

Language & Learning

Getting Started With Early Intervention

Your Early Intervention Team

Your early intervention includes several key individuals called a Multi-Disciplinary Team (MDT) who will help you in the process of building your baby's communication skills for the first important years.

One person, especially one professional, is not allowed to decide what is right for your baby. Professionals have good information and advice to offer, but a team of adults is more likely to make good decisions than a single person. You are an important member of the team. You can, and should, speak up for your baby.

Generally, members of your team will agree on the importance of your baby's needs, and a strong team can be a wonderful support for parents.

Team members and their roles include:

You, the Parent: You are the first and most important member of the team. No one knows your baby as well as you. You are there to observe your baby's development, from rolling over to sitting up, from standing to walking, from cooing and babbling to first spoken words or from gestures and pointing to first words in sign.

You will be the person who puts on the hearing aids and talks, cues and/or signs to your baby throughout the day. You will be the person to tell other team members when the first words come. Other professionals, however, know things that you are still learning about ways to help you and your baby communicate. They can answer your questions, and help you know what questions to ask.

Your advisor can give you information from many different sources, so that you can make the decisions for your child based on his or her individual needs. You will work with your infant/family specialist to become an advocate throughout your child's years of development. Teachers and team members will come and go, but you and your child will grow and develop together.

The Audiologist: The audiologist is a very important member of the team. This individual keeps track of the amount of hearing your baby has, fits hearing aids, programs cochlear implants, and answers your questions about hearing, hearing aids, cochlear implants, and other auditory equipment.

An Infant/Family Specialist: When your child is three or older, this role may be filled by a classroom teacher of the deaf and hard of hearing or a speech-language pathologist. Early in your baby's life, you will need a person who specializes in helping families and babies get a good start. This person may have background in a variety of disciplines (e.g., teacher of the deaf, speech-language pathologist; audiologist, special education teacher, early childhood specialist) but will have special expertise in working with infants who are deaf or hard of hearing and their families.

A Speech/Language Therapist: Sometimes, your infant/family specialist is a speech language pathologist who has learned about aural habilitation. Most parent/infant teachers of the deaf and hard of hearing are also trained to help deaf and hard of hearing children begin to develop their voices and their hearing. For children who use sign language, this team member will help you to begin communicating with your baby as quickly and as easily as possible.

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A Primary Care Physician: Whether your baby needs to see the family practitioner or pediatrician regularly in order to grow up to be healthy and strong, or whether other physical and medical intervention is needed, your primary care physician must approve and sign the Individualized Family Services Plan developed by your baby's team.

A School District Representative: When your baby needs special services, someone with authority to say that the district can and will provide those services needs to be at your IFSP meetings.

An Advocate: If you have another individual that you would like to be with you during meetings, you are free to invite your own advocate. This might be someone else in your family, someone who knows your baby well but is not usually on the school MDT, or someone that you feel can help you to make appropriate decisions. Whether or not you bring an advocate is up to you.

Your infant/family specialist or service coordinator will be able to help you get in touch with the other members of your team. It is a good idea to keep a list of school district members, audiologists and doctors with their phone numbers and e-mail addresses.