
Childhood developmental delay and disability early intervention

Summary

- Early childhood interventions help babies and young children with developmental delays or disabilities.
- You and your healthcare professionals can choose one or more interventions that best suit your needs.
- Early childhood interventions offer parenting and family support, as well as specific therapies for your child.
- Therapies for your child can support learning physical skills for everyday life and new behavioural and social skills.
- Research suggests that therapies that are intense and take time give the best results.

In the healthcare industry, intervention means taking action or using a treatment to try to improve a condition or problem. Early childhood intervention refers to support services to help babies and young children with developmental delays or disabilities.

Many different types of interventions exist, so you and your healthcare professionals can try one or a combination of approaches to best suit you and your child's needs.

The overall aim of early childhood intervention is to improve your child's development and wellbeing during their early pre-school years, which is important to their ongoing learning and development.

Types of early childhood intervention

The types of support include developmental and behavioural interventions, medication and support for your family.

Intervention services can help with:

- education programs
- family support
- kindergarten inclusion
- linkages to support services
- parenting support
- therapy for behaviour and development
- transition to kindergarten or school.

Early childhood therapies

Healthcare professionals working in early childhood intervention cover a broad range of therapeutic areas, including:

- early special education
- occupational therapy – helps with motor skills, play and self-help skills, such as dressing and toileting
- physiotherapy – helps with motor skills such as balance, sitting, crawling and walking
- psychology
- speech therapy – helps with speech, language, eating and drinking skills.

For children with a disability, healthcare professionals can help to improve your child's skills in areas such as:

- balance
- dressing and toileting
- eating and drinking

- motor (movement) skills
- play
- sitting, crawling and walking
- speech and language.

Behavioural support for your child

If you are concerned about your child's emotions or behaviour, a good place to start is to keep a diary of situations and responses that concern you. Include information about where and when they occur. You can then discuss your concerns with specialist healthcare professionals when you see them.

For children with autism spectrum disorder, research shows that education and behavioural interventions that begin as early as possible achieve the best results for most children. Research also suggests that using intensive techniques that take time is critical to success.

Approaches based on behaviour focus on teaching children new behaviours and skills with structured techniques.

Examples of behaviour-based approaches include:

- applied behaviour analysis (ABA) – a set of principles that focus on breaking down skills or behaviours into steps and teaching these with clear instructions,
- rewards and repetition
- Lovaas program – teaches skills for self-help, language, communication, play, early academic and socialisation skills, based on ABA
- discrete trial training – teaches skills for learning, develops new skills and focuses on decreasing difficult behaviour
- incidental teaching – teaches skills for language use, interpersonal interaction and learning readiness
- positive behavioural support – addresses social, communication, academic and daily living skills, as well as difficult behaviour
- pivotal response training – teaches social, communication and play skills.

Most research about effectiveness has focused on these and other similar behaviour-based therapies. You should be careful of therapies that claim to 'cure' your child.

Accessing early childhood intervention services

There are many pathways into early childhood intervention for your child and your family. Depending on your needs, you can access the broad range of support through:

- community health
- non-government organisations
- private therapists
- the Victorian Government.

For more information, contact **Early Childhood Intervention Services (ECIS)** in your area, which are funded by the Victorian Government's Department of Education and Training. ECIS provide information and support, planning and service coordination, as well as individual and group therapy and education.

You can apply to ECIS for access to support teams across Victoria. Your doctor or other healthcare professional can help you with your application. The application form has contact details for offices in your area.

Where to get help

- Your doctor
- Early Childhood Intervention Services Tel. (03) 9637 2000
- Local community health centre
- Maternal and Child Health Line (24 hours) Tel. 132 229

- NURSE-ON-CALL Tel. 1300 60 60 24 – for expert health information and advice (24 hours, 7 days)
- National Disability Insurance Agency Tel. 1800 800 110

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