

Welcome to *Early On*[®]



PART **1** OF THE *EARLY ON* GUIDEBOOK

This is Part 1 of the *Early On*[®] Guidebook. It introduces you to *Early On*. It gives details about how you can get help for your child. It explains how your family can be a part of the process. It lets you know what to expect while your child and family work with *Early On*.

As you go through this part of the guidebook, you will find underlined words. These are words commonly used in *Early On*. They are defined within the text the first time you see them, and/or you can find them in the Glossary at the end of the book.

You will also find **bold type** in this section. These are the rights that you have while working with *Early On*. There is also an *Early On Your Family Has Rights* brochure. This is a document for families that explains your rights while your family is in *Early On*. **Your local *Early On* contact will give it to you.**

PART 1

YOUR LOCAL EARLY ON CONTACT

For additional copies, contact the above *Early On* Coordinator.

Welcome to Early On[®]





What Is *Early On*?

Early On is the name for Michigan's early intervention system. An early intervention system includes:

- Activities—things you do day-to-day or programs where your child can play and learn with others.
- Supports—can be help, resources, or information.
- Services—when a trained professional works with you to help you learn how to support your child.

Early On can help your child with his or her development. A child's development is their process of growing and learning. It can also help your family to be better able to help your child grow and learn.

The Michigan early intervention system comes from a federal law called the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)*. Part C of the IDEA law:

- Tells how each state needs to plan and provide their early intervention system.
- Explains families' rights.

Early On is not one single "program." It's a collection of activities, supports, services, and resources provided by many programs such as:

- Schools.
- Public health.
- Mental health.
- Social services.
- Programs where children play and learn.

It also includes many people with different skills. These people want to work with you to help your child grow and learn.

Our daughter just wasn't talking and making sounds like other kids her age. After talking with our family and our doctor, we decided to call *Early On* to see how they could help us.

— Parents of a 16-month-old

Who Is *Early On* For?

Early On is for children from birth to three years of age. *Early On* is here for your family if you have a concern about your child's growth and learning. *Early On* helps children who have a:

- Developmental delay. A developmental delay is seen when a child's rate of growth and learning is different from that of most children the same age. A developmental delay may be in one of the following areas:
 - Thinking.
 - Talking.
 - Hearing.
 - Seeing.
 - Moving.
 - Taking care of basic needs.
 - Responding to others.
- Health issue. A health issue is when a condition (physical or mental) is likely to lead to a developmental delay.

It doesn't matter how much money you make, where you live, or when you enter. You only have to want to help your child grow and learn.



What Does *Early On* Believe?

- You are your child's first and most important teacher.
- You know your child best.
- Children learn best in the places they know, such as at home or where they play.
- Children learn best with children their age.
- *Early On* works best when you share information about your child and family.

Early On can help with people, information, supports, and connections to other families.

One of the things I like best about *Early On* is that no one tells me what to do with my daughter. Instead, with *Early On*, people listen to me. We work together as a team to figure out what my child needs, and then we go get it.

— Mom of a 12-month-old

What Can *Early On* Do for My Child and Family?

Early On helps young children grow and learn. Working on delays early means your child gets a great start in life. *Early On* helps by:

- Working together and with you as a team. *Early On* helps to get people, activities, supports, and services working together with you. (Think of *Early On* as a baseball team. Each player brings different skills. When all of these skills are put together, the team can play ball; however, one person alone cannot.)
- Listening to families. You know your child best. You know your family's routines best. The information you share with *Early On* will help your child.
- Getting information to parents. This allows you to be better able to help your child grow and learn.
- Making your family stronger and healthier. That is why some supports and services may be provided to your family. When your family is strong and healthy, you will be better able to help your child grow and learn.
- Connecting you to other families. Raising a child who has developmental delays can be tough. It may help to talk with other families who have a child with developmental delays too.



How Do I Get Help for My Child?

Early On is called when there is a concern about your child's development.

