

FACT SHEET



SECTION ON

PEDIATRICS

AMERICAN PHYSICAL THERAPY ASSOCIATION

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American
Physical Therapy
Association

The Science of Healing. The Art of Caring

Natural Environments in Early Intervention Services

What Are Natural Environments?

Natural environments are:

- A variety of settings where children live, learn, and play
- Home (*family life*) and *community-life* settings that are natural and typical for children without a disability and their families
- Settings where the child, family, and care providers participate in everyday routines and activities that are important to them and serve as important learning opportunities

Family Life:

Daily routines, play activities, household chores, entertainment, rituals, celebrations, and social activities

Examples of family-life environments: Kitchens, bathrooms, playrooms, bedrooms, backyards

Examples of family-life activities: Eating, bathing, infant and toddler games, reading, walking, doing laundry, gardening, birthday parties, visiting families and friends

Community Life:

Family activities and outings, going on errands, play activities, community events, outdoor activities, participation in church/religious groups and/or community organizations, sports activities/events

Examples of *community-life environments*: Playgrounds, parks, libraries, places of worship, childcare facilities, neighborhoods, stores, restaurants, and transportation to and from activities (car rides, bus rides, train rides, etc)

Why Are Natural Environments Important?

Natural environments are important because they:

- Are included in the law (under Part C of the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act)
- Support families in promoting their children's development, learning, and participation in family and community life
- Emphasize children's, families', and care providers' abilities during everyday activities, rather than teaching a new skill out of context
- Focus on function and socialization with an indirect benefit of raising awareness of disability, empathy, and promoting friendships
- Promote learning in locations where the child will use the new skills
- Enable families and therapists to identify facilitators, barriers, and constraints to skill acquisition in the typical setting in which the child will be using or executing this skill

- Enable children to learn by modeling their families and peers
- Provide children with opportunities to practice skills throughout their day
- Strengthen and develop lifelong natural supports for children and families
- Recognize family members and care providers as the primary influence for nurturing growth, development, and learning

- Justification includes an explanation of how the desired outcomes will be generalized into typical daily routines for the child, family, and care providers
- Justification is child focused and is not for the convenience of the program or the provider
- A need exists to bring families together to network or to provide other family support as identified on the IFSP

How Do I Make Sure I Am Using Natural Environments for Early Intervention?

- Establish rapport with families
- Ask families and care providers what activities and routines are part of their daily lives
- Invite and encourage families and care providers to identify their priorities and outcomes as an initial step in the planning process
- Identify the important people in the children’s and families’ lives
- Observe children engaging in real-life activities with families and care providers across natural settings
- Provide families with emotional, informational, and material resources to support the achievement of Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) outcomes
- Provide physical therapy within the context of family and child routines and activities
- Be a resource for families to network with other families in the community
- Learn about your community, especially formal and informal activities for young children
- Seek out additional resources, supports, and networks by contacting regional resources through the APTA Section on Pediatrics Early Intervention Special-Interest Group (information is located online at www.pediatricapta.org under Special-Interest Groups)

Exception to the use of natural environments should be short term, and alternate options for providing services in natural learning environments should be explored. Justification should include a plan with criteria for outcomes and a timeline for further exploration of service delivery in natural learning environments.

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Services Provided Under Part C of IDEA Must Be in Natural Environments

Other environments may be used only when:

- Alternate options for intervention services in natural learning environments have been explored
- The IFSP team can justify that IFSP outcomes cannot be achieved satisfactorily in any natural learning environment

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Shelden ML, Rush D. The ten myths about providing early intervention services in natural environments. *Infants Young Child*. 2001;14(1):1-13.

Web Sites:

Council for Exceptional Children: Division for Early Childhood. <http://www.dec-sped.org>.

Everyday Children's Learning Opportunities Institute at the Orelena Hawks Puckett Institute. <http://everydaylearning.info/index.php>.

Therapists as Collaborative Team members for Infant/Toddler Community Services. <http://tactics.fsu.edu>.

Project SPIES: Strategies for Preschool Interventions in Everyday Settings. <http://www.cpd.usu.edu/spies/default.htm>.

The National Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center. <http://www.nectac.org>.

This Web site provides a topic page with practical suggestions related to implementation of services in natural environments in addition to offering comprehensive information about Part C programming, including the following: Workgroup on Principles and Practices in Natural Environments (Final Draft 11-07) Mission and principles for providing services in natural environments, Seven key principles: Looks like/doesn't look like, and agreed-upon practices for providing services in natural environments. OSEP TA Community of Practice—Part C Settings. <http://www.nectac.org/topics/families/families.asp>.

Video:

Being a Kid. Distributed by Western Media Products. Available at 800/232-8902 or <http://www.media-products.com>.

For More Information:

If you have additional questions, would like to order additional copies of this fact sheet, or would like to join the Section on Pediatrics, please contact the Executive Office of the Section on Pediatrics of the American Physical Therapy Association at: APTA Section on Pediatrics, 1111 North Fairfax Street, Alexandria, VA 22314, 800/999-2782, ext 3254, Fax: 703/706-8575. Or visit the Section's Web site at **www.pediatricapta.org**.

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