

December 30, 2024

D-2024-Early Intervention-001

TO: REGIONAL CENTER EXECUTIVE DIRECTORS

SUBJECT: EARLY INTERVENTION SERVICES IN NATURAL ENVIRONMENTS

This letter provides guidance to regional centers regarding the provision of Early Intervention Services. Early Intervention Services are designed to support families in meeting the unique developmental needs of their infants and toddlers with delays, or those at risk of delays or disabilities. These services are required to be delivered in natural environments, pursuant to 34 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Section [303.13\(a\)\(8\)](#). “Natural environments” are defined by Section [303.26](#) as settings that are natural or typical for a same-aged infant or toddler without a disability. Some examples of natural environments include a child’s home, playgrounds, libraries, daycares, childcare centers, or other community settings.

Providing services in natural environments enhances a family's ability to support their child's development through everyday activities such as mealtime, story time, play, and bath time, offering numerous opportunities for children to learn and practice new skills in their daily environments. These services should be delivered in other settings only if the outcomes cannot be achieved satisfactorily in natural environments, as determined by the IFSP team, including the parent(s).

Requirements for Providing Early Intervention Services Outside the Natural Environment

If the IFSP team, which includes the parent(s) or guardian(s) and the service coordinator, determines that one or more outcomes identified in the IFSP cannot be achieved with a service provided in a natural environment, the IFSP team must include a child-specific justification to receive those services outside of the natural environment.

Acceptable justifications for providing services outside of the natural environment must include all of the following criteria:

- Be agreed upon by all members of the child’s IFSP Team. Justification that is documented as based solely on one member’s preference is not acceptable;
- Be based on the child’s outcomes as identified by the IFSP Team;
- Include the reason why the service(s) cannot be delivered in the natural environment; and,
- Be consistent with the provisions in 34 CFR, Sections [303.13\(a\)\(8\)](#) which outline requirements for providing Early Intervention (EI) services in natural

environment, 303.26 which defines natural environments, and [303.126](#) which requires states to establish policies and procedures to ensure services are provided in natural environments.

Regional center staff who coordinate Early Intervention Services are encouraged to review their current practices to align with the requirements for information that must be included when developing the IFSP, as outlined in [34 CFR, Section 303.344\(d\)\(1\)](#) which specifies necessary information about the service.

For additional information please contact EarlyStart@dds.ca.gov.

Sincerely,

Original Signed by:

MARICRIS ACON

Deputy Director

Children, Adolescents, and Young Adult Services Division

cc: Regional Center Administrators
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