

# The IFSP Process and Natural Environments

The consideration of natural environments for the child and family is an ongoing activity that begins with the first family contact and continues throughout the child's eligibility for Early On. The consideration of natural environments is never solely about the location or setting in which an early intervention service will be delivered. Moving an early intervention session from a developmental clinic or center-based school program into a family's home is not sufficient to meet the legal requirement of Part C of IDEA. The early intervention service must also fit into the context of the family's life and support them to achieve their desired outcomes for their child.

Which natural environments early intervention services and supports are ultimately provided in is the outcome of an IFSP process, that identifies when and where in a family's daily routines, interventions will be most effective. Building on existing routines, using familiar, culturally appropriate, and accessible materials, and involving people who are familiar with the family, are practices that make a natural environment a more effective learning environment for the child and their family.

Each component of the IFSP process is addressed in the following sections. Each section is designed to provide helpful information for service coordinators and early intervention service providers.

## FIRST CONTACTS WITH FAMILIES

At an appropriate time, during the first contacts with families, the service coordinator:

- A. Explains the Early On commitment to the provision of early intervention services in natural environments to the family using the Early On Family Guidebook.
- B. Explains that the focus of the developmental evaluation will be on understanding the child's current functional participation in daily routines and activities.
- C. Asks the parents about the everyday environments in which the child currently participates, and where the parent would recommend the evaluation to take place.
- D. Asks the parents who from those everyday environments might participate in the evaluation to increase the child's comfort with the process.
- E. Discusses with the parents the advantages and disadvantages of using different locations for the evaluation and assessment.
- F. Selects, with the family, the settings that will provide the most useful information about the child's functional participation, in the daily routines and activities in which the family is concerned about the child being able to participate.
- G. Asks for the family's permission to interview them about their resources, priorities and concerns related to enhancing their child's development.