



## Explaining Early Intervention to Families

Advice from the Field

2.9.17

- **Be Prepared.** Before the first phone call, review the referral information. If needed, contact the referral source for more information. If the child has a diagnosed condition, research the condition. Find out if the family has been involved with EI before to help gauge their knowledge of EI.
- **Listen to the family's story.** Ask open-ended questions, and pay close attention to what the family shares. Ask what brought them to EI, what they know about EI, and what their expectations are. Let the family guide the conversation.
- **Emphasize the positive.** Share the benefits of EI: some services are provided at no cost to families, services will be tailored to the needs and priorities of the family, visits will be at times that work for the family.
- **Give the right amount of information.** Families are at different places with their knowledge about EI. Let their level guide the amount of information you provide. You can start with an overview and build on it in subsequent visits. It's not a "one and done." Conversations will evolve over time, especially in the first 45 days. You can fill in the gaps in the family's knowledge as the process progresses.
- **Focus on "what happens next."** At each step in the process, explain what will happen next and why we are doing each activity. Walk through the process with the family ensuring that they understand what each activity will look like for them.
- **Be relaxed.** Even if using a script or talking points, let your personality shine through.
- **It's ok to be repetitive.** There is a lot of information for families to take in. They may not understand or remember everything the first time.
- **Meet the family where they are.** Be mindful that the family may be grieving. Be mindful of how they may respond, as they may feel that they somehow "caused" their child's disability and react defensively.
- **Address misunderstandings right away.** Families may have preconceived ideas about EI. Make sure to clear up anything that could be an obstacle in the relationship or the family's involvement in EI.
- **Address funding appropriately.** Some counties talk about funding early on; others minimize this aspect until outcomes are developed and services identified. Families will vary in how much they know about funding and may have ideas based on past funding structures that no longer apply.
- **Parents are the experts, but they are not alone.** Make sure parents understand they are an integral part of the team. They are the experts on their child. But they will have a team supporting them in helping their child learn and develop.
- **Link the family to community supports.** Provide the family with information to access other agencies and resources and to link them with families that have similar stories. This helps them to be more connected.
- **Age 3 and Beyond.** Explain that we are there to support the family until the child's third birthday and that prior to age 3, we will help them transition to the next step.

## **Q and As with Seasoned Service Coordinators**

**Q:** How do we explain Need for Services?

**A:** Most families are not familiar with this terminology. It can help to explain it in the context of daily routines. The RBI can help because it leads to conversations about routines/times of day that are a struggle and how EI can provide support.

**Q:** How long does it take a new Service Coordinator to understand EI? What was helpful in learning about EI?

**A:** It takes time for everyone. A year is a good estimate. It can be helpful to talk to other Service Coordinators, in and outside your county and to accompany them on visits. You will learn a lot by talking to families. Helpful resources include the IFSP Guidance Document and the training module, "The IFSP: It's All About the Process" (course #1066899 on OhioTRAIN). If you become overwhelmed, talking to your supervisor is always an option.

**Q:** What topic(s) are the most uncomfortable to discuss with families, and how do you approach them?

**A:** The COS (comparing to other children), symptoms that are "red flags" for a diagnosis, unexpected delays. While it may be uncomfortable to broach these areas, in many cases, the family will have thought about them and want to know about areas of concern. It is likely they will feel validated and heard when a potential delay or diagnosis is recognized. It is helpful to "start strong;" rich conversations leading up to the difficult topic can make the issue less unexpected. We can also explain early on that while the family may have a concern in one area, we will evaluate the *whole child* and look at functioning in all of the domains.

**Q:** How do you approach difficult situations, e.g. a child born addicted, and the parent has no concerns?

**A:** It is important to express caring and not sound judgmental. "Educate with compassion." Ultimately, it is up to the family whether to pursue EI services.

**Q:** Do you always explain the entire EI process at the beginning or start with more of an overview?

**A:** It depends on the family and their prior knowledge of EI. In many cases, it is fine to start with an overview and add information as the process continues.

## **Helpful Resources**

### **Child Outcome Summary (COS) training modules**

<http://dasycenter.org/child-outcomes-summary-cos-process-module-collecting-using-data-to-improve-programs/>

### **Video Series of Bri's IFSP Meeting: Child Outcome Summary**

Part One <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cSX52InYT7s>

Part Two <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EHpwqywFN3o>

Part Three <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dHcfL2DCimY>

### **Larimer Co Age Anchoring Tools**

<http://ectacenter.org/googleresults.asp?q=Larimer%20Co%20Age%20Anchoring%20Tools>

### **New York State EI Training for Service Coordinators**

<http://www.nyc.gov/html/doh/media/flash/earlyint/training/player.html>