Center information on the DDS website	Department of Developmental Services Phone: 833-421-0061 Email: info@dds.ca.gov TTY: 711	Information about the regional centers and other information on developmental disabilities

California Resources, Continued:

Resource	Links & Contact	What Will I Find Here?
Special Education information on the DRC website	Disability Rights California (DRC) Phone: 800-776-5746 TTY: 800-719-5798	General resources about special education
Find Your Parent Center in California	Center for Parent Information and Resources Phone: 973-642-8100	Links to the Parent Training and Information Centers (PTIs) and Community Parent Resource Centers (CPRCs). PTIs and CPRCs provide information, resources, and training about special education (including Early Start). Use this link to find the center that serves your area

National Resource:

Resource	Links & Contact	What Will I Find Here?
Parents & Families webpage	U.S. Department of Education Phone: 202-245-7459	Resources for families about special education for the entire United States but not specific to California

For more information on healthcare and social services

California Resources:

Resource	Links & Contact	What Will I Find Here?
Medi-Cal for Individuals webpage	Department of Health Care Services Medi-Cal Helpline: 800-541-5555 Phone: 916-636-1980	Information about Medi-Cal
Department of Social Services website	Department of Social Services Phone: 916-651-8848	Information about a variety of services including In-Home Supported Services

National Resource:

Resource	Links & Contact	What Will I Find Here?
Social Security Administration (Federal) website	Social Security Administration Phone: 800-772-1213	Information about Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and Social Security

For more information about your rights

California Resources:

Resource	Links & Contact	What Will I Find Here?
Parents' Rights webpage	California Department of Education Phone: 916-319-0800	Information about rights and procedural safeguards
Parents' Rights: An Early Start Guide for Families	Department of Developmental Services Phone: 800–515–BABY (800–515–2229) Email: earlystart@dds.ca.gov	Includes state and federal laws and regulations that govern Early Start in California
Special Education Rights and Responsibilities (SERR) webpage	Disability Rights California (DRC) Phone: 800-776-5746 TTY: 800-719-5798	How to become eligible for special education, how to request and advocate for special education services, and what to do if you disagree with school districts
Rights Under the Lanterman Act (RULA) webpage	Disability Rights California (DRC) Phone: 800-776-5746 TTY: 800-719-5798	Help with understanding rights to supports and services under the Lanterman Act, rights with the regional center and service providers

California Resources, Continued:

Resource	Links & Contact	What Will I Find Here?
State Council on Developmental Disabilities (SCDD) website	Phone: 916-263-7919 Toll Free: 833-818-9886 council@scdd.ca.gov	SCDD is established by state and federal law as an independent state agency to ensure that people with developmental disabilities and their families receive the services and supports they need. Through advocacy, capacity building and systemic change, SCDD works to achieve a consumer and family-based system of individualized services, supports, and other assistance.

GLOSSARY

American Sign Language (ASL):
ASL is a visual language that is expressed by movements of the hands and face.

Assistive Technology:
Any item, piece of equipment, or means used to increase, maintain, or improve the skills of children or adults with disabilities.

Audiology Evaluation:
A hearing evaluation performed by an audiologist.

Audiologist (Hearing Doctor):
A specialist who is trained to understand how hearing works and can measure hearing loss or figure out problems with balance and work with you to solve the problem.

Autism (also called Autism Spectrum Disorder or ASD):
A developmental disability that affects how a child interacts with other people, communicates, learns, and behaves.

Advocate:
An advocate is someone who represents another person's interests. This person may help and support when needed, like attending a meeting or writing a formal request letter, as well as give suggestions. Anyone can be an advocate, but this person is not an attorney and does not offer legal advice.

Advocacy:
The act of supporting a child or family's interests and rights.

Audiology:
Identifying and providing services for children with hearing loss and prevention of hearing loss.

At-Risk:
A term used for children who may, in the future, have problems with their development that may affect learning and development.

Assessment:
The initial and ongoing procedure used to identify:

- A child's unique needs and strengths and the services appropriate to meet those needs.
- The resources, priorities and concerns of the family and the supports and services necessary to enhance the family's capacity to meet the developmental needs of their infant or toddler with a disability.

