



Connecticut Birth to Three System
A Family Handbook

Guide 1: Referral and
Eligibility Evaluation

July 2014



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This handbook and others
are available at www.birth23.org



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Inserts:

- Programs that serve your town
- State and national resources
- Birth to Three DVD: Providing Hope, Realizing Dreams (if requested)

Welcome to the Connecticut Birth to Three System!

For families worried that their child's **development** is lagging behind other children his age, the infant, toddler, and preschool years can be spent anxiously waiting for developmental milestones to be met. Early intervention and the **Birth to Three System** can help you put your concerns to rest. You have taken a very important first step by talking with the Child Development Infoline and scheduling an **eligibility evaluation** visit for your child.

This handbook introduces you to the Connecticut Birth to Three System and lets you know what to expect during your child's evaluation and beyond. A welcome video is available for viewing on our website: www.birth23.org, under Videos for Families. If you do not have access to a computer and would like a DVD copy of our welcome video please contact Child Development Infoline at 800-505-7000.



This handbook lets you know what to expect
during your child's evaluation.

An introduction to the Birth to Three System

The Birth to Three System was created under **Part C** of a federal law called the **Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)**, and by state law 17a-248. In Connecticut, the Department of Developmental Services is the lead agency that administers the Birth to Three System. The **lead agency** operates a central office for outreach, training, and fiscal operations. In addition a family liaison is on staff to work directly with families who have questions or concerns about the Connecticut Birth to Three System or their individual **Birth to Three program**.

Staff members from each program work directly with families and eligible children. Birth to Three professionals will coach you in ways to embed early intervention strategies into your daily routines with your child. Each program serves a specific set of towns. The programs serving your hometown appear on our website: www.birth23.org under Birth 23 by Town and are also included with this book. Since Birth to Three visits usually take place in the homes of eligible children, do not be concerned if your program's office address is not in your hometown. Most towns have more than one program serving their town giving families the option of choosing a specific program. This can be done before or after the eligibility evaluation and right up to the time you leave the Birth to Three System.

Information that can help you learn more about each program is available on our website at www.birth23.org by clicking on About our Programs. If you would like to know how a particular program compares to other state programs click on How are we doing? then click on Public Reporting of APR (Annual Performance Review) data. You can also click on State Performance Plans to learn how well the State of Connecticut is doing. If you don't have access to the Internet you can contact the Birth to Three Accountability and Monitoring office at 860-496-3073.

The evaluation visit

The evaluation visit usually takes place in your home if that is where you and your child feel most comfortable. When scheduling this visit, think of the best time of day for you and your child. When is your child awake and alert? Can your spouse, partner, or other caregiver also be home to participate? At least one parent must be present for the evaluation. The evaluators will work with you to find a good time for the visit that also fits into their schedules.

The team will ask you to sign several forms at the start of the visit including consent to:

- Evaluate your child
- Bill your health insurance company for the evaluation (with no co-pay or deductible for you)
- Get information from your doctor or others you identify

The evaluators will explain each form to you before you sign. Your consent is voluntary and may be cancelled at any time. Information about your child and family is **confidential** and cannot be shared without your permission. **See page 12 for more details about your rights in the Birth to Three System.**

Parent participation in the evaluation

Please participate in the evaluation by:

- Helping your child feel comfortable during the evaluation visit
- Helping with activities that explore your child's abilities
- Telling the team whether or not what they are seeing is typical for your child
- Providing truthful and accurate responses to questions about your child's development no matter how painful those answers may be
- Helping the team see your child's unique strengths and needs
- Asking questions and offering your opinions about how your child's evaluation is going

The Birth to Three team will ask you to share information from other developmental assessments or evaluations your child might have had outside of Birth to Three. These outside evaluations may be very important for determining eligibility.

Team members are interested in hearing about things your child can already do and the things that are difficult for your child. They will watch your child playing with you and with toys to see what he or she can do. You know more about your child than anyone else. Your input is extremely valuable.



You can best prepare for the evaluation by taking some time beforehand to think about the following:

- your child's prenatal history
- your child's birth
- your child's health and developmental history
- any significant changes in your life or your child's life that may contribute to behavior changes in your child
- when you were first concerned that something might not be quite right
- what you may have done to learn more about the suspected problem
- your concerns now

The team will review results from this testing, the information you provide about your child's history and development, and any reports received from medical providers to arrive at an eligibility decision. If at all possible, you will be given a written draft copy of the results and eligibility decision in your native language. The evaluation report is not final until you have had a chance to read it and make sure that it is correct.

How is my child's eligibility decided?

Your child may be found **eligible for early intervention** in one of two ways:

1. your child has a confirmed medical condition that is expected to lead to a developmental delay and therefore is automatically eligible
or
2. eligibility evaluation by staff from two different professions (for example, speech therapy and physical therapy) confirming that there is a significant developmental delay. If a Birth to Three professional holds two certificates or licenses from different disciplines (for example social work and speech therapy), then he or she can complete the eligibility evaluation without a second person from a different discipline.

The information you gave to the Child Development Infoline (CDI) about your child and family over the phone was recorded in our confidential electronic database and transferred to the Birth to Three program that will evaluate your child. If you gave consent for CDI to follow-up with you two months after the referral, your information was also recorded in a separate confidential electronic database for that purpose.

The Birth to Three program will send two staff (or one professional with two certificates or licenses) to your home to complete an evaluation visit with you and your child. If your child does not have a confirmed medical condition from our diagnosed condition list, making the child automatically eligible or an outside evaluation that can be used document a significant delay, an evaluation of your child's abilities and possible developmental delays will be used to determine eligibility.

You will be an important part of the **Birth to Three evaluation team** that will assess five areas of your child's development.

Five Areas of Development

- physical development, such as vision, hearing, movement and health
- communication skills, such as pointing, understanding your words, expressing thoughts
- adaptive or self-help skills, such as feeding and dressing
- cognitive skills, such as thinking, learning, and reasoning
- social-emotional development, such as getting along with others, expressing feelings, developing relationships

If your child was referred to Birth to Three because of concerns about his or her speech or language abilities it is very important to have your child's hearing tested. Hearing problems, even minor ones often result in speech and language **delays**. Your child may even exhibit tantrums and behavioral concerns that may result from the frustration of not being able to communicate. It is very important for your Birth to Three team to know your child's level of hearing when it completes the initial assessment. Talk to your pediatrician about the possibility of being referred to a pediatric audiologist for an in depth hearing evaluation. Many health insurance plans cover this, so check your health plan to see if yours does.



What if my child **is not eligible** for Birth to Three?

If you disagree with the results of the Birth to Three eligibility evaluation and this cannot be resolved by talking with the program or the family liaison there are other ways of resolving disputes. You may file a written complaint, request **mediation** or request a **due process hearing**. **For more information on your rights, see page 12.**

Children who have mild delays are not eligible for Birth to Three services. If your child is not eligible your evaluation team will link you to other programs that will help you understand your child's development. Ages and Stages is a free program that helps you keep track of your child's development. If you enroll, the Child Development Infoline (CDI) will mail you a questionnaire about your child's development every four to six months. Mail your answers back to CDI for scoring. If your child's development continues on schedule, CDI will send you a note telling you so along with some activities you can enjoy with your child. If your child's development shows that he or she might need some help from Birth to Three, CDI will phone you to discuss scheduling another evaluation. All evaluations are free.

What if my child **is eligible** for Birth to Three?

In order to be considered eligible, your child's development must fall two standard deviations below average in one developmental area or one-and-a-half standard deviations below average in two or more developmental areas. While this may seem complicated, in simple terms it means that according to the evaluation tools used, your child's development was considerably behind all other children of his age in one or more areas. Early intervention through Birth to Three will work to close these gaps and assist you as you help your child reach age appropriate developmental milestones.

After eligibility is determined, you will be assigned a **service coordinator**. Your service coordinator will help bring together all the people, information, and resources that are an important part of your life. Your service coordinator is your guide as you make connections to community resources including those outside of Birth to Three. These may include a wide variety of developmental, health, economic and quality of life issues.

Your service coordinator will guide you in developing a plan called the **Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP)**. The IFSP will describe the real-life **outcomes** you want for your child and family. The IFSP lists how, where, and when your family will work with the program staff to reach those outcomes. Your service coordinator will offer you more details about the IFSP and many other topics as you work together.

Birth to Three is a system of supports for families to help them meet the needs of their infants and toddlers who have **disabilities** or delays in their development. All eligible families will receive **service coordination**. In addition, most families receive one or more direct services for their child. Birth to Three programs include up to seventeen different services, but typical services for most families include working with a developmental specialist (teacher), physical or occupational therapist, speech pathologist, social worker or other professional. These professionals will demonstrate for your family how to teach your child new skills or behaviors. They will coach you as you practice these skills with your child in your daily activities so they become a part of your routine. Birth to Three is different from outpatient rehabilitation services, where professionals work with your child for a fixed amount of time while you watch. Research shows infants and toddlers learn best when skills are incorporated into their daily routines by their caregivers. You and your child's other caregivers are an essential part of the Birth to Three team.

How much will I have to pay?

Your child's eligibility evaluation is completed at no cost to your family. You will be asked for permission to bill your health insurance to help offset the cost, but this is voluntary and will not affect your child's evaluation in any way. If your child is found eligible, you will be asked again for permission to bill your health insurance plan for reimbursement of some of the services. This is also voluntary and will not affect any of your services but will result in an additional copayment based on your income.

If your child is found eligible and your income is under \$45,000 you will **NOT** be asked to pay fees. If your income is over \$45,000 and you wish to receive direct services, you will be asked to begin making monthly payments after your first full month of services.

Parent payments are determined on a sliding fee scale according to your income and family size. There will also be an additional copayment based on income if you do not consent to have your insurance billed. For example, a family of four with an annual adjusted gross income of \$122,000 with permission to bill insurance would pay \$144. If this same family decided not to allow their insurance to be billed they would pay a fee of \$144 PLUS a copayment of \$75 for a total monthly cost of \$219.

If you feel last year's adjusted gross income does not reflect your family's current income, you will have the opportunity to adjust your income. For example, there may be changes in your family's income due to job loss, reduced hours or maternity leave. Or you may now be paying childcare costs. The Family Cost Participation Form you fill out prior to services beginning will guide you through the categories of "extraordinary expenses." You will be required to provide proper documentation and the approval of Birth to Three staff prior to an income reduction that may result in a decrease in your monthly family fee. Be sure to ask your service coordinator for assistance in filling out your form. Or check the Birth to Three website for an interactive presentation for families "Birth to Three Family Cost Participation."

There are some services that will be offered to your family at no cost. They are: Child Find, service coordination, development and review of an IFSP, assessment, and assistance with transition out of Birth to Three. If you and your family decide you would like to obtain direct services from a private provider in your community at your own cost or through your own health insurance, these other services will still be available to you.

If your child is enrolled in the Medicaid program (HUSKY A) there is no fee.



What can my Birth to Three program offer?

Your service coordinator is employed by an agency that earned approval to provide Birth to Three services and supports. Each approved agency employs staff that are licensed or certified in different specialties. These specialties include: education, physical therapy, social work, audiology, behavior analysis, occupational therapy, speech therapy, and other areas of expertise. The staff will work with you and your family to help you and your child reach the outcomes you choose for your child and family. All programs and their staff meet the standards for excellence set by the Birth to Three System.

Each Birth to Three program offers:

- **free eligibility evaluation** by trained professionals, typically in your home
- **a service coordinator** who will also be providing direct services (such as speech) and who is responsible for identifying resources in your community to assist your family, coordinating all the different people, information, and resources that support your family and assist your family as you plan for your child's transition out of Birth to Three
- **Trained staff** will help you to work on goals related to your child's and your family's needs
- **Services** that will help you practice new skills with your child during activities that are a part of your family's regular routine. Practicing these skills with your child in your home and in the places where you both spend time in your community (for example, at childcare or grandma's house) is the best way for your child to most successfully learn new skills.
- **Due process rights** under IDEA, Part C guarantee families certain rights, called procedural safeguards. Please refer to pages 12 through 14 of this handbook to learn more about your rights in the Birth to Three System.

Services in the Birth to Three System

Services are designed around your family's needs, concerns, and priorities. **Natural learning opportunities** happen throughout your day and are used for practicing new skills with your child. **Here is a quick look at supports and services:**

- **FOCUS:** Your whole family, not just your eligible child will be supported in Birth to Three.
- **OUTCOMES:** You choose which skills you want to work on with your child so that he may become successful in family and community activities.
- **PROVIDERS:** Providers will work with you and your family in a close partnership using a **transdisciplinary** model demonstrating and coaching you on incorporating skills into your child's daily routine.
- **LENGTH OF SERVICE:** Services are voluntary. You may leave whenever you choose, when services are no longer needed or by the time of your child's third birthday. The service coordinator assists the family in transitioning to community programs upon exiting from Birth to Three. Examples of community programs may include child care, early childhood special education or Head Start.
- **WHERE:** Services will be provided in your home and community, wherever your child spends time during the day.
- **INTENSITY:** The frequency and length of visits is designed to match the outcomes for your child and family. The frequency of visits you and your Birth to Three team decide on may look different from what your doctor or medical team is prescribing. Many medical professionals are more familiar with an outpatient rehabilitation model where you sit and watch a professional work with your child. During Birth to Three visits providers will be demonstrating and coaching you on how you can implement specific techniques and strategies into your daily routines. Research shows that this is how very young children learn best. Research also indicates more frequent visits do not guarantee faster development. You are an essential part of your child's team.
- **MEASURES OF SUCCESS:** Success is measured by your child learning new skills, your family gaining confidence in meeting your child's needs and connecting with community resources and activities.

What are my rights?

The IDEA gives you certain rights under the Birth to Three System beginning immediately with your first contact with Birth to Three. If at any time you are not sure of your rights, please talk with your service coordinator, program director, the Birth to Three family liaison, or the Child Development Infoline. Your service coordinator will also give you a brochure called, **Parent Rights Under IDEA Part C**, that describes your rights in more detail.

Here is a brief summary:

- **You have the right to give written permission before your child is evaluated**, before services begin or change, and before any information about your child or family is shared with anyone.
- **You have the right to be notified** before any action takes place. You must be told in advance about any meetings, evaluations, services, or actions affecting your child under the Birth to Three System. This is called “prior written notice.” You will be asked to sign forms given to you by your service coordinator to show your agreement. You can change your mind at any time.
- **If your child is eligible, you have the right to an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) delivered by a team that includes you and anyone you want to invite.** Meetings to develop or review an IFSP should be at a convenient time and place for you and your family. You have the right at any time to request an IFSP meeting to review, change, discontinue, or add a different service that will help you and your family reach your outcomes. You also have the right to postpone a meeting in progress if necessary.
- **IFSP meetings must be held in your native language** or other mode of communication you need, such as sign language, unless, for some reason, it is not possible to do so. You may ask for an interpreter to help you understand and actively participate in the IFSP discussion.
- **You have the right to request an IFSP meeting at any time to review the supports and services your child and family receive.** However, in order to change your IFSP a multidisciplinary team including you and at least two individuals from separate disciplines must participate. One of the individuals must be the service coordinator. Please keep in mind that it may take time to make arrangements for the team to assemble for an IFSP meeting.
- **You have the right to privacy.** Information about your child or family is confidential. Only select Birth to Three staff, Lead Agency auditors, and accrediting agencies can review your child’s record without your specific written consent.

- **You have the right to examine your child's record.** An electronic record is begun at the time your child is referred and is updated until you exit the program. Your service coordinator also maintains a folder of important documents. You may schedule an appointment to examine these records or request a copy of them at any time. Within 10 days of your request you must be provided with a copy of the records. If you do not understand something in the record, it will be explained to you. If you do not agree with something in the record, you can request that it be changed. Your program must agree to change the record within ten days of you're your request. If they disagree they must inform you of your right to a hearing.
- **You have the right to disagree with the Birth to Three System. There are four ways to do this.**

1. Very often the quickest and most satisfying way to resolve a concern is to talk with your service coordinator. You can also speak to the program director of your Birth to Three program. If you are uncomfortable doing this or you feel the problem has not been resolved, you may contact the family liaison at the Birth to Three central office. She will try to understand the problem and work with you and your Birth to Three program to make adjustments to meet the needs of the situation. In many instances, an explanation of why something is done in a certain way is all that is needed usually to resolve the problem.
2. If this is not successful or if you choose, you may also file a written complaint. The letter should be addressed to:

**Lynn Skene Johnson, Acting Director
CT Birth to Three System
460 Capitol Avenue
Hartford, CT 06106-1308**

The complaint must be signed and include your name, address, and phone number; the name and address of the program or person that you are complaining about; plus a statement of what the complaint is about and a proposed solution. You must also mail a copy of the complaint to the program about which you have a complaint. It is helpful to also include the best days and times that you can be reached by telephone

The Director will then ask a Birth to Three manager or an independent person to investigate your charges. That person will contact you to see if you have any additional information that you wish to submit. The

Director will send you a written response within sixty calendar days. It will include:

- the facts and conclusions
- the reason for the decision
- the corrective actions, if required, that will be taken

3. Another way to resolve a disagreement is to write to the family liaison to request mediation. Mediation allows you and your program's staff to talk about the details of your disagreement with an impartial, trained mediator. The mediator will work with you and your program to find a suitable solution and then write up the terms of your agreement. Mediation works well in many situations and you are encouraged to consider this option. However, you are not required to use mediation.
4. You may also write to the Family Liaison to request a due process hearing, a more formal process conducted before an impartial hearing officer. The incident about which you are requesting a due process hearing must have occurred in the previous 12 months, unless there are extenuating circumstances. Normally, legal counsel or another person with professional knowledge of your child should represent your case. An Assistant Attorney General will represent the Birth to Three System. At the request of either party, the hearing officer may extend the 30-day timeline for a due process hearing decision.

