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Implementing the Pyramid Model in Early Intervention:

Providing Early Intervention Services in Child Care

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ChallengingBehavior.org

Published: 10/2026

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IDEAs that Work Office of Special Education Programs U.S. Department of Education
University of South Florida

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Pub: 10/2026

Introduction

Early intervention services are provided in natural environments which can include the home and community settings such as child care centers or family child care homes. This resource provides guidance to early interventionists implementing the Pyramid Model when providing services in child care settings. Guidance consists of tips and strategies for providing services in child care settings with a social-emotional lens, reflective questions, case study examples, and resources.



This guide can be used by early interventionists as they work with child care providers who are implementing the Pyramid Model or those who have not been introduced to Pyramid Model implementation. When supporting a child with an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) in a program that is not actively engaged in Pyramid Model implementation, the support provided to caregivers might differ from settings where you will collaborate with Pyramid Model practitioner coaches, behavior specialists, or other members of the program-wide leadership team.

Terms We Use

Early Interventionist: In early intervention, many types of professionals may be involved (e.g., early childhood special educators, speech-language pathologists, physical therapists, occupational therapists, and service coordinators) in providing services to families and their children. For this guide, we use the term early interventionist (EI) to refer to any professional who provides direct support to families and caregivers of infants and toddlers with disabilities. Our use of early interventionist includes, but is not limited to, developmental specialists, family support specialists, service coordinators, and related service providers such as speech-language pathologists, physical therapists, or occupational therapists.

Caregiver: In child care settings, many terms are used to define the role of adults providing infant and toddler care in child care or family child care settings. These terms include, but are not limited to, teacher, early educator, family child care educator, child care provider, or child care professional. For the purposes of this guide, we use the term "caregiver" to be inclusive of these roles.

Care Setting: In this document, we use care setting to ensure we are inclusive of all settings where children might receive child care (e.g., classroom, family child care, child care program).

Early Intervention Session: This refers to the scheduled delivery of early intervention services to the child in the child care program by the early interventionist. Please note that these services are provided within the natural routines and activities of the care setting.

The Importance of Coaching in Early Intervention

In early intervention, we use coaching to guide and support caregivers and early educators in using strategies to promote the skill development of a child with an IFSP. Coaching can occur in caregiver homes or in the early childhood education programs that care for the child. When coaching the caregiver, the early interventionist implementing the Pyramid Model focuses on building the caregiver's skills, confidence, and decision-making to promote the social-emotional skill development of the child with an IFSP.



Coaching IS:

- Collaborative and relationship-based, built on partnership and trust
- Embedded within everyday routines, activities, and real interactions
- Focused on strengthening the caregiver's confidence, knowledge, and skills
- Grounded in observation, practice opportunities, reflection, problem-solving, and supportive feedback
- Centered on helping children build meaningful skills, relationships, independence, and participation in daily routines and peer interactions—while individualizing support as needed

Coaching IS NOT:

- Primarily working directly with one child while the caregiver observes
- Focused only on stopping or "fixing" behavior in the moment without understanding the why behind it
- Delivering strategies to caregivers without active caregiver participation and shared decision-making
- A separate, isolated, or pull-out service disconnected from daily life

Expanding on Capacity Building in Child Care Settings

The goal of coaching in child care is to strengthen the caregiver's capacity to use effective practices within everyday routines and interactions to support the child with an IFSP. While early intervention services are centered on helping one child achieve individualized outcomes, coaching often results in the use of practices that improve participation, development, and learning for that child and the other children in the care setting.

Capacity building occurs when caregivers:

- **Understand social-emotional competence as foundational.** They recognize that skills such as emotional regulation, communication, social interaction, and persistence are essential for participation in daily routines and later learning.

- **Prioritize nurturing and responsive relationships with all children.** They engage in warm, consistent, and attuned interactions (e.g., following the child's lead, responding to cues, offering comfort and encouragement), understanding that relationships are the primary context for teaching and learning.
- **Understand why practices work, not just what to do.** They connect Pyramid Model practices to child development (e.g., how predictable routines reduce anxiety, how responsive interactions build regulation, and how intentional teaching promotes skill development).
- **Use universal promotion practices with all children.** They apply practices flexibly across routines such as meals, play, transitions, and caregiving activities to create supportive learning environments.
- **Recognize when targeted or individualized supports are needed.** They identify when a child needs additional support, structure, cues, or explicit teaching to participate and engage successfully.
- **Feel confident adapting supports independently.** They make in-the-moment decisions to adjust universal and targeted supports based on children's cues, needs, and the context.
- **Anticipate and prevent challenges.** They proactively structure environments, interactions, and expectations to support success and reduce the likelihood of challenging behavior.
- **See themselves as capable and effective.** They develop professional confidence and ownership, recognizing that their everyday interactions have a powerful impact on children's social-emotional outcomes.

When caregivers build strong, responsive relationships, implement universal practices, and use targeted strategies when needed, they create environments where all children can thrive and where children with IFSPs are more likely to achieve their individualized goals.

Case Study Connection

Sarah is a speech-language pathologist who works with Jack, a two-year-old with autism, in his child care classroom. Jack's IFSP goals focus on communication (i.e., using words or gestures to ask for things) and social interaction (i.e., playing near and with other children).

When Sarah arrives each week, Jack's teacher Melissa usually asks her to take Jack to a quiet corner to "work on his skills." Melissa sees this one-on-one time as the best way for Jack to make progress.

Sarah wants to try something different. Instead of pulling Jack aside, she wants to show Melissa how Jack can practice requesting and playing with peers during things that are already happening — like snack time and play. Sarah's goal is to help Melissa feel confident using these moments herself, even when Sarah isn't there.