- Maybe you noticed your child wasn't babbling.
- Maybe a doctor or nurse noted a health issue.
- Maybe your childcare person noticed your child having trouble sitting up.
- Maybe a friend saw that your child isn't making eye contact with people.

When *Early On* is called, a referral is made.

- A referral is a recommendation to have a child evaluated by *Early On*.
- Anyone can make a referral to *Early On*. The referral should be made right away.
- **You must be contacted when a referral is made. *Early On* has ten days to contact you.**
- **When you are contacted about the referral, *Early On* must ask for your consent to do an evaluation of your child.** An evaluation is a process to learn about your child's growth and learning. It is also used to find out if your child is eligible for *Early On*. Eligible means your child can receive help from *Early On*.
- ***Early On* must tell you about what they will do with your child and family. They must tell you in the language you usually speak or in your normal means of communication.**
- After the referral is made, a service coordinator must be assigned to work with you as soon as possible. This person knows about and has worked with children with developmental delays.



Why Do I Need a Service Coordinator?

The service coordinator's first job is to plan your child's evaluation. The evaluation will help the team to find out what activities, supports, and services your child may need.

A service coordinator:

- Will support your family the entire time you're in *Early On*.
- Is your main contact.
- Works with your team to plan for when and where activities, supports, and services will happen.
- Can answer your questions.
- Will help and support you in many ways (for example, finding activities to help your child grow and learn, looking for new supports, finding people to provide services, finding other parents who can help you get what your child needs).



What if I'm Not Ready to Get Help From *Early On*?

It is your choice to participate in *Early On*. If you are not ready for *Early On*, you may call back when you are ready. If you have any concerns about your child, don't worry but don't wait. Call *Early On*.

Finding Out if My Child Is Eligible for *Early On*

How Do We Get Started?

Your service coordinator will be in charge of setting up an evaluation. The evaluation will:

- Find out if your child is eligible for *Early On*.
- Help your *Early On* team understand how your child is growing and learning.

It can also give ideas about what could be done to help your child grow and learn. These ideas will help when you make a plan.

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Before the evaluation can happen, **your service coordinator will have you sign a Consent to Evaluate form.** This form explains:

- What an evaluation is.
- How the evaluation will happen.
- Why an evaluation is needed.
- What your family's rights are.

It is important that you understand *Early On* and your rights before you sign. Also be sure to understand what you are signing. When the form is signed, your child can be evaluated.





Where and When Does the Evaluation Happen?

An evaluation:

- Can be completed anywhere your family or child spends time (for example, in your home or childcare setting).
- Should work into your family's schedule.
- Should be at a time and place that is comfortable for your child and family.

Setting up the evaluation can be a lot of work. Calls need to be made and schedules need to be looked at. It is important to be at the evaluation on the day and time planned. If you need to change the day or time, call your service coordinator first. He or she can help you let the others on the *Early On* team know.

Two people came to our house to see our son and talk to us. They came at lunchtime, so I could be there, too. After we gave permission, they also went to our babysitter's to talk to her and see our son there, so they could get the whole picture.

— Dad of a nine-month-old



What Does an Evaluation Include?

There are four parts that make up an *Early On* evaluation.

The first part measures how your child grows and learns and is called a developmental evaluation. This evaluation is not a test that your child can pass or fail. It is used to help your team find out how your child is growing and learning. The developmental evaluation looks at how your child is:

- Thinking.
- Talking.
- Moving.
- Hearing.
- Seeing.
- Responding to others.
- Taking care of basic needs (such as feeding and calming down).

Your *Early On* team looks at all of these pieces to give them a whole picture of your child.

In the second part, your team will watch you and your child play, eat, or spend time together. This will let them get to know you and your child better and see how you and your child learn together. Your service coordinator will also ask you about how your child has developed and grown since his or her birth. This is called a developmental history.

The third part of the evaluation is about your child's health and growth. This information is used to see how the health of your child relates to his or her growing and learning. This information will be gathered from your doctor or nurse. Before information on your child's health and growth can be gathered, you must consent.

