

Guide to Early Intervention

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Introduction

Hello! My name is Vanessa Shrontz. I am currently working towards my Master's Degree in Applied Developmental Psychology at the University of Pittsburgh. For one of my graduate courses, Emotional Disorders in Childhood, I created this Guide to Early Intervention. I completed this guide to educate parents about early intervention.

Throughout the guide you will find information in a variety of designs. I created a podcast, a short online audio clip, as part of this guide. You will also find a glossary of terms, list of suggestions, additional parent resources and references.

I hope this guide helps you better understand early intervention. For additional information and guides on other related topics, please visit www.sbbh.pitt.edu. It is a wonderful website with numerous resources. It provides excellent information and support for parents and children about emotional and behavioral disorders.

Glossary

1. **Early intervention:** activities that enhance a child's development and improve a child's skills
2. **Emotional and Behavioral Disorders:** disorders that affect children and adolescent that impact child's emotional and behavior
3. **Social skills:** skills a child uses to interact with others (eg. sharing, taking turns, helping others), also known as people skills
4. **Problem-solving skills:** skills a child uses to look at a problem and figure out a reasonable and appropriate solution
5. **Comorbidity:** A dual diagnosis, when two disorders are diagnosed together (eg- depression and ADHD)
6. **Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA):** a federal law that makes sure all children with disabilities receive a free, appropriate education
7. **Part B:** a section of IDEA that serves pre-schoolers and school-aged children
8. **Part C:** a section of IDEA that servers infants and toddlers
9. **Multidisciplinary team:** a team made up of professional from different backgrounds
10. **Individualized Family Plan (IFP):** a plan developed for a child by their parents and a multidisciplinary team that outlines what early intervention services a child will receive

Early Intervention Podcast

Hello, my name is Vanessa Shrontz. Thank you for listening to this podcast for parents who want more information on early intervention. As a parent you may have many questions if your child has received a referral for early intervention for an emotional and behavior disorder. What is early intervention? What is an emotional and behavioral disorder? You may not know what any of this means, what it involves, and what intervention your child will receive. What will your role be? How will it be paid for? These are all very important questions and can seem very overwhelming and confusing to someone who is not familiar with the system. Today, I will explain a little about emotional and behavioral disorders and how early intervention can help your child. I will also discuss two early interventions, Incredible Years and First Step to Success.

Early intervention simply refers to activities that improve skills or boost a child's development (Ramey & Ramey, 1998). Just because a child has been referred to early intervention does not mean that something is wrong with the child. Every child is unique and develops at their own pace. Early intervention is used for many reasons. Showing early signs of an emotional and behavioral disorder is only one of them. In early intervention, children can learn many useful skills. For example, a program might teach a child social and problem-solving skills, to use at school, with friends, and at home. Parents are the most important teachers in their children's life, so families are a strong part of early intervention (NICHCY, 2005).

Next, what is an emotional and behavioral disorder? Emotional and behavioral disorders classify a wide range of disorders that affect children and adolescents. The most common emotional disorders found in preschoolers are depressive and anxiety disorders. Attention deficit hyperactivity, conduct, and oppositional defiant disorder are the most common behavioral

disorders (Egger & Angold, 2006). Approximately 9- 14% of children ages 0 to 5 have a serious emotional or behavioral disorder (Brauner & Stephens, 2006). This may seem like an alarmingly high percentage. This number, however, has pushed experts to do research and make improvements in the field. This has resulted in better assessments, diagnosis, and intervention options.

You may wonder, “Why it is even necessary to intervene early?” Well, if your child had a rash or ear infection you would not wait for your child to grow out of it or wait to seek treatment. Mental health disorders tend to have a bad name and sometimes we ignore the signs. But your child’s emotions and behaviors may have a medical cause, just like other illnesses. And getting help early can make a big difference.

Some wonder if children will grow out of problem behaviors. The answer is no. Problem behaviors in preschool can lead to very troubling behavioral problems later (Kendziora, 2004). We can provide help as early as preschool and kindergarten that may prevent later bad behaviors. Professionals in the field say the earlier the intervention the better (Kendziora, 2004).

Good behavior is not only easier for all but it helps children in the future. Children’s preschool behavior influences their readiness for school and future school success. Problems like poor grades and school dropout can be reduced by early intervention. Recent research has shown social and emotional behaviors in preschool are linked with later problems (Kendziora, 2004). Friendships can be lost to problem behaviors. Children tend to shy away from other children who are aggressive and disruptive. Early intervention can make a child’s future better.

You may be concerned about how early intervention will change your child and if it will really work. Children who are at risk for having an emotional and behavioral disorder respond

best to early intervention (Mathur et al., 1998). Every child can benefit from early intervention, especially the ones who show problem behaviors.

Comorbidity is a term professionals often use. Comorbidity simply means a child is diagnosed with two or more disorders (Coleman, 2006). When your child gets a cold they are more likely to get bronchitis. Emotional and behavioral disorders follow this pattern as well. Several emotional and behavioral disorders have a strong link to each other. They are often diagnosed together. For example, anxiety and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder are often diagnosed in the same child; along with oppositional defiance or conduct disorder and depression (Egger & Angold, 2006). These disorders tend to cluster together. When a child has two or more diagnosis, both sets of symptoms must be assessed and addressed in treatment (Forness, 2004). If a child partakes in early intervention, common comorbid disorders are less likely to emerge.

Now that you understand the basis of early intervention and emotional and behavioral disorders, let's discuss the early intervention process. You might notice your child is doing well in some areas but lagging behind in others. Perhaps a doctor or a teacher mentions a problem. Your child's doctor or teacher can point you in the right direction on who to contact.