Assessment Team:
A team that gathers information for decision-making. In addition to parents, this team can include a Psychologist, Speech Therapist, Occupational Therapist, Physical Therapist, Nurse, and/or Teacher.

Cerebral palsy (or CP):
A developmental disability that affects how a child is able to move, balance, and control their muscles.

Childcare:
Caring for children while their parents or adult caregivers are at work, in training, or doing other things.

California Children's Services (CCS):
A state program for children with certain diseases or health problems. Through this program, children up to 21 years old can get the health care and services they need. CCS will connect you with doctors and trained health care people who know how to care for your child with special health care needs.

Consent:
The permission a parent gives to a program or agency, generally in writing. Consent is always voluntary, and a parent may cancel it at any time

Communication:
Is more than talking! It is any form of message sent from one party to another, through sounds, words, or physical hints, like body language.

Confidentiality:
The right that personal information about a child and family is not released without your permission or only when permitted or required by law. Consent to share information is always voluntary, and a parent may cancel it at any time.

Developmental:
The steps or stages in the growth of a child.

Developmental Delay:
Refers to a child that is slower to gain the skills expected of him or her, compared to others of the same age.

Developmental History:
An account of the progress of a child in learning as they grow in skills, such as sitting, walking, or talking.

Developmental Milestone Skills:
Skills typically reached at specific ages.

Developmental Tests:
Tests that measure a child's development compared to the development of other children at the same age.

Disability:
A developmental delay or physical or mental condition which is very likely to result in a child having a developmental delay.

Early Intervention:
A set of services and supports delivered as early as possible to prevent long-term difficulties.

Eligibility:
The requirements a child must meet to be able to receive services from the program.

Epilepsy:
A developmental disability that affects activity in the brain and causes seizures.

Established Risk:
A term used for a child who has a condition with a known cause, and who may, in the future, have problems with their development that may affect learning and development.

Evaluation:
Collects information about a child's learning needs, strengths, and interests. An evaluation is part of the process of determining whether he/she qualifies for a program or service.

Family Training, Counseling, and Home Visits:
Services to help the family of an infant or toddler in understanding the care needs of the child and enhancing the child's development.

Feeding Therapy:
Helps children learn how to eat or eat better, particularly for infants and children who have trouble eating, chewing, feeding, sucking, and swallowing.

Feeding Therapist:
Provides feeding therapy and are usually Occupational Therapists or Speech and Language Pathologists.

Family Support:
Anything that helps a family. This help may include advice, information, or helping a parent understand what options may be available.

Family Resource Center:
A place where families of young children who are at risk or have a developmental delay or disability can get information, support, and information from other parents and families.

Fine Motor:
In physical development, the use of the small muscles of the body, most commonly the hands/fingers. Like pinching, picking up an item, holding a pencil, or buttoning clothing.

Generic Services and Supports:
Resources that may be available to all children from local, State and/or Federal agencies. These include services such as Medi-Cal, Social Security, and school programs like Head Start.

Gross Motor Skills:
The use of large muscle groups of the body, arms, or legs, as in sitting up, walking, balancing, or throwing a ball.

Health Services:
Health-related services are services necessary to allow a child to benefit from other early intervention services.

Home-based Service:
Any service or therapy that is provided in the home.

Home Visits:
Visits to your home by a professional for the purpose of planning and providing early start/intervention services.

Infant Development Services:
Services and activities that promote the infant's or toddler's development of skills in a variety of developmental areas.

IFSP (Individualized Family Service Plan):
A written plan for the child's and family's services that the family develops with a team.

Intellectual disability (or ID):
A developmental disability that affects a child's ability to learn and function in daily life (take care of themselves).

Individualized Education Plan (IEP):
A written plan for a child's special education services.

Infant:
Birth to one year old children. Sometimes regarded as infants up to 18 months or until the child is walking when a child then is called a toddler.

In-Home Respite:
Is designed to give the family a break from the care of the child and is provided in the family home.

Interpreter and Translator Services:
May provide language interpretation at meetings, and/or translation of written communication (IFSP), from English into the primary language of the family.