The fourth part, if you agree to it in writing, will be a family assessment. You and other members of your family will be able to talk about what your family needs to be a strong and healthy family and to be better able to help your child grow and learn. You will also talk about what your family is good at doing.

During the family assessment, you will get a chance to talk about your family's:

- Concerns—what you worry about with your child's growth and learning; what you would like *Early On* to work on to help your child and family.
- Resources—the people, places, relationships, supports, and services your family already has that could help your child.
- Priorities—what you think is most important for your child and family.

It also provides your team with ideas of how they can help your family take the lead in your child's development.

Your family DOES NOT have to have a family assessment. Your child can still get help from *Early On*. However, it is a great time to ask questions and share information with your team. Then they can begin to get to know your child in the same ways you do. If you DO take part in the family assessment, you only have to share what you want to share.

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Who Will Do the Evaluation?

At least two people will evaluate your child. These people:

- Work with *Early On* in your community.
- Are trained in different ways (for example, a nurse and social worker) to help young children grow and learn .

During the evaluation, each person on the team shares with the rest of the team what they have seen and their ideas. Their viewpoints may not be the same. Your family's viewpoints may differ from theirs. The evaluation will combine all these viewpoints and allow the team to get a clear picture of your child and his or her needs.



How Does *Early On* Gather Information About My Child and Family?

Before your *Early On* team can gather any information, they must talk with you about:

- What information they would like to gather.
- Whom they would like to share it with.

You can:

- Decide what you want to have shared.
- Decide whom it can be shared with.
- Change your mind about sharing information at any time.

These decisions will be listed on an Authorization to Share Confidential Information form. When you sign this form, it means you agree that *Early On* can gather and share the information listed. **No one in *Early On* can share your information without your written consent.**

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Your Authorization to Share Confidential Information form is good for only six months. You need to sign it at least every six months or anytime you make a change.



Why Is My Family a Part of the Evaluation?

Your family:

- Is an important part of the evaluation.
- Knows your child and family best.
- Has information that no one else has (this information can help your team to learn about and get help for your child and family).

As always, **what you share with the team won't be shared with anyone else without your written consent.**

What Will I Be Asked During the Evaluation?

You will be asked to share information about such things as:

- Your pregnancy and the birth of your child.
- Big events in your child's life.
- Your worries and concerns about your child.
- What your child is really good at.
- What you are already doing to help your child grow and learn.
- What you would like to be different for your child and family.

You will be asked questions about how your child is growing and learning. These questions may be hard to answer. Just answer them the best that you can. The evaluation is a time for everyone to learn new information. By talking and sharing, your *Early On* team will learn about what would be helpful to your child and family.

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What if My Family Has Already Told Its Story Many Times to Other Programs?

(for example: schools, public health, mental health, social services, and other programs where children play and learn)

Let your *Early On* team know of any other programs with whom you have had contact. With your written permission, they will contact these other people and places and find out what you have shared and use it for *Early On*, too. For example, your child had some evaluations not long ago. These may be developmental or health evaluations. *Early On* does not want your child to have to do these over. Your *Early On* team will work with you to gather copies of these evaluations. Then they will use these evaluations instead of conducting new ones.



What Happens to My Information?

The information from the evaluation will be:

- Used to help you and your team to understand your child's and family's needs.
- Used to make a plan for your child and family.
- Put in writing, and you will get a copy.
- Put into your *Early On* record.

An *Early On* record is started for each child and family. Your record includes:

- Information your child and family shared.
- Information gathered from others.
- All the papers and plans from your time in *Early On*.

You have the right to:

- **Know where your record is.**
- **See your record.**
- **Ask for changes to your record.**
- **Add a note.**
- **Ask to have something removed.**
- **Get a copy of your record.**

Any person or program working with your family cannot share anything about you without your written consent.

At first we thought, "Oh great, a file with our personal information in it." But it was OK—*Early On* only used the information to help us get things that our son needed.
— Parents of a two-year-old

What Happens When the Evaluation Is Finished?

The evaluation may find your child not eligible for *Early On*. *Early On* can still help by giving ideas about next steps to take.