Supporting Infants and Toddlers in the Natural Environment



The environments where infants and toddlers spend their time, whether at home or in child care, shape their social and emotional development. When providing early intervention services in child care settings, it helps to reflect on what infants and toddlers experience as part of their day and what social and emotional skills and supports a child with an IFSP needs to engage and learn. This information can help you identify the focus for your early intervention services and how you might work with the caregiver to individualize practices that can be embedded across the routines and activities in the care setting. In this section, considerations for providing early intervention services when child care is the natural setting are shared.

1. **Provide supports in the care setting to maximize learning opportunities for both the child and the caregiver.** The amount of time the infant or toddler spends with their peers and caregivers exceeds the amount of time spent with the early intervention provider. The infant or toddler needs the skills and supports necessary to participate in daily routines and activities and engage in peer interactions during times when the early interventionist is not present. When the early interventionist focuses their supports in the setting where the child spends most of their time (e.g., versus pull-out services in a separate location), this gives the child opportunities to practice new skills within everyday routines, with caregiver support between early intervention sessions.

   Providing early intervention services within the care setting also allows the early interventionist to strengthen the caregiver's skills and confidence to support the child effectively throughout the day. With the early interventionist present, there are more opportunities for communication and shared understanding between the early interventionist and the caregiver to reflect together, plan, and problem-solve what strategies might benefit the infant or toddler and when to use them. It also allows the early interventionist to model and provide practice for the caregiver in the natural setting.



2. **Identify the daily routines and activities of the care setting.** Spending time in the care setting gives the early interventionist more information about the child's routines and activities, which informs how specific strategies and supports can be embedded. An early interventionist might know a strategy that can support a specific outcome, but knowing the context of where it is being applied can help the early interventionist maximize its impact by adapting it to a specific part of the day, with specific peers present, or in a way that is easiest for the caregiver to facilitate. The Responsive Routine Inventory can help early interventionists support caregivers in planning how to embed supports that respond to the child, promote social and emotional development, and teach new skills during specific moments in the day.

3. **Use the IFSP, observation, and conversations with child care providers and families to inform what adaptations and supports are needed to help the child engage successfully.** Write IFSP goals so they are relevant across home and child care, even though the routines and supports used to work toward them may differ. For example, a goal that a child will communicate their wants and needs during everyday routines might be supported during play, meals, and bedtime at home, and during play, meals, and naptime in child care. The child may also communicate differently across settings because the toys, foods, caregivers, and other children differ. The early interventionist can help the family and caregiver in child care identify priorities and opportunities in each setting, adapt supports to fit those routines, and share what they notice about the child's progress.
4. **Use coaching to support the caregiver to embed strategies into daily routines and activities.** After identifying specific goals, routines, and activities for embedding those goals, use side-by-side coaching supports to model and provide practice opportunities. This involves following the routine or activity with the caregiver and embedding moments of coaching. Some tips for providing coaching on the use of strategies are listed below:
    - Follow natural routines and activities.
    - Offer to schedule sessions during a challenging or successful routine depending on caregiver preference.
    - Be present in the same area or activity with the caregiver and the child.
    - Explain the goal the infant or toddler is working on and how it links to social-emotional development.
    - Ask if the caregiver has seen examples of the child using a skill related to their goal in their day.
    - Model the strategy following the child's interest and the expectations of the routine (e.g., child crawls to a peer and smiles at them during floor time).
    - Identify practice opportunities. If applicable, encourage the caregiver to practice the strategy with peers (e.g., encouraging other children to use the "more" sign during mealtimes).
    - Engage the caregiver in discussions to problem-solve how the practice might be applied to other parts of their day.
    - Create short guides around a practice that can be left with the caregiver. Make multiple copies and keep them with you in case you are working with a different caregiver in your next session.
    - Provide the caregiver with visual supports and materials already adapted to their specific context (e.g., creating a first-then visual schedule using pictures of objects found in the care setting).



Reflection Questions for Providing Supports in Child Care

- What are the routines and activities in the care setting?
- What developmentally appropriate expectations are in place to promote the child's engagement in daily routines and activities with their peers?
- What skills does the infant or toddler have that can help them to engage in daily routines and engage with peers and adults in this setting?
- What skills might the infant or toddler need to develop to engage in daily routines and engage with peers and adults in this setting?
- What supports are needed to help the infant or toddler learn these skills?

Case Study Connection

Drop-off is hard for Jack. He cries when his family leaves and has trouble settling into the classroom. Sarah observes this routine during a few early intervention sessions with Jack, then meets with Melissa to develop a plan together. They talk about what happens right now, what feels hardest for Jack, and what might help him settle in more easily.

Together, they design a new drop-off routine: Melissa will greet Jack at the door, show him a picture schedule so he knows what's coming next, and walk him to a favorite activity at a table where other children are already playing. She'll stay close, help him join the play, and talk about what he and his peers are doing.

Sarah and Melissa try it out over a few mornings, then check in on how it's going and adjust — moving the picture schedule closer to the door, choosing a different starting activity — until it works well for Jack.

This routine supports both of Jack's goals: the picture schedule helps him understand what's happening (communication), and sitting with peers gives him a reason to interact with them (social interaction). Melissa is now confident enough in the routine that she uses it with a few other children who also struggle with drop-off.

Building Relationships and Establishing Buy-In



Providing early intervention services in child care settings offers opportunities to partner with caregivers who know the child and their daily routines. It can also be challenging, especially when staff changes occur, or caregivers are unfamiliar with the early interventionist's role. Taking time to explain that role, learn about caregivers' priorities, and build relationships from the start can support effective collaboration. This section offers guidance for building those relationships and developing a shared understanding of how to support the child within child care routines.

Clearly communicate the role of the early interventionist

Caregivers may not clearly understand the early interventionist's role or may hold misconceptions based on past experiences with early intervention. Clear communication from the start can build trust and transparency when establishing expectations about the early interventionist's role. Below are a few strategies for communication.