Mediation:
A meeting to resolve disagreements between parents (you) and a regional center.

Medi-Cal:
California's Medicaid health care program. This program pays for a variety of medical services for children and adults with limited income and resources, or with specified life situations. Medi-Cal is supported by federal and state taxes. You can apply for Medi-Cal benefits regardless of sex, race, religion, color, national origin, sexual orientation, marital status, age, disability, or veteran status. If you are found (or determined) eligible, you can get Medi-Cal as long as you continue to meet the eligibility requirements.

Medical Services (for diagnostic/evaluation purposes only):
Services provided by a licensed physician for diagnostic or evaluation purposes to determine a child's developmental status and need for early intervention services.

Motor Development:
Also known as motor skill development is how a child develops physical skills in using their body and body parts.

Motor Skills:
The ability to move and coordinate the body. There are two broad types of motor skills that young children develop:

- Fine motor skills using the smaller muscles like picking up and putting down objects, clapping hands, using fork and spoon, feeding themselves finger food
- Gross motor skills for example, crawling, climbing, kicking, and skipping

Natural Environment:
Places or settings that any young child and his or her family go to in any day. This may include the home, a preschool, or other community location, such as a local park or library.

Nursing Services:
Services to help prevent health problems and promote health and development and may include the administration of medications and treatments prescribed by a doctor.

Nutrition Services: (see feeding)
Assist in the development and monitoring of appropriate plans to address the nutritional needs of children.

Occupational Therapist (OT):
Experts in fine motor skills, eye hand coordination, sensory processing, lip, and tongue ties and feeding issues.

Occupational Therapy:
A service provided by a licensed occupational therapist who assists children with fine motor activities and everyday tasks like eating, dressing, and hand use.

Out of Home Respite:
Services that provide a break from the care a child needs and are provided outside of the family home.

Peers:
Other children who are the same age or may be of the same development level. They are not necessarily friends. It's important for children to have contact with peers for their social learning and developing social skills.

Psychological Services:
When a psychologist assesses or tests a child's development and interprets the test results.

Physical Therapist (PT):
Experts in gross motor skills, focusing on mobility such as rolling, crawling, walking, and climbing. They also can help with sensory-motor coordination.

Physical Therapy:
A service provided by a licensed physical therapist who assists children with gross motor activities and everyday tasks like crawling, walking and jumping. They also can help with sensory-motor coordination.

Physical Disability:
A disability that impacts a person's physical development.

Provisional Eligibility:
If a child who is three or four years of age (or approaching three years of age) and does not show signs of a developmental disability, provisional eligibility is intended to avoid delays and reduce gaps in regional center services to children at a particularly vulnerable time in their development.

Service Coordination (Case Management):
Service coordinators assist and help an infant or toddler with a disability and the child's family to receive the services they need.

Sign Language and Cued Language Services:
These services include teaching sign language, cued language, and auditory/oral language and providing sign and cued language interpretation.

Social Work Services:
Provide individual and family-group counseling with parents and other family members, and provide appropriate social skill-building activities with the infant or toddler and parents

Specialized Instruction:
Play-based learning. Tailored lessons are planned by an infant professional to teach you how to guide your child in fun learning experiences to achieve goals.

Speech Language Pathologist (SLP):
Experts in expressive and receptive communication, what children say or sign, and what children understand.

Speech/Language Therapy:
Services to support the development of communication skills. To help children improve communication and social function skills provided by a Speech Therapist or Speech-Language Pathology Assistant.

Therapy:
Regional centers can provide therapies specific to children specialized needs. These therapies may include Occupational Therapy, Physical Therapy and Speech Therapy

Transition:
The process where the children at age 3 will move from Early Intervention services to other early childhood supports or services, such as the Preschool Special Education Program or community programs.

Transportation and Related Costs:
Regional centers may offer a variety of options to help families access the community when they are unable to do so on their own.

Vision Impairment:
A loss in vision that, even with correction, affects a child's ability to see. The term includes both partial sight and blindness.

Vision Services:
Evaluation and assessment of visual functioning, including the diagnosis of specific visual disorders, delays, and abilities that affect early childhood development.