- One next step might be to contact *Early On* at a later time. If you still have concerns about your child's growth and learning, *Early On* could evaluate your child again.
- Another next step could be to help get your child other support for his or her growing and learning. This support may be information or a link to other activities and programs (such as Early Head Start). Ideas will depend on what is available in your community.

Your child may be found eligible for *Early On*. Your family will then begin making an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP). This is your written plan that guides everything that will be done while your child and family are involved with *Early On*. It lists what activities, supports, and services are needed by your child and family.

Be sure to read other available guidebooks to learn more about your time in *Early On*.

- **Part 2: Our Individualized Family Service Plan**
- **Part 3: Transition: Leaving *Early On***
- **Part 4: *Early On* Family Rights**



Whom Can I Call With Questions?

There are many people and places you can call that can give you help and information.

- ☎ You can call your service coordinator. His or her name and phone number are on your IFSP. You can also find them in the front of this guidebook. Your service coordinator will try to answer your questions and help you find answers. He or she can also help you work out problems.
- ☎ In each area, *Early On* has a person in charge. This person is called the Early On Coordinator. He or she can answer your questions and help you work out problems. You can get your local *Early On* Coordinator's name and phone number from your service coordinator.
- ☎ You can talk to families who are in *Early On*. They may have information to share that can be helpful to you. Ask your service coordinator to share your name with other families.
- ☎ You can contact support groups and advocacy organizations. Support groups are families who meet to support each other. Advocacy organizations help families understand their rights. They can also speak and act on your behalf if you choose. Ask your service coordinator for information on support groups and advocacy organizations.
- ☎ If you have any questions, look at the *Early On* Family Rights guidebook part 4 or the *Your Family Has Rights* brochure. If you didn't receive copies, ask your service coordinator.
- ☎ You can call 1-800-EARLY ON (1-800-327-5966). This is a free phone call in Michigan. This phone is answered by people who can help answer questions and help you figure out other places to call. Additional information about *Early On* is also available at www.1800earlyon.org.
- ☎ You can receive information about being in *Early On* by calling the Michigan Department of Education, Office of Early Childhood Education and Family Services. This office directs special education and *Early On* around Michigan. If you have questions or a complaint, call (517) 373-8483.

This Process Check is to help you follow the steps in the *Early On* process. Use this Process Check to be sure each step is completed.

- Early On* received a referral. *Early On* contacted us within ten days. *Early On* asked for our permission to evaluate our child.
- A service coordinator began to work with our child and family. This happened soon after the referral. We knew who that was and how to contact him/her.
- We began to develop a working relationship with our service coordinator (and other members on our *Early On* team).
- We worked with our service coordinator to decide if we needed an Interim IFSP.
- We learned about our child's and family's rights.
- We understood what was going to happen before we signed any forms.
- Our *Early On* team explained the evaluation. We chose whether to sign the Consent to Evaluate form.
- We chose whether to sign an Authorization to Share Confidential Information form. This form said who could share what information about our child and family and with whom.
- Our *Early On* team asked us for information about our child. Our *Early On* team asked what we wanted to happen for our child.
- A developmental evaluation was done. It helped our *Early On* team to see how our child was growing and learning.
- Our *Early On* team gathered information about our child's health and growth. Our *Early On* team got this from our doctor or nurse.
- Our *Early On* team watched our child and family play, eat, or spend time together.
- Our *Early On* team asked if we wanted a family assessment done. If we said yes, our *Early On* team talked with us about our concerns, resources, and priorities.
- Our *Early On* team shared all of the results of our evaluation and assessment. Our *Early On* team told us if our child was eligible for *Early On*.
- We asked questions. We made sure we understood what was said. We made sure we knew what was going to happen for our child and family.

If any of these steps did not happen, talk to your service coordinator. You can also check your *Early On* Family Rights guidebook part 4 or the *Your Family Has Rights* brochure.

Activities: The things a family does day-to-day or programs where children can play and learn with others.

Advocacy Organizations: Groups that can help families understand their rights. They can also speak or act on a family's behalf.