1. Check for understanding and awareness about why early intervention services are being provided in the caregiver's setting. It isn't always clear what the caregiver has been told about early intervention services being provided in their care setting. Rather than assuming they know, it is best to check in with the caregiver from the start about their level of understanding of the early intervention services being provided. During initial introductions, share names, roles, and contact information, and provide time to ask and answer questions. Some questions might include:
    - *Hello, I am (name) from (agency). I am a (EI role) here to provide early intervention services to (child). What have you been told so far about who I am and what I will be doing when I deliver early intervention services?*
    - *Have you ever worked with an early interventionist before? Did they provide the child's services in your care setting or pull the child out to another space for the delivery of services? Can you tell me what that was like for you?*
    - *Before I explain a little more about my role, what is your understanding of my role and what the early intervention sessions will look like?*
2. Explain the early interventionist role, including what supports can be provided and what supports are not included during early intervention sessions. This might include what coaching looks like in this context, how the early interventionist will support communication between the caregiver and the family, and the early interventionist's role as a collaborator.
3. Explain how early intervention supports can be helpful to them as a caregiver. Explain how part of the early interventionist's role is to help maximize the implementation of strategies to support the child's IFSP goals into the caregiver's daily practice and routines. This will include embedding evidence-based practices that will help the child with an IFSP and that might also benefit all children in the care setting. Other benefits include building awareness of infants' and toddlers' development and connecting caregivers with additional community supports and services, including early intervention for other children the caregiver may identify as having potential delays.





4. Check for preferences and embed them into future interactions and early intervention sessions. Preferences that early interventionists might consider clarifying with caregivers can include scheduling of early intervention services to a specific day, time, or routine, communication preferences (e.g., text, email, or inclusion in collaborative emails with families), and preferences for specific coaching practices (e.g., modeling, feedback, when is best to implement opportunities for reflection and conversation).
5. Emphasize collaboration as the goal. It is important to remind caregivers that they are equal partners in the process. Explain that you are reliant on their expertise about the child as the child participates in daily routines and activities, demonstrates skills targeted in IFSP goals, and how the child interacts with peers and other adults in the care setting. It can help to give caregivers ideas for ways they can participate in early intervention sessions. Ideas include:
    - Provide information on the child's developmental progress.
    - Provide information on the child's participation in routines and activities.
    - Provide information on the child's interactions with peers and familiar adults.
    - Share their observations of the child's preferences.
    - Ask questions about early intervention services and caregiver coaching approaches.
    - Offer ideas for strategies and practices to try with the child or all the children that support the child's IFSP goal.
    - Ask for ways targeted practices can be implemented differently when they aren't working or don't fit into the daily routine easily.
    - Share progress on the child's outcomes related to IFSP goals.
    - Share teaching activities and curriculum information to inform how IFSP goals might be addressed.
6. Be prepared to explain your role multiple times as needed. Staff turnover is common, and even when caregivers are consistent, they may need reminders about the role of early intervention sessions and how they can participate. Create or use the information sheet provided in the Appendix to share this information. Keep multiple copies on hand to share with new caregivers as needed.
7. Identify multiple points of contact within the program. Building relationships with the program as a whole can create shared understanding and a smoother experience for everyone. Take time to introduce yourself to program leaders and other caregivers. The more adults who understand who the early interventionist is, their role and purpose, and how they can engage to support the child and family receiving services in their program, the more shared understanding and support there will be, regardless of turnover.

Follow care setting activities and routines



Another way to build strong relationships and foster buy-in with caregivers is to emphasize that early intervention services are designed to fit within existing routines and activities. Rather than adding more to the caregiver's day, the early interventionist works alongside them to identify natural opportunities to embed supportive practices into what is already happening. This approach helps make intervention and supports practical, sustainable, and easier to use throughout the day. Continuous conversation around strategies, activities, and routines should occur to check for understanding and make changes as needed to support both the caregiver's ability to embed practices and the child's learning. Following through is just as important. It helps caregivers see how targeted practices can fit naturally and flexibly into their daily routines. Practices for following routines and activities are listed below.

- Offer to work with the child in a space where the caregiver is already working (e.g., at the table for meals, in the same play space).
- Ask questions about how the child currently participates in daily activities and routines:
  - *Are there any routines or transitions that are challenging for (child) throughout your day?*
  - *Which routines and transitions feel easier?*
  - *During (targeted routine), what would you like to see (child) be able to do?*
  - *Are there any routines or activities you feel (child) can follow with the same supports their peers are getting? Any routines or activities where they might need more individualized supports?*
- Ask questions about caregiver preferences during routines:
  - *Are there specific routines and activities you would like for me to be present?*
  - *Are there specific parts of your day where it feels easier to do a quick check-in with me?*
- Some ideas for practices or strategies might occur in the moment. Be sure to ask permission before trying something new (e.g., Would it be ok if I...?).
- Offer practice opportunities for caregivers and reflect in the moment.
  - *How did that feel?*
  - *Do you think the way we did that would work for you?*
  - *Do you have ideas for how we might change that to make it easier for you?*
- Offer help when appropriate (e.g., helping the caregiver transition a group of toddlers from indoors to outdoor play).

Engaging a reluctant caregiver

You might encounter caregivers who are hesitant about early intervention supports and building relationships right away. Below are some tips and strategies for engaging caregivers who might need more time to build trust and understanding.