What will happen after a child is referred? Your child will be evaluated to see if they qualify to receive early intervention under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, or IDEA, (NICHCY, 2005). IDEA is the federal law that ensures all children with disabilities receive free, appropriate public education (U.S. Department of Education). You may hear someone refer to Part B or Part C. Part B focuses on preschoolers and school-aged children while Part C focuses on infants and toddlers (Coleman, 2006). After the evaluation you, the parents will go over the results (NICHCY, 2005). If your child is eligible, they then will be assessed. Many sources will be used for the assessment, such as doctor's reports, medical history,

observations of your child, and interviews with you and other caretakers (NICHCY, 2005). All of these sources are used so a full picture of your child is made. Both the evaluation and assessment will be done by a multidisciplinary team (NICHCY, 2005). A multidisciplinary team is made up of a many people (Coleman, 2006). It may include a psychologist, social worker, speech or language specialist, occupational or physical therapist, along with an early intervention specialist (NICHCY, 2005). All of these people have different training to make sure all your child's needs are met. Your child's teacher may also be on the team. Most importantly, you will be on the team.

You do not have to pay for the evaluation or assessment. These are paid for by the state and federal government (NICHCY, 2005). You and your team will then make up an Individualized Family Plan or IFP (NICHCY, 2005). Remember, you are your child's strongest advocate. The team will want to develop a plan that meets you and your child's needs (NICHCY, 2005). Your family's strengths will be used in the IFP. The IFP will outline the services your child will receive. Policies on funding are different in every state; some states provide free services or use a "sliding-scale" fee, some insurances also cover services (NICHCY, 2005).

IFPs are different for everyone. Your child may receive counseling, home visits, and child and parent training. The services will be offered in your home, at a clinic, or at your child's school (NICHCY, 2005).

Early intervention is effective, especially for children with emotional and behavioral disorders (Kendziora, 2004). Incredible Years and First Step to Success are two programs that improve behavior in young children.

Incredible Years is an early intervention program developed for children who might develop conduct disorder (Webster-Stratton, 2005). This is a clinic-based intervention. The

program reduces aggressive and disruptive behavior. Parent, teachers, and children ages 2-8 receive training. Incredible Years goals are to teach social, emotional, and academic skills to children. Parents and teachers are taught helpful skills to deal with difficult behaviors. The program encourages family strength and a good relationship between parents and teachers (Webster-Stratton, 2000).

As mentioned, the program works with parents, teachers, and children. In Incredible Years Basic Parent Training, parents attend two hour sessions once a week for 13-14 weeks. Groups consist of 12 to 14 parents. Many parents like the group format because it provides a support system. Parents watch and discuss videos (Webster-Stratton, 2005). The videos show basic interactions between parents and children during times like meals, baths, and bedtime. Every child and parent does these activities. These are common high problems times. The videos show problem solving skills and positive discipline practices such as time out, ignoring, and the use of consequences.

Advance and School training are also available for parents. The Advance Parent Training focuses on improving your life by expanding your social support and personal care (Webster-Stratton, 2005). Often as a parent you neglect yourself to take care of your child. Taking good care of yourself makes you a better parent. In the School Training for parents you learn how to support and encourage your child in school (Webster-Stratton, 2005).

Teachers' training is similar to yours. They learn how to promote social skills and encourage good relationships and communication. Most importantly they learn how to best deal with misbehavior in the classroom (Webster-Stratton, 2005). Teachers pass these skills on to your child's teacher next year. This provides stability and continuous behavior expectations for your child year after year.

Children attend dino school with Dina the Dino in the Incredible Years program (Webster-Stratton, 2005). They attend group session like parents. Videos and hands on material like life sized puppets, role-playing, sketches, letters to parents, and dino tokens are used in sessions. Children are taught many useful skills to use at home, school, and with friends (Webster-Stratton, 2005).

Through Incredible Years, parents and children report having better relationships along with a better teacher and parent bond (Conroy, Hendrickson, & Hester, 2004). Having a good relationship with your child's teacher can improve their school performance. Most importantly children involved in the program show fewer problem behaviors and a more positive attitude (Conroy et al., 2004).

Another early intervention program is First Step to Success. This program is a school and home-based intervention (Conroy et al., 2004). The children go through a screening process in kindergarten (Conroy et al., 2004). This process recognizes children who may benefit from early intervention. Children learn academic and social skills. Each child has their own special intervention. Teachers learn how to promote good behavior and social skills (Conroy et al., 2004). Weekly home visits are made. Parents are taught how to improve their child's social skills. They are also taught helpful problem-solving skills along with tips to reinforce positive behavior (Conroy et al., 2004). Research has shown promise in First Step to Success (Conroy et al., 2004).

I hope this podcast helped you. It is very important to remember you are the most important person in your child's life. Your bond with your child and family strengths can be used to boost your child growth and success. Just be sure to ask for help early. It is there for you. Thank you very much for listening.

Suggestions

- Do ask for help early
- Do be a voice for your child, you know your child the best
- Do ask questions, knowing about your child's behaviors and intervention will help you and your child
- Do stay committed, early intervention is effective and will help your child build skills and enhance their development
- Do not wait for your child to grow out of a phase
- Do not wait to ask for help

Additional Resources

There are several helpful resources for parents who have children with disabilities. Many of them have websites with information for parents about early intervention. Several states have resources guides for parents as well. I have listed some website for you that will help you understand the early intervention process.

First Signs- offers parents information about early intervention; provides a parental guide for early intervention and three state resource guides (Minnesota, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania)

<http://www.firstsigns.org/treatment/EI.htm>

National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities- discusses early intervention; provides parents with information and tips to early intervention; how and what services are offered; provides state by state resources and contact information

<http://www.nichcy.org/babies/Pages/Default.aspx>

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