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PARENT INFORMATION CENTER OF DELAWARE

TRANSITION AT AGE THREE FOR TODDLERS WITH DISABILITIES

AT A GLANCE

Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and Delaware state policy, infants and toddlers with disabilities (aged birth to three) and their families are eligible to receive early intervention services. Also under the IDEA and state law, children and youth with disabilities (aged three through 21) are eligible to receive a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) which includes special education and related services. There are significant differences between the two programs, and it is important that parents, the early intervention system, and the school system work together closely to plan for a smooth transition as a child with a disability approaches age three and the child's eligibility for early intervention services comes to an end.

WHAT ARE THE IFSP AND THE IEP?

The planning document for each child's and family's program of early intervention services is called the *Individualized Family Service Plan*, or **IFSP**.

The planning document for each child's program of special education and related services is called the *Individualized Education Program*, or **IEP**.

HOW ARE THE ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA FOR EARLY INTERVENTION (BEFORE AGE 3) & FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION AND RELATED SERVICES (FOR CHILDREN BEGINNING AT AGE 3) DIFFERENT?

An infant or toddler, aged birth to three, and the child's family, is eligible to receive early intervention services if the child has either: (1) a developmental delay in at least one of five developmental areas—cognitive, physical (including hearing and vision), communication, social or emotional, or adaptive; or (2) the child has a diagnosed physical or mental condition that has a high probability of resulting in a developmental delay, even if the child does not currently present a developmental delay of at least 25% in any of the five areas of development.

Beginning at age three, a child with a disability is eligible to receive FAPE/special education and related services if the child meets the criteria for one or more of 14 disability categories as defined in Delaware's special education regulations, **AND** because of that disability needs special education and related services.

Because these eligibility requirements are so different from each other, many children who are eligible up to age three to receive early intervention services will not be eligible to receive FAPE/special education and related services once they reach age three.





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WHAT AGENCIES PROVIDE EARLY INTERVENTION SERVICES UP TO AGE THREE AND FAPE/ SPECIAL EDUCATION AND RELATED SERVICES BEGINNING AT AGE THREE?

In Delaware, early intervention services are provided by Child Development Watch (part of the Delaware Department of Health and Human Services) under the supervision of the Birth to Three Program. FAPE/special education and related services are provided by school districts under the supervision of the Delaware Department of Education.

HOW ARE EARLY INTERVENTION SERVICES FOR INFANTS AND TODDLERS WITH DISABILITIES, AGES BIRTH TO THREE, DIFFERENT FROM SPECIAL EDUCATION AND RELATED SERVICES FOR CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES BEGINNING AT AGE THREE?

Early intervention services for children up to age three are family-centered, focused on helping parents support their child's development and growth, and are generally provided in the home or community settings. As part of support to the family, each child and family has a service coordinator who will assist the parents in accessing the services the child and family need, and work with the family to coordinate early intervention services across providers and agencies.

Special education and related services for children with disabilities beginning at age three are child-centered, generally provided in school settings, and focused on supporting the child's success in school.

Note that some services, such as speech and language pathology, occupational therapy, and physical therapy, can be available under either program, depending on the needs of the child.

PIC is a statewide non-profit organization with a mission to improve health and educational outcomes for children and youth by empowering them, their families and the professionals who serve them. For more information visit www.picofdel.org or call 302-999-7394



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WHAT STEPS NEED TO BE TAKEN TO HELP ENSURE A SMOOTH TRANSITION AT AGE THREE IF THE CHILD MAY BE ELIGIBLE FOR PRESCHOOL SPECIAL EDUCATION SERVICES?

At least 90 days and up to nine months before the child's third birthday, Child Development Watch (CDW) must:

- Notify the Delaware Department of Education and the school district in which the child lives that the child will be reaching the age of three;
- With the parent's approval – hold a meeting with the parents, Child Development Watch (CDW), and the school district to discuss any preschool special education and related services the child may receive once they reach age three; and
- Establish a transition plan as part of the child's IFSP, which includes steps for the child and family to exit from the early intervention program, and any transition services that the IFSP team identifies as needed by that child and family.



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**FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ABOUT TRANSITION FROM EARLY INTERVENTION TO
PRESCHOOL SPECIAL EDUCATION:**

Child Development Watch

<https://dhss.delaware.gov/dph/chs/chscdw.html>

New Castle Office: (302) 283-7240 | Kent & Sussex Office: (302) 424-7300

Department of Health and Social Services, Birth to Three

<https://www.dhss.delaware.gov/dhss/dms/epqc/birth3/directry.html>

Delaware Department of Education, Office of Early Learning

(302) 735-4295, early.learning@doe.k12.de.us

Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center

<http://ectacenter.org/families.asp>

Parent Information Center of Delaware

<https://picofdel.org/>

Office: (302) 999-7394

Center for Parent Information and Resources

<https://www.parentcenterhub.org/ei-overview/>



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