- Take time to revisit and clarify the roles and responsibilities of both the early interventionist and the caregiver during the delivery of early intervention services. Check whether this aligns with the caregiver's understanding and discuss whether any adjustments would better fit their needs or context.
- Focus on one simple, meaningful strategy at a time, and partner with the caregiver to adapt it so it feels practical and realistic within their daily routines.
- Ask the caregiver which parts of the day feel most challenging or stressful and explore what types of support would feel most helpful in those moments.
- Offer choices about the routines you might focus on or strategies that might be used to promote a goal so the caregiver has voice and ownership in the coaching process.
- Use practical strategies that can be explained and modeled quickly within naturally occurring moments, rather than requiring lengthy instruction or extra time.
- Share simple, easy-to-use resources (e.g., visuals, handouts, examples, or reminders) that help support the use of the practice between early intervention sessions.
- Create space for the caregiver to share concerns, questions, or feedback. Respond in ways that show you listened, value their perspective, and are adjusting support based on what they shared.

Reflection Questions for Providing Supports in Child Care

- Have I clearly explained my role and choices for caregiver participation, and then checked for understanding?
- Have I offered ideas and choices for how the caregiver can engage?
- Have I offered opportunities for the caregiver to share ideas and concerns rather than "telling" them what to do?
- Have I followed through with what I said I would (e.g., embedded coaching and communication preferences, followed routines)?

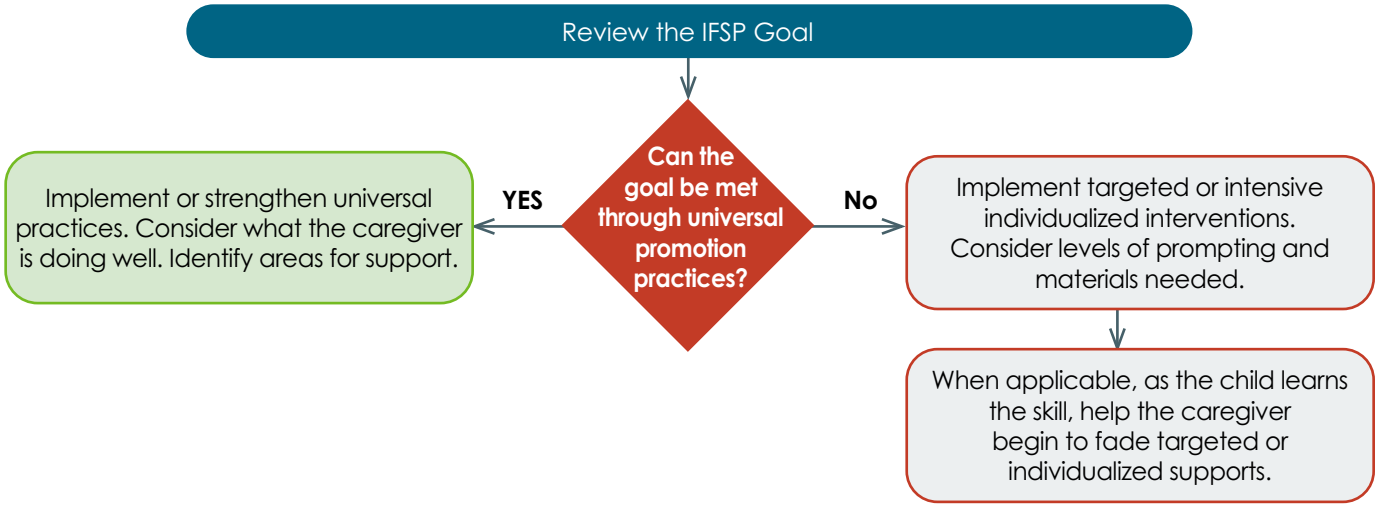
Case Study Connection

Mornings are especially hard for Melissa. After a rough start to the day, she turns to Sarah and says, "Can you just take Jack for a bit? I need a break." Sarah understands. She says, "It sounds like a really tough morning. I'm here to help." Then she offers something different: "Would it be okay if I stayed here with you during play, and we tried something together?" Instead of taking Jack aside, Sarah stays next to Melissa and helps her prompt Jack to request a toy from a peer. This keeps the focus on Jack's goals — requesting and playing with others — and shows Melissa that Sarah is there to support her, not replace her.

Prioritizing IFSP Goals and Embedding Universal Promotion Practices

Universal promotion practices are important for all children, including the child who has individual IFSP goals. This section explores ways to help caregivers use universal practices to support the child's social-emotional development and specific IFSP goals. Below is a visual map to help you address IFSP goals within child care settings.

Visual Map: Addressing IFSP Goals in Child Care or Group Care settings



Exploring Universal Practices in Infant Toddler Child Care Settings

Universal practices are practices that have been shown to promote the social-emotional development of all young children and prevent challenging behaviors. These practices focus on responsive, nurturing relationships; high-quality, supportive environments; and promoting children's social, emotional, and behavioral development.

Below are resources that will help you reflect on what practices are being used in the setting and what practices might be implemented in a manner that supports the child with an IFSP in their social-emotional development and meeting their IFSP goals. When you guide the caregiver to use a practice with the child, also mention that using the practice with all children can help promote everyone's social-emotional development.

Infant-Toddler Caregiver Reflection Tool – Offered in English and Spanish, this tool can help you identify practices that promote the child's social-emotional development. Focus on embedding one specific practice at a time into routines that will promote a child's progress towards an IFSP goal.

Pyramid Model Practices Implementation Checklist for Infant Toddler Classrooms – this tool lists the practices used at all levels of the Pyramid Model to address the social-emotional and behavioral needs of children in the setting. You might use this to identify the strengths of the caregiver and a practice to strengthen that will support the child with the IFSP. If you are working in a program that is implementing the Pyramid Model, collaborate with the practitioner coach to learn more about the caregiver's practice implementation goals and the professional development supports that are being provided.

Pyramid Model Practices for Family Child Care Homes – this resource provides caregivers in family child care with best practices that can be used to support children at each tier of the Pyramid Model. You might use this to identify the strengths of the caregiver and a practice to strengthen that will support the child with the IFSP. If you are working in a program that is implementing the Pyramid Model, collaborate with the practitioner coach to learn more about the caregiver's practice implementation goals and the professional development supports that are being provided. Focus on embedding one or two specific practices at a time within care routines that will promote a child's progress towards an IFSP goal.

