Early childhood intervention

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Introduction

This policy aims to ensure early intervention and support services are available when children and their families need them. It outlines how we will work with children with a disability and their families, taking a multi-agency approach to support, to ensure all needs of the child are met.

Early intervention means doing things as early as possible to work on a child’s developmental, health and support needs. Early intervention services give specialised support to children and families during the early years (from birth to school entry). This support might include:

- special education
- therapy
- counselling
- service planning
- help with mainstream services, e.g. kindergarten and child care.

Children with disability should be included in, and supported to access, services available to all children such as family health services, kindergartens, community health centres, regional parenting groups, child care services and play groups.

Early intervention supports identify children with special needs as early as possible to provide them support and services they need to meet their physical growth, social, emotional and intellectual development needs. Evidence shows that early intervention increases the developmental, educational and social gains for children and reduces the potential for secondary problems. The earlier a child’s special needs are identified and addressed, the more likely the child and their family will experience meaningful results from intervention.

Early intervention supports also provide families with better understanding of their children and how to be actively involved in supporting their child’s development. Therefore, it is vital we involve families in each element of support offered to the child. When children and families receive support early on, this can reduce family stress and promote a positive and optimistic future for their children.

Diagnosis

While a child’s support should not be dictated by their diagnosis, it is important to understand what their diagnosis is prior to commencing support as this helps understand which interventions may work best.

Referrals

Children receiving support will have an attributable mental or physical impairment or a combination of mental and physical impairments that results in a reduction in their capacity for:

- self-care
- receptive and expressive language
- cognitive development
- motor development.

As a result, they will need special interdisciplinary care, treatment or other services for an indefinite period of time and will have been referred into the service by a healthcare professional. They are likely to have a diagnosis that was accepted by NDIS.

We will put in place a referral system that ensure each child receives support as soon as possible after their referral. We will collect key information as part of our referral process including:

- the child's personal information
- parent's contact details
- diagnosis and reason for referral
- care and support needs, e.g. mobility
- behaviours, including those that may be of concern
- current and previous care, including interventions
- parental consent.

Support plans

Our early intervention services are designed around the needs of the child and their family. We work with them to develop person-centred support plans that cover all aspects of the child's life, including their hobbies and interests, what they want to achieve and how we can help them get there. Workers and other healthcare professionals should also be involved in the support plan process.

The initial support plan will become a baseline tool to measure progress against agreed targets. All targets should be SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time Bound) and dates should be set to review the early support plan.

Developing a support plan early in the process allows us to form a picture of the child, their medical history, previous support, and how they have responded to different types of interventions. This helps ensure we can meet their needs in the best possible way and begins the process of engaging the parents in the support process. Reviewing progress against agreed goals also provides an evidence base for requesting further funding or support from external agencies (if needed).

When developing support plans it is important to remember that:

- Support should be based on the needs of the child and family being served, not just their diagnosis.
- Children who need extra support should be able to access this as soon as the need is identified; we should not delay request for additional support from external agencies or healthcare professionals.
- Children's needs will change as they grow older and their skills develop. Plans should be considered live documents and regularly reviewed and updated to reflect the child's needs at any given time.
- The needs of other family members (parents and siblings) should be considered as part of the support plan, e.g. we may need to help them access services so they can better understand a diagnosis or manage the stress that does come with having a child with disabilities.
- Plans should be clear and easy to understand. Depending on the age and diagnosis of the child, they may not be able to read a standard support plan so consider using easy read or images to help them understand.

Interventions

Our early intervention services offer a range of interventions to support children with disabilities. Interventions may also be described as therapies. The aim of early interventions should always be to support a child's growth and development. Interventions can be offered in service, at home or in other settings, e.g. child care or kindergarten as outlined in the support plan.

Dependent on their individual needs, types of early interventions available include:

- occupational therapy: to help develop fine motor skills, play and self-help skills like dressing and toileting
- physiotherapy: to help with motor skills like balance, sitting, crawling and walking
- speech therapy: to help with speech, language, eating and drinking skills
- specialist early interventions linked to autism spectrum disorder, cerebral palsy, hearing impairment and visual impairment.

If an early intervention is identified and we cannot provide it, we will identify and facilitate access to a provider who can deliver the intervention. This might include another service provider, community health centre, hospital, GP or paediatrician.

Working with families

Navigating NDIS providers to find the service that best meets a child's specific needs can be challenging for families. Systemic problems can mean that a significant amount of time may pass between when a problem is identified and when a service is provided, a critical factor in the effectiveness of early intervention. We are committed to making access to support as easy as possible.

Good parenting is key to successful outcomes from a child's early development through to them achieving independence, including the crucial acquisition of language and communication skills. However, not all parents are comfortable when asked to be involved in their child's support. Parents should be encouraged to engage, as evidence shows that involving parents and the wider family can have a positive impact on the outcomes a child achieves.

Applicability

When
• applies to all our sites and services involved in providing early childhood intervention.

Who
• applies to all workers involved in providing early childhood intervention including key management personnel, full time workers, part time workers, casual workers, contractors and volunteers.

Governing regulations for this policy

NDIS (Quality Indicators) Guidelines 2018 (Cth)

Applicable processes for this policy

Provide early childhood intervention supports

Guiding principles

- acknowledge that fostering the growth and development of each child is one of society's most important responsibilities
- treat each child as if they have unlimited potential to grow and develop
- realise that early intervention support and services have a lasting benefit to each child throughout their lives
- support the family as a child's family is central to healthy development
- services should be provided to children within the context of the family, with respect for the family's values, beliefs and culture
- services should be based on the needs of the child and family, not on a diagnosis.

Early interventions

- are family centred, which means:
    - parents, siblings and other family members are included and involved in supporting the child with disabilities and work alongside healthcare professionals, ensuring we take a holistic, multi-agency approach to support
    - flexibility—we will offer it in the most appropriate setting for the child and their family
    - it is explained to the family with opportunities to ask questions so they fully understand what is being offered

- are developmentally appropriate, which means:
    - an individualised plan is developed for the child which is reviewed regularly to monitor progress against agreed goals
    - it is specially designed for children with disability, taking into account not just their diagnosis but previous interventions (and how the child responded to them), interests, hobbies and what they want to achieve
    - it uses appropriate assessments, delivered by suