



# Connecticut Birth to Three System A Family Handbook

**Guide 2:** Orientation to Supports for Families  
of Eligible Children



This handbook and others are available at [www.birth23.org](http://www.birth23.org).

CT Birth to Three System is a Division of the  
CT Office of Early Childhood (OEC).



# What is a Service Coordinator and What Can I Expect?

A service coordinator is someone on your Birth to Three team who will help you to identify any resources you and your family may need. They are responsible for bringing together the different people, information, and resources available to support your child and family. The service coordinator is there to answer any questions you might have, and to make what might seem confusing at first more manageable.

Your service coordinator has expertise in providing early intervention supports (such as physical therapy or speech and language supports); and has completed additional training to be certified as a service coordinator in the CT Birth to Three System. With your family's identified priorities in mind, they will:

- help coordinate services, supports, and information from different sources
- talk to you about ways to teach your child new skills during your family's regular routines and activities
- help you find answers to questions you have about your child
- help you find opportunities to connect with other families
- help you talk with other specialists involved with your child and family, such as medical providers and child care staff
- offer information on helpful state and community resources
- help with transition to preschool or other community supports of your choosing



Your service coordinator is the person on your Birth to Three team who will work closest with you. You and the service coordinator are the team co-captains, while additional members of your team may include other early intervention providers, your child's child care provider, and your child's doctor. Your service coordinator will guide you through the early intervention system and prepare you to leave it once supports are no longer needed, or your child turns three.

# What is an IFSP?

Your Individual Family Service Plan (IFSP) is an agreement between you and the Birth to Three program providing early intervention services and supports to your child and family. Your plan is a legal document designed to help everyone on your team understand what is going to happen; who is going to be involved; and when and where supports will take place, and for how long. You and your team (at least two individuals from separate disciplines, one of whom must be your service coordinator) will review the IFSP at least every six months or as often as needed to make sure it still fits your priorities, and your child's and your family's needs.



## WHAT IS AN IFSP MEETING?

You, as the parent(s) or caregiver(s), and your service coordinator must be present at all IFSP meetings. The first IFSP meeting will also include a provider who helped to gather and complete the developmental evaluation and assessment information about your child. You may invite others to attend the meeting, such as family members, your child care provider, and any friend or other provider that you feel should be involved. If they cannot attend, their information can still be shared and included in the plan. Another important person is your child's primary health care provider (PHCP), who will be contacted for their input.

The more involved you and your family members are in the IFSP meeting, the more meaningful your plan will be. Share what is important to you and what you think your child will need. Ask any questions you have regarding the evaluations and assessments describing your child.



## IMPORTANT INFORMATION ABOUT YOUR CHILD AND FAMILY

- What does your child like? Dislike?
- What frustrates your child?
- What have you already tried to help with your child's frustration?
- What does your child do during the day?
- Are there any significant changes in your life or your child's life that may contribute to behavioral changes in your child?
- What things do you like to do as a family? With friends?
- Which people and agencies do you find helpful?
- What are your family's strengths in meeting your child's needs?
- What else do you want the team to know about your child or family?

All team members, including you and your family, will work together to develop the IFSP. This will be done by reviewing information, making choices, and developing IFSP outcomes. The outcomes are the changes that you and your family have decided you want to work towards achieving. During these discussions, you can suggest the activities you will use to reach those outcomes. You will also decide on activities and early intervention services that will support your outcomes for your child and family.



# Supports and Services Under Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Part C (Early Intervention)

Your primary service provider (likely also your service coordinator) with the support of other team members can help with the following supports and services:

- assistive technology
- cued language
- family training, counseling, and home visits
- health
- nursing
- nutrition
- occupational therapy (OT)
- physical therapy (PT)
- psychological support
- service coordination
- sign language
- social work
- specialized instruction
- speech and language
- transportation or mileage reimbursement when necessary to receive other IFSP identified supports
- vision and mobility



## UNDERSTANDING PARENT RIGHTS AND THE SYSTEM OF PAYMENTS UNDER IDEA, PART C

Under Federal law, you must indicate that you understand your rights and give permission before services can begin. Your signature on the IFSP will indicate that you agree with the entire IFSP. You can give permission to begin one or more early intervention services as written, while disagreeing about or declining others. If you do not fully accept a new IFSP, you and your team must try to resolve the issue. The agreed upon supports must begin by the projected start date.

Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires states to identify how their early intervention services are funded, including the use of State and private resources, and Federal funds (which must be considered the payer of last resort).

In Connecticut, State and Federal funds cover approximately 80% of the cost of Birth to Three services. The remaining 20% is covered by billing families' private medical insurance.

If you would like more information about your Parent Rights and System of Payments, please refer to the Parent Rights and Early Intervention Funding brochure given to you by your service coordinator, or visit [birth23.org/families/family-resources/](http://birth23.org/families/family-resources/).





# What are my responsibilities in Birth to Three?

As the most important member of your child's Birth to Three team, it is your responsibility to be an active participant in every visit. Your Birth to Three team members will involve you by asking lots of open-ended questions, coaching, demonstrating, and asking you to try. They will make sure you understand everything they are sharing and that you feel comfortable using these new skills with your child between visits.

**The following are some ways you can actively participate during a visit:**

- Schedule your visit during an activity with which you are wanting support from your provider, such as mealtime, bathtime, drop-off at child care, or taking a walk around the neighborhood.
- Talk about how things went with strategies you've tried since the last visit.
- Practice during the visit and ask questions if you are not sure.
- Develop a between visit plan with your primary service provider, identifying a specific activity you'd like to target and the strategies that will support your plan.
- Share any relevant information that happened since the last Birth to Three visit that might impact your child. This may include medical or outside evaluations.



# How do I get the most out of my visit?

## BEFORE YOUR VISIT

- **Be prepared.** Schedule your visit at a time that is convenient for you, so that you may actively participate during the visit. Siblings and other family members or caregivers are welcome and will be invited to join in the visit if present.
- **Plan the agenda.** Let your Birth to Three provider(s) know what activity you want them to observe and what you want to discuss at your visit. Write down any questions that you may have since your last visit.
- **Be ready to share what has happened since your last visit.** Think about or make a list of anything you think is important to share, such as a trip to the doctor or changes in routine. Think about what suggestions have worked well and those that have not worked so well.

## DURING YOUR VISIT

- **Ask questions.** Make sure you understand the information being shared. If you are not sure why something is being done, just ask. If it helps, ask for information to be put in writing.
- **Ask for another demonstration.** Ask to be shown again anything you don't understand. Practice strategies together during the visit. Hands-on instruction is the best way to learn.
- **Discuss ideas for carrying over strategies between visits.** Practice time between visits is just as important as the visit itself. Be sure to talk about ways to use the strategies and activities during everyday family activities.

**Celebrate successes! Even the tiny ones!**

## AFTER YOUR VISIT

- **Try things out.** Practice the new strategies you picked within the activities you planned. What is working? What isn't?
- **Make a note of it.** Remember to make a mental note or keep a notebook for questions that may come up between visits.
- **Have fun.** The best teaching and learning occur when you and your child are having fun.





## WHEN IS IT TIME TO LEAVE BIRTH TO THREE?

It is good to think about and plan for the future at every stage of your family's Birth to Three experience. Discussion about transition begins at your very first IFSP meeting and will continue throughout your family's time in Birth to Three. You may notify your service coordinator that you wish to transition out of Birth to Three at any point; or your service coordinator may discuss ending Birth to Three supports if your child no longer needs early intervention.

By law, most Birth to Three services and supports will end when your child turns three years old. New partners may enter your life as you plan to say goodbye to Birth to Three. If your child leaves before age three or if your child will not be receiving early childhood special education, your service coordinator will work with you to identify other available activities in your community.



## COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES



- library story hours
- local play groups
- Head Start
- recreational programs
- community nursery schools
- child care centers

There are many community options to choose from that you and your child may enjoy. If you would like, your service coordinator can help you collect information about how to enroll in a program and possible funding or scholarship information. You will receive prior written notice that Birth to Three services are ending and a transition meeting will be held to develop your transition plan.

If your child needs special education services beyond age three, your service coordinator will help you to work with your local public school system to determine your child's eligibility for early childhood special education and related services. Planning for this transition may begin anytime, but usually increases during the nine months before your child turns three. Some children may qualify for Early Intervention Services and Supports over 3 years old (EIS over 3) during the summer months if certain requirements are met. For more information on the transition process and EIS over 3, please review **Handbook III: Guide to Transition**.