Witnesses are called to testify and are cross-examined, evidence is presented, and shortly after the hearing ends and within 30 days of the request, the hearing officer issues a written decision. The hearing is provided at no cost, but you must pay for any professionals that represent you.

You can request a brochure on mediation or due process hearings from the Family Liaison.

While a complaint is being resolved in any of the ways described, you have the right to continue receiving services that are not in dispute until your child turns three or unless you and Birth to Three team agree that this is not in your child's best interest.

For more information about your rights in Birth to Three visit our website at www.birth23.org and click on Videos for Families, then click on Welcome videos for families.

Who can I call if I have a question?

If you have already scheduled your child's evaluation visit, you may call the evaluation team with questions or ask questions once they arrive in your home. Refer to the insert that comes with this booklet to find the agency name and phone number for your program.

You may contact the family liaison at any time before or after your child's evaluation for answers to your questions about all aspects of early intervention. If you do not speak English, over-the-phone interpretation services in your native language are available at no charge to you.

The Birth to Three website, which is updated often, is a great source of information. Visit the website at www.birth23.org

Glossary

accrediting agencies: national organizations that give an "approved" status to those programs that meet their standards for excellence

Birth to Three program: an agency under contract with the Birth to Three System or run by the lead agency in order to provide supports and services that help you help your child and family to reach your chosen outcomes

Birth to Three evaluation team: people who have specialized knowledge about what works to reach developmental outcomes; the team always includes your family and may include one or more therapists, a teacher, and other professionals, who are trained to help with your outcomes and needs

confidential: private; cannot be shared without your permission

consent: the approval that you give for someone to do something; consent in the Birth to Three System is always voluntary and may be cancelled at any time

Glossary continued

delays: a developmental milestone that failed to happen at the intended or expected time

development: the process of learning and mastering new skills over time including the ability to move, communicate, think, see, hear, and play with toys or other people

disabilities: conditions that limit or slow down one or more kinds of development

due process hearing: the most formal way to resolve a disagreement between an enrolled family and the Birth to Three System; usually used after verbal discussion, written complaint, and/or mediation have not successfully resolved the complaint.

early intervention: supports and services offered to an eligible child and family as soon as a developmental delay is identified in order to improve the child's ability to live, learn, and play in their home and community

eligible: meeting the requirements to participate

eligibility evaluation: By using developmental measurements to test a child's abilities, and then comparing these with what is expected for children of the same age, if it is found then that there is a significant difference, the child will be eligible for early intervention.

Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP): a written plan describing the outcome you want for your child and family, the Birth to Three services and supports used to reach those outcomes, where and when they will take place, and who will work with you.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA): A federal law that supports the provision of early intervention to eligible infants and toddlers (under Part C of the law), and guarantees that all children ages 3 to 21 who need special education receive a free appropriate public education (under Part B of the law).

lead agency: the State agency responsible for IDEA, Part C, which assures quality, and conducts audits in order to maintain compliance with all applicable laws; the lead agency in Connecticut is the Department of Developmental Services

mediation: a way to settle a conflict so both sides win. Parents and professionals discuss their differences and, with the help of a trained mediator, reach a settlement that both sides accept.

natural learning opportunities: the everyday routines and activities of life that can be used to teach and practice new skills (for example, snack time, diaper changing, bath time, etc.)

outcomes: the changes that a family would like to work toward achieving



Part C: part of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) providing funds to State lead agencies to assist in the provision of early intervention services to infants and toddlers with disabilities from birth until the child's third birthday.

service coordination supports: an active ongoing process provided at no cost, that assists and enables families to access services and assures their rights and procedural safeguards.

service coordinator: a person from your Birth to Three program who will help you to communicate with the people on your team, understand the information given to you, and will work with you to connect your family to community resources outside of Birth to Three covering a wide variety of developmental, health, economic, and life quality issues.

transdisciplinary: when parents and professionals from two or more different disciplines teach, learn and work together across traditional disciplinary or professional boundaries. For example, a developmental specialist working with parents on their child's problem-solving skills will include speech activities during the visit if language development is a concern. The team may designate one member as the primary interventionist. Team members may provide direct services, consulting services, or both. A transdisciplinary approach to service delivery is recommended for all early intervention and support services.

Visit the website at www.birth23.org



www.birth23.org

1-866-888-4188

Funding provided under Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA), through the United States Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs

Designed by Gardner Group Graphic Design, LLC, West Hartford, CT www.gardnergdd.com

Printing by State of Connecticut, Department of Administrative Services Print Shop