

INTRODUCTION

About Part C/Babies Can't Wait Program

Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEIA) 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.

The mission for Part C/Babies Can't Wait early intervention is to build upon and provide supports and resources to assist family members and caregivers to enhance children's learning and development through everyday learning opportunities.

Babies Can't Wait (BCW) is Georgia's comprehensive, coordinated, statewide, interagency service delivery system for infants and toddlers, birth through 2 years of age, who have or are at risk for developmental delays, and their families. The program is established under Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), as amended. Family-centered care and family empowerment are important concepts in IDEA. Through participation in Babies Can't Wait, families are assisted in identifying and accessing resources that may be available to them. Equipped with information, families become more effective advocates for themselves and their children.

Services for children 3 years old and up are provided by the state Department of Education. However, programs for children under age 3 are provided by different agencies in different states. Sometimes the Department of Education will handle all these programs; in other states it may be another lead agency. In Georgia, the Department of Public Health administers the Part C/Babies Can't Wait program. The term "infants and toddlers with disabilities" in the law refers to children (ages birth through two years) who, with their families, may benefit from early intervention supports and services designed to promote development in the following areas:

- Physical,
- Cognitive,
- Communication,
- Social or emotional, and/or
- Adaptive development.

Early intervention supports and services must be provided by individuals who are qualified to work with infants and toddlers who have disabilities or who are at risk of developing disabilities. Any services provided must be written into an Individual Family Service Plan (IFSP) that is reviewed at a minimum every six months.

The guiding principles for early intervention for infants and toddlers with special needs and their families include:

- All children are unique, with individual strengths and talents. The presence of a disability or special need is not the defining characteristic of any child.
- Children grow and develop in the context of relationships with their families and other caregivers.
- All children have the right to belong, to be welcomed, and to participate fully in the typical places and activities of their communities.
- Children with and without special needs learn important things from one another.
- Everyday routines, activities, and places offer countless opportunities for children to learn and develop.

- The lives of families are enhanced when they are successful in maintaining their everyday lives and relationships.

The philosophy of family empowerment drives the service coordination that all eligible children and families receive. Babies Can't Wait early intervention services are to be family-centered, provided in natural environments and culturally competent. Family members have an integral and equal role in identifying outcomes for the Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP), determining services and supports necessary to achieve those outcomes, and promoting the child's development through participation in family activities and routines. Early intervention services are provided based upon the identification of child/ family strengths, interests, and desired skills to be acquired by each eligible child in order to promote maximum inclusion and participation in home and community settings. Intervention is integrated throughout activity settings and learning opportunities within locations where children and families typically spend time. Intervention focuses on working with and coaching families and caregivers to support each child to achieve optimal participation and inclusion in home and community activities and settings.