

The Waukesha County Birth to Three Program is administered by Lutheran Social Services of WI and Upper MI. Working in partnership we offer a framework of early intervention services that may be very different from what you are expecting. Our goal in early intervention is to support you and enhance your capacity to meet the needs of your child. We take this approach because young children do not function outside of a family unit. Their physical, social, and intellectual growth happens because of the interactions they have every day with you, their parents and caregivers.

This framework of early intervention services that we use is based upon federal legislation, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Part C, which offers guidance and mandates. These federal requirements state that early intervention services must be comprehensive and coordinated, based on research (so we know they will be effective), be supportive to families so that parents have the necessary tools to support the growth of their child, and occur in the child's natural environment.

The Waukesha County Birth to Three Program implements this framework of early intervention services by incorporating three components:

- natural learning environment practices
- coaching as an interaction style (an evidenced-based adult learning style)
- primary coach approach to teaming

Let's look at each of these separately. First, natural learning environment practices. Natural learning environment practices, according to the law, IDEA, means that intervention services go to the child. Why? Research tells us that young children learn best in familiar settings, when surrounded by the people they know and love, and have lots of opportunity for repetition, or to experience the same thing over and over. Children will learn the skills they need to by participating in the activities that they are already doing at home (getting diaper changes, eating, playing with a sibling), and in community activities that the family likes to do (going to the zoo or the library, visiting Grandma and Grandpa). These are everyday learning opportunities and provide the child with lots of time to practice (at a much greater frequency than a single visit from a provider).

Second, coaching as an interaction style (an evidenced-based adult learning style). IDEA requires that we must give parents the necessary tools they need to improve the developmental outcome of their child. Why? Research tells us that a young child's family has the most influence

on how that child grows and develops. How the family structures their day, what they value, and their interests are just a few examples that will influence what a child learns. Our framework of early intervention services is designed to take all of those unique features about your family and support you in figuring out how best to meet the needs of your child. Through conversation and modeling (showing you and talking about different strategies that might be helpful), we work with you to share experiences, reflect on what works and doesn't work, and problem solve those things that are not working well.

Third, primary coach approach to teaming. IDEA requires that early intervention services must be comprehensive, coordinated, and multidisciplinary. Services must include access to many professionals. Why? Children are complex and it often requires many points of view to understand all that is happening. Research tells us that a team approach is most effective, but families do best when there is one primary individual that acts as the team liaison to support the parent. This primary individual, or primary coach, coordinates access to the entire team for the parent, and works with the team, through conversation, to get ideas and information.

So let's look at an example using all three of these components in our framework of early intervention services. *Your 2 year old is not talking. He has a couple of sounds that he uses to get your attention, but mostly points and pulls you to get what he wants. His, and your, frustration level is high, and he has recently begun to bite you when you do not guess what he wants right away.*

*Using coaching, we would talk with you to get a really good picture of what is happening. (What time of the day is his frustration highest? Does anything different happen right before he bites?) We would also want to know what you have already tried and what your ideas are for helping to figure out what he wants. We will always share what we know about kids and communication skills, and help you to determine what might be the best approach for working with your son. We work with you to develop a plan, and then to think about how that plan is working and how we may need to make some changes.*

*Through conversation, we determine that your most difficult time is mealtime. Your son is hungry and somewhat of a picky eater. If you choose the wrong food, the meal is over. Your son starts to cry, and attempts to bite you. Again, through conversation, we determine that your son generally eats one of three foods to start his meal and that if he sees his preferred food first, all is well. Using natural learning practices, we help you to implement a strategy to allow your son*

*to see all three food items and make a choice. It works. He has not missed a meal all week. By being in the home, and you providing him with these choices at all meals and snack (5 times a day) he has had lots of time to practice, and you have had multiple opportunities to give him praise for making a choice, remaining in his highchair, and not biting. Now, it's time to work on getting him to say some of those words for his choices, rather than pointing at a picture. Again, through conversation, we will talk about what you have tried, how you son has responded, and what we might do next to implement a successful strategy.*

*Lastly, your primary coach would be that one individual that is involved in all those conversations. No more trying to remember what you said and who you where talking to. Let's pretend that your primary coach has a background in special education, and through conversation it is determined that you son does not sit very well in his highchair. A few things have been tried but they were not very successful. You and your coach determine that a physical therapist, who has expertise in seating, should come at take a look. With your permission, that visit, with your primary coach and the physical therapist is scheduled and they come out and meet you together. Having a primary coach allows for consistency and collaboration, ensuring that all areas of need are met for your child.*