Using Visuals to Support Children in the Early Learning Environment – this resource explains how visuals support children in learning new skills and preventing challenging behavior, and it provides templates and examples for developing visual supports.

Infant Toddler Temperament Tool – this reflective tool helps caregivers understand how adults and children may be similar or different in temperament traits. Using the tool can help caregivers adjust their caregiving methods to better support their child's natural way of responding to the world.

Examples of IFSP Goals Addressed Through Universal Practice

The examples below provide ideas for how you can help caregivers to embed IFSP goals into daily routines and activities through the use of universal practices. Conversations with the caregiver and family will help to prioritize specific implementation strategies. If a strategy requires visuals, create the visuals for the caregiver. Encourage the caregiver to focus on one or two practices per routine. Leave a matrix or simple guide as a reminder of what to do. Invite the caregiver to notice how the child responds between early intervention sessions, and let them know you will help them make changes if the child isn't making progress or needs more support.

IFSP Goal	Care Routines	Structured Group	Play	Transitions
Family/child care caregivers will use strategies to make transitions easier for the child by her annual review.	Use first-then language to let children know what to expect (e.g., "First diaper, then play.").	Use a visual schedule for circle time to show the sequence of activities.	Use a timer to prepare the children for transitions from outside to the next activity.	Use a first-then visual for whole-group transitions to let children know what will happen next.
Child will follow one-step directions during wake-up, play time, meal time, bath time, bed time, or in the	Use positive language that tells the child what to do (e.g., "Sit in your chair", "Go to your cot").	Use positive language that tells the child what to do (Pair with a picture: "Sit in your chair").	Use positive language that tells the child what to do. (Pair with picture, "Hold the rope to move inside").	Use positive language that tells the child what to do. (Pair with picture, "wash your hands").
Child will respond to their name by turning their head during wake-up, play time, meal time, bath time, bed time, or in the community.	Use children's names during care routines. Pause and notice response (e.g., "Cole, time for diaper," "Cole, what are you eating?" "Cole, time for nap.").	Sing a welcome song to greet all children by name at circle time.	Talk and play with individual children. Use their names-pause and notice response.	Sing a transition song using children's names (e.g., "Where is Cole?" sung to the tune of "Where is Thumpkin?") to get attention. Follow with a first-then statement.

IFSP Goal	Care Routines	Structured Group	Play	Transitions
Child will engage in back-and-forth vocalizations during playtime.	Initiate interaction by commenting on the child's interest- pause for a response. Copy a sound or action the child initiates; pause for a response.	Sing songs with gestures- notice if the child copies your gesture or sound.	Initiate interaction by commenting on the child's interest- pause for a response. Copy a sound or action initiated by the child- pause for a response.	N/A
Child will use words or gestures to get their needs met during wake-up, meal times, play times, bed times, bath times, or in the community.	Model signing "more" to make requests at meal times.	Model signing "all done" as you complete each part of the group time visual.	Model "more" and "all done" to make requests during play.	Model "all done" during transitions.

Reflection Questions for Providing Supports in Child Care

- What skills can the child do on their own during whole group activities and routines?
- What prompts are most helpful for the child to learn the skill? How might they be embedded in everyday routines and activities?
- Is the universal practice feasible for the caregiver to use consistently?
- Is the child responding to the use of the universal practice?
- Can the child learn the skill with a small change to the use of the universal practice, or do they require more targeted supports?

Case Study Connection

Sarah and Melissa sit down to look at Jack's IFSP goals together: a) using a word or gesture to ask for something he wants; b) playing near or with another child during play; and c) greeting or responding to a peer or adult.

At first, Melissa assumes these need to be taught one-on-one, away from the group. Sarah shows her how each goal already fits into the routines of the group. Requesting can happen at snack time. Playing near peers can happen across any play times. Greetings can happen at arrival and during songs. For example, during play, Melissa helps Jack sit near a peer on the carpet with two piles of blocks. As they play, watch each other, and begin to interact, she narrates what each of them is doing. Over time, Melissa sees that Jack doesn't need intervention away from the other children. He just needs the right setup and a little support in moments that are already happening.

Targeted Supports



While universal practices benefit all children, some children will need additional intervention to develop social, emotional, or behavioral skills. Targeted supports include additional support, structure, cues, or explicit teaching to guide the child's development and learning. These supports are embedded within everyday activities to provide practice opportunities and learning with peers. Targeted supports are selected based on the child's IFSP goals, observation, and caregiver input to promote skill development and address specific barriers to participation.

Effective targeted supports are:

- Embedded within ongoing routines
- Simple, practical, and easy for caregivers to use
- Designed to support the child's independence and participation—not dependence on adults
- Used consistently across caregivers and times of day



Examples of targeted supports in child care include:

- Visual supports (e.g., first–then boards, schedules, choice boards)
- Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) (e.g., gestures, pictures, simple devices)
- Adapted materials to make it easier for the child to participate
- Peer supports (e.g., buddy systems, guided interactions)
- Pre-teaching expectations and routines
- Environmental adjustments (e.g., reducing wait time, increasing access to materials)
- Structured transition supports (e.g., songs, cues, consistent routines)
- Explicit instructional strategies using additional cues (verbal, gestural, physical)

The goal of targeted supports is to provide temporary scaffolds that help the child build skills and participate more independently over time. Targeted supports are only as effective as the caregiver's ability to use them intentionally, consistently, and flexibly. For this reason, targeted supports should be paired with coaching so caregivers understand when, why, and how to use them effectively.