Authorization to Share Confidential Information: A form that says *Early On* can gather and share information about a family or child. The form must tell who can share what and with whom. Information cannot be gathered or shared until the form is signed by a parent.

Concerns: What a family worries about with their child's growth and learning. It is what they would like *Early On* to work on to help their child and family.

Consent: Give permission.

Consent to Evaluate: A form that gives permission to *Early On* to evaluate a child. The form must tell what an evaluation is, how it will happen, and why. The evaluation cannot happen until the parent signs this form.

Development: The process of growing and learning.

Developmental Delay: When a child's rate of growth and learning is different from that of most children the same age.

Developmental Evaluation: A way to learn about a child's growth and learning. It measures the areas of thinking, talking, hearing, seeing, moving, taking care of basic needs, and responding to others.

Early Childhood Education and Family Services: A division in the Michigan Department of Education. It specifically oversees programs for early childhood from birth to six years of age and *Early On* Michigan.

Early Intervention System: Includes any activities, supports, and services a baby or toddler may need to help with his or her growing and learning.

Early On: Michigan's system of early intervention. It is not one single "program." It's a collection of activities, supports, services, and resources provided by many programs.

Early On Coordinator: A person in charge of *Early On* in a local county or counties.

Early On Record: All the papers and plans from your time in *Early On*. It is also all the information you gave and that was gathered from others.

Early On Team: A team that includes the parents and the service coordinator. It also includes people who provide services. Everyone will work together to support the growth and learning of a child.

Early On Your Family Has Rights Brochure: A document for families that explains their rights while working with *Early On*.

Eligible: When a child qualifies to receive supports and services from *Early On*. To be eligible for *Early On*, your child must have a developmental delay, and/or a health issue that is likely to lead to a developmental delay.

Evaluation: A process to learn about a child's growth and development. It is also used to find out if a child is eligible for *Early On*.

Family: A group of people close to you and your child. It could include parents, husband or wife, grandparents, in-laws, aunts and uncles, brothers or sisters, legal guardians, or friends.

Family Assessment: A process to let the family discuss their concerns, resources, and priorities to help them be better able to help the child grow and learn. It is up to the family to decide whether a family assessment is done.

Health Issue: A medical issue or condition found by a doctor or nurse that is likely to lead to a developmental delay.

Individualized: It is about you and your child's own life and needs. Every child and family is different.

Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP): A written plan of action that guides everything a child and family will do while involved with *Early On*. It lists what activities, supports, and services are needed by the child and family.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA): The federal law that guides the education of children with disabilities. Part C of the IDEA law tells how each state needs to plan and provide their early intervention system. It also explains the rights families have.

Interim Individualized Family Service Plan (Interim IFSP): A temporary plan that is made when a child has immediate needs to be supported.

Michigan Department of Education: The unit that oversees *Early On* in all intermediate and local school districts around Michigan. *Early On* funding comes through the Michigan Department of Education.

Multidisciplinary Evaluation: An evaluation to learn about your child's growth and development. It is done by at least two people with different skills and training.

Parent: Any person responsible for the care and well-being of a child. It could include birth parents, adoptive parents, single parents, guardians, grandparents, or foster parents.

Priorities: What a parent thinks is most important for their child and family.

Referral: A recommendation to have a child evaluated for *Early On*. The referral starts the *Early On* process. It occurs because of a concern about a child's development or health issue.

Resources: The people, places, relationships, supports, and services a family already has that could help their child.

Service Coordinator: The family's main contact in *Early On*. This person supports and assists the family the entire time they are in *Early On*. He or she knows about and has worked with children with developmental delays.

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Services: When a trained professional works directly with a child or helps a family learn how to support their child.

Support Groups: Groups who meet to support each other.

Supports: Help, resources, or information.

**“As Governor, I will be
fighting for a Great Start
for every child in our state.”**

Governor

Jennifer M. Granholm

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Understanding This Guidebook

If you need help reading or understanding the contents of this guidebook,
please contact 1-800-EARLY ON (1-800-327-5966).

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