

Natural Environments

WHAT ARE NATURAL ENVIRONMENTS?

Natural environments means “settings that are natural or normal for the child’s age peers who have no disabilities.” (34 CFR 303.12 (4)(b)(2))

Natural learning environments include family routines and community activities where providers and caregivers work together to build intervention into everyday life. The intervention is specific to the individual routines and needs of the child and family.

What do natural environments have to do with early intervention services? “Early intervention services means developmental services that, to the maximum extent, appropriate and provide natural environments, including the home and community settings in which children without disabilities participate.”

COULD YOU BE MORE SPECIFIC?

Natural environments often provide children with opportunities to interact with other children who do not have disabilities. A location is probably a natural learning environment if it is:

- The child’s home (unless he/she would typically go to day care);
- Where the child would go if he or she did not have a disability;
- Where same-age peers go who do not have disabilities;
- Part of the community where children and families without disabilities spend time when they are not being treated or tested for illness or health issues;
- Consistent with the child and family’s routines.

SO, NATURAL LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS MEANS SERVICES IN THE HOME?

No. Natural learning environments are not limited to particular settings. The home might not be the natural place for a child if the parent is working or would like to work. Depending on the child and family’s routines, Grandma’s house or daycare may be a natural learning environment.

It may be helpful to think of natural environments as “natural activity settings.” Areas include family and community settings which feature typical routines and play. Riding in the car, taking a bath, and visiting the local YMCA offer many opportunities for children to work toward their IFSP outcomes. Service providers must listen to families, understand their routines and desired activities, and develop plans which meet their concerns, priorities, and resources in settings that are normal for them.

For more information, visit 1800EarlyOn.org.

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