Without clear guidance and support, targeted supports may:

- Be used inconsistently or incorrectly.
- Become overly adult-directed or prompt-dependent.
- Be abandoned if they feel burdensome or unclear.
- Fail to address the underlying need or function of behavior.

With coaching, targeted supports become tools that caregivers can confidently and effectively integrate into their daily practice.



Coach caregivers to identify:

- Specific routines or times of day when the child needs additional support (e.g., transitions, group activities, play).
- Early signs that a child may be becoming dysregulated or disengaged.
- Opportunities to proactively support success rather than react to behavior.

Help caregivers understand:

- What the child may be communicating (e.g., a need for predictability, communication support, connection, or skill development).
- How the support reduces frustration and increases participation.
- How the support builds long-term skills, not just immediate compliance.

Support caregivers to:

- Model and practice using the support within real routines.
- Use clear, consistent language paired with the support.
- Provide appropriate prompts and gradually fade them.
- Reinforce the child's use of new skills.
- Adjust the support based on the child's response.

Resources that might be helpful

These resources can be helpful as you guide the caregiver to use targeted supports.

Development of Play Skills for Infants and Toddlers – This guide can help the caregiver consider play development milestones and how to support the child.

Strategies for Supporting the Development of Friendship Skills – A resource that provides supportive strategies for the development of friendship skills of infant and toddler-age children.

Providing Helping Prompts – Provide this handout to help explain how a prompting hierarchy is systematically used to promote skill development.

Reflection Questions for Providing Supports in Child Care

- Which routines or activities are most challenging for this child?
- What barriers may be limiting the child's participation or engagement?
- What targeted support might help the child be more successful?
- Is the support practical and feasible for the caregiver to use consistently?
- How will we know whether the support is helping?

Case Study Connection

As Melissa gets more comfortable with everyday routines, Sarah helps her add a few simple, targeted supports:

- *To support playing with peers: Melissa seats Jack next to another child during play and activities and provides Jack with similar toys to encourage parallel play.*
- *To support requesting: Melissa places a favorite toy where Jack can see it but not quite reach it, so he has a reason to ask for it. She models the word he can use, like "toy" or "more."*
- *To support greetings and group participation: Melissa uses a small picture schedule during music and movement time, so Jack knows what's coming next.*

Sarah models each strategy first, then invites Melissa to try it herself, offering feedback and encouragement along the way. Little by little, Melissa starts using these supports on her own, and Jack begins requesting more often and playing next to the other children more easily.

Supporting Child Care Providers in Understanding and Addressing Challenging Behavior

Challenging behavior can be stressful for caregivers, especially when they are supporting multiple children at once. Early interventionists can help caregivers shift from reacting in the moment to understanding what may be driving the behavior and identifying supports that promote success.

A key part of coaching is helping caregivers reframe challenging behavior as communication. Instead of asking, *"How do I stop this behavior?"*, early interventionists can support caregivers to ask, *"What might this child be trying to communicate?"*

This shift helps caregivers recognize that behavior often reflects an unmet need, missing skill, or mismatch between the child and the environment.

Support caregivers in considering whether the behavior may be related to:

- **Connection or regulation needs** – The child may be overwhelmed, dysregulated, tired, frustrated, or seeking comfort and support from a familiar adult.
- **Skill-based needs** – The child may not yet have the communication, social, emotional, or self-regulation skills needed to participate successfully.
- **Environmental factors** – The routine, expectations, sensory input, materials, or demands may be too challenging, unclear, or overstimulating.

Coaching conversations can help caregivers reflect on patterns in behavior by asking:

- When does the behavior usually happen?
- What happened right before the behavior?
- What seems difficult for the child in this moment?
- Are expectations clear and developmentally appropriate?
- What support might help this child be more successful?

Once caregivers better understand the possible function of the behavior, early interventionists can coach them to use practical strategies embedded within routines, such as:

- Strengthening nurturing and responsive interactions to support co-regulation.
- Using predictable schedules and routines to reduce uncertainty.
- Providing clear expectations with simple language, visuals, or gestures.
- Increasing engagement through multiple toys, materials, and choices.
- Using redirection to guide children toward appropriate activities.
- Using planned ignoring for minor behaviors when appropriate while reinforcing desired behavior.
- Teaching replacement skills such as requesting help, waiting, transitioning, or communicating needs.
- Adjusting the environment to reduce frustration and increase participation.

Early interventionists can help caregivers notice early signs of dysregulation—such as withdrawal, whining, crying, or increased activity—so they can provide support before behavior escalates. They can also help caregivers recognize and manage their own stress responses, because a calm, regulated adult can better co-regulate and support a dysregulated child.

Infants and toddlers are not engaging in challenging behavior to gain power or control over adults. More often, they are communicating unmet needs, responding to stress, or showing us that they do not yet have the skills to manage a situation successfully. Simply put, they are still learning—they just got here. When caregivers view behavior through this lens, they are more likely to respond with empathy, prevention, and intentional teaching rather than frustration or removing the child from activities.

Reflection Questions for Providing Supports in Child Care

- What patterns do I notice about when and where the challenging behavior occurs?
- What might the child be trying to communicate through their behavior?
- Does the behavior appear to be related to a need for connection, regulation, communication, or skill development?
- Are current expectations, routines, or environmental demands developmentally appropriate for this child?
- What universal and targeted supports are already in place, and are they being used consistently?
- What additional individualized supports may help this child be more successful?
- How can I support the caregiver in responding calmly and consistently during challenging moments?

When children need an individualized behavior support plan

When it is determined that a child needs an individualized behavior support plan, it will be essential to include the caregiver as a member of the team. They will bring important observations to the functional behavior assessment process and ideas for support plan development. Once a plan is developed, you will provide support and guidance for plan implementation and progress monitoring.



Resources that might be helpful

These resources can be helpful as you guide the caregiver in responding to and intervening with challenging behavior.

