
System of Early Intervention

Natural Environments

...where children spend their time

Nebraska Departments of Education and Health and Human Services

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The Law Says...

Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act says that to the maximum extent appropriate, early intervention services must be provided in natural environments, including home and community settings in which children without disabilities participate. Services can only be provided in a setting other than a natural environment when early intervention cannot be achieved satisfactorily in a natural environment.

[SEC. 632 (4) (G) and SEC. 635 (a) (16) (B)]

303.18 As used in this part, natural environment means settings that are natural or normal for the child's age peers who have no disabilities

Frequently Asked Questions

Why are natural environments important?

- ◆ It is a child's nature to learn throughout the day in whatever activity or place they are in.
- ◆ Segregation of children with disabilities often leads to further isolation.
- ◆ Natural environments provide support to families to help their children develop to their fullest potential.
- ◆ A common characteristic of some children who are experiencing delays and disabilities is difficulty in generalizing skills from one environment to another. Supporting intervention in the natural environment allows the child to respond to the natural cues of the environment and learn to use the skill across many similar, but not identical situations.

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Questions?

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Frequently Asked Questions

How is a child's natural environment identified?

- ◆ Natural environments are the day-to-day settings and activities that promote learning for children. A child's home is usually one "natural environment," but children typically have other locations that are natural for them as well. Older toddlers may experience recreation and socialization in a variety of community environments. Natural environments are identified by the family as they talk about the activities of their life. They may see grandpa, walk to the store, get the mail, feed the dog, and do the laundry. These are opportunities for teaching and learning.

What is not a natural environment?

- ◆ A natural environment is not just a place. Services in natural environments do not just refer to the location of services. It also refers to the way services are provided.
- ◆ Places children usually go because they have disabilities or medical issues, such as clinics, hospitals, therapy offices, or training centers are not natural environments.

The Early Intervention System is about helping families help their children develop "

Who decides the natural environment for early intervention services?

- ◆ The Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) team, which includes the child's parent(s), decides the natural environments in which services will be provided. Early in the IFSP process, the services coordinator, the family and other team members discuss details about the family's daily routines and activities, as well as their concerns and priorities. All of these things will be considered when developing the IFSP and, to the extent appropriate to the child's needs, services will be provided where the child lives, learns, and plays.

Why do services now have to be provided in a child's natural environment?

- ◆ Federal law under Part C of the Individuals with disabilities Education Act (IDEA) has always required early intervention to provide services in natural environments. The reauthorization of this law in 1997 strengthened this requirement.
- ◆ Natural environments make good sense for children and families. When services are provided as part of a family's daily routines and activities, the family has more opportunities throughout the day to encourage their child to learn and practice new skills, and the child is more likely to achieve desired outcomes.
- ◆ Providing services in natural environments will hopefully interrupt the cycle of isolation and segregation of people with disabilities.
- ◆ Providing services in natural environments is not just the law. More importantly, it reflects the core mission of early intervention which is to provide support to families to help their children develop to their fullest potential.