Teaching Tools for Young Children (TTYC) – Use this resource with the caregiver to identify when the child has behaviors that are challenging and identify the supports that can be used within common routines to prevent the behavior and teach new skills.

Temperament Continuum – Use this in discussions about the child's temperament and how to support the child within routines.

Things That Will Help Me Stay Calm (Infants) – Caregivers can use the strategies in the infographic to provide infants with predictability in their day and safety in relationships, all to support healthy attachment.

Things That Will Help Me Stay Calm (Toddler) – Caregivers can use the strategies included in this infographic to provide toddlers with predictability in their day, safety in relationships, meaning to their experiences and emotions, and begin to build their problem-solving skills.

Reading Your Child's Cues – This handout helps caregivers better understand the communication cues of infants and toddlers by using weather-based categories to describe their emotional states.

Supporting Behavior Through Connection – This resource offers simple, relationship-centered strategies to respond to challenging behavior in ways that help children feel safe, valued, and supported.

Considerations for Working with Children who Have Experienced Trauma – Use this resource to guide prevention strategies to help children with challenging behavior who have been exposed to trauma and strategies for responding to children when they are trauma-activated.

When Children Have Behavior that Challenges Others. Applying a Trauma-Informed Lens to Providing Individualized Positive Behavior Support – This resource offers ideas for responding in the moment when a child becomes escalated and for building support plans centered on safety, relationships, and skill-building.

What We Bring Workbook – Some caregivers might find this reflection guide helpful as they consider the support of children with challenging behavior.

Case Study Connection

During music and movement time, Jack often gets upset, cries, and leaves the group. At first, Melissa thought he was being difficult and would remove him from the activity.

Sarah offers a different way to think about it: "I wonder if Jack is trying to tell us something. Maybe the activity is too loud or too hard for him right now."

Melissa starts to see Jack's behavior as communication, not defiance. She turns down the music, starts the group with a soft song, and Sarah suggests having the assistant sit behind Jack to help him participate actively. With these changes, Jack stays engaged longer and participates more often — exactly what his goal is asking for.

Creating Family Partnerships



Early interventionists may facilitate communication between home and child care. Maintaining clear communication and partnerships with the family when their child receives early intervention services in the child care setting helps keep them informed of their child's progress and how they can support their child's goals at home. It is equally important for the child care to be aware of the family's priorities for their child and how they are supporting their child at home. Sometimes a child may be able to use a skill in one setting and not another. In this instance, early interventionists may engage both the family and the caregiver in discussion to identify specific strategies that have worked with the family or child care.

Tips for Engaging Families and Facilitating Partnerships with Child Care

- Identify communication preferences for both the caregiver within child care and the family for sharing information and scheduling.
- Provide the family and caregiver with a log that captures information on how strategies for a specific goal can be used at home and in child care.
- Communicate with both the caregiver and family to plan a monthly meeting during drop-off or pick-up to support the family with IFSP goals and collaboration with the caregiver.
- Ask the family how they would like to be included in their child's early intervention services.
- Offer flexible scheduling where early intervention sessions can happen at child care and in the home (e.g., the early interventionist sees the child at home with the family once a month and all other sessions occur at the child care).
- If the family is open, invite the caregiver from child care to IFSP meetings to provide information on the child's abilities in the care setting and inform future goals, and to hear family perspectives on their child's goals.
- Preferences and perspectives can change on the part of the family or the child care provider- offer check-ins to make sure communication and scheduling preferences are still being met.
- Ask for help from service coordinators and early intervention administrators when you feel unsure navigating challenging situations.

Not all families may be open to your offers to include them in the process. Providing early intervention services in child care settings requires building trust and relationships over time with both the family and the caregiver. The key is to keep offering opportunities for them to engage. Continuous conversations with all caregivers can help to open pathways to solutions. Below are resources caregivers can share with families to help them use universal promotion practices to promote social and emotional development at home. This is one way you can support practice opportunities that target a specific IFSP goal at home and provide a resource caregivers can share with all families to support any of the universal promotion practices they might be working on in their care setting.

Teacher's Guide: Relationship Building with Families – This resource describes how family-teacher partnerships can benefit children and provides tips for building relationships with families.

Teacher's Guide: Positive Interactions with Siblings and Friends – This resource will guide families in creating opportunities to promote their infant/toddler's peer interactions during natural routines at home.

Teacher's Guide: Making Connections with My Child – This resource helps families strengthen relationships with their infants or toddlers through various turn-taking opportunities.

Teacher's Guide: Labeling Emotions – This resource provides families with helpful tips for teaching their infants and toddlers about emotions.

Reflection Questions for Providing Supports in Child Care

- Have I asked the family what priorities they have for their child, and have I shared them with the caregiver?
- Have I asked about communication preferences for both the family and the caregiver?
- Do I have all the information I need to know how the child can use a skill related to their IFSP at home and in child care?
- Am I consistently providing information on how the child is meeting their goals to both families and caregivers?

Case Study Connection

At pickup, Melissa tells Jack's mom, "Today Jack asked for more crackers at snack by pointing and saying 'more.' He also stayed for both songs at music and movement time." A few weeks later, Jack's mom shares that she's started using the same approach at home. During cleanup, she points to the toy bin and says, "Put in." At dinner, she models for Jack by holding out her hand and saying, "Give me." Melissa, Sarah, and Jack's mom keep sharing what's working so Jack hears the same simple words and gestures at home and at child care.

Monitoring Outcomes



Monitoring in early intervention is an ongoing, collaborative process in which the early interventionist and caregiver work together to observe how supports are functioning within everyday routines and interactions. Rather than focusing only on whether a strategy was used, monitoring involves noticing how the child responds to the support, how the caregiver feels about using it, and whether the support helps the child participate more successfully in daily activities and relationships.

The early interventionist helps the caregiver reflect on what is working well, what feels challenging, and patterns they notice over time. This might include observing whether the child is more engaged, communicates more often, transitions more smoothly, or interacts more positively with peers and adults. It also includes considering whether the support feels practical, sustainable, and well-matched to the realities of the care setting.

Through ongoing observation, reflection, and problem-solving, the early interventionist and caregiver can celebrate progress, make adjustments when needed, and identify meaningful next steps. Monitoring helps ensure supports remain responsive to both the child's goals and the caregiver's capacity to implement them consistently within daily routines.

Reflection Questions for Providing Supports in Child Care

- What are you noticing about how the child is responding to the support during daily routines and activities?
- What changes have you noticed in the child's participation, engagement, communication, or interactions with peers?
- When does the support seem to work best? Are there times when it is less effective?
- Which strategies feel most helpful or easiest to use consistently?
- What feels challenging or difficult to implement right now?
- How is this support working for you as the caregiver within the flow of your day?
- Does anything need to be adjusted to fit the child or caregiver's needs better?
- What small next step could we focus on together?

Case Study Connection

Sarah and Melissa check in regularly on how Jack is doing. Together, they notice real progress: Jack asks for things using words or gestures more often, stays engaged longer during group activities, and plays next to peers more.

Melissa also notices a change in herself. She feels more confident supporting Jack during the day and doesn't feel like she needs Sarah to "take over" anymore. As they keep tracking Jack's progress, they notice something else: some of the changes they made to help Jack —are helping other children in the class too.

Appendix A: Early Intervention Practice Guide

This resource is meant to be left with the caregiver after an early intervention session as a quick reminder of what they can work on before the next session. Create multiple copies to have on hand to share with multiple caregivers or to provide guidance on multiple goals.

How to use this guide:

1. Look for the routine
2. Try the strategies
3. Watch how the child responds
4. Adjust as needed

Early Intervention Provider Name:	
Contact Information:	
My next session is: *Please contact me with any questions before the next session.*	
IFSP Goal:	

CARE ROUTINES	PLAY	OUTDOORS	STRUCTURED GROUP
Strategies:	Strategies:	Strategies:	Strategies:
If the child needs more help:	If the child needs more help:	If the child needs more help:	If the child needs more help:

Questions or information I want to share during the next session around this goal:

Appendix B: Family/Child Early Intervention Log

Early interventionists can use this log to document strategies that can be used to address a child's IFSP goal both at home and in child care. After a session, fill out the log by listing strategies for relevant routines and provide a copy to both the child care provider and the family.

Early Intervention Provider Name:	
Contact Information:	
My next session is:	

Our IFSP Goal:

We are working on:	We are trying:

Strategies to Try in Child Care	Strategies to Try at Home
Care Routines: *(e.g.,meals, diaper/toileting, dressing, naptime)*	**Care Routines:** *(e.g.,meals, diaper/toileting, dressing, bed/nap, bath)*
Play:	**Play:**
Outdoors:	**Outdoors:**
Structured Group:	**Community Outings:**
What to Share with Me in Our Next Session:	**What to Share with Me in Our Next Session:**
Did the strategies work? ☐ **Yes** ☐ **No**	Did the strategies work? ☐ **Yes** ☐ **No**
Something that is working in child care I want the family to know is:	Something that is working at home I want child care to know is:
Questions/Needs around this goal:	**Questions/Needs around this goal:**

Appendix C: Information Sheet to Share with Child Care

This resource can be used to help you share information and expectations about early intervention services in child care settings with child care administrators and staff. Make multiple copies to have with you to share. Adapt as needed to fit the context of your state and community.

Early Intervention Provider Name:	
Contact Information:	

What is early intervention?

You are receiving this information because a child in your care is currently receiving early intervention services.

Early intervention (Part C) of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is a federal program that provides services to infants and toddlers with disabilities and developmental delays.

This team-based approach may include early intervention providers, service coordinators, related services (e.g., occupational therapy, physical therapy, speech-language pathology, nursing), families, and anyone the family identifies as an important team member.

Services are provided in the natural setting, or any setting that would be considered typical for an infant or toddler. This can include the home or community settings, including child care or family child care. Services involve creating goals, strategies, and interventions to address developmental milestones.

Do you have concerns that another child in your care has a disability or delay?

If you have concerns about a child's development, talk with the child's family and/or contact to learn more about early intervention.

What does an early interventionist do during an early intervention session?

Work with the child in the child's typical routines and

- Observe the child's use of skills.
- Offer supports and strategies that can be implemented in everyday routines and activities to support the child with an IFSP.
- Guide you in using strategies that will help the child with an IFSP engage with others, participate in activities, and learn.
- Facilitate communication between home and the child care regarding the child's progress and priorities related to the individualized family service plan (IFSP) following required consent and confidentiality procedures.
- Model new strategies for you to try to support the child's goals.
- Help you identify practice opportunities for the child to try new skills with your support.
- Ask questions about the child's progress.
- Engage in problem-solving discussions to help the child meet goals and participate with peers during routines and activities.
- Share information to help you use strategies with support between early intervention sessions.

What is the caregiver's role during early intervention sessions?

- Follow your routines and activities as planned.
- Schedule sessions at times that might be challenging for the child or might help you to practice or learn new strategies with support.
- Share your perspectives on the child's interests, strengths, challenges, strategies, and progress with the early interventionist and the family.
- Ask questions to clarify your role, the child's skills and progress, or about strategies.
- Do your best to inform the early interventionist when changes are expected (e.g., scheduling, staff).
- Learn how to use strategies and supports to help the child meet their developmental and learning goals.
- Use the strategies that are part of the plan between early intervention sessions.
- Provide feedback on what strategies are working, what is challenging, and what you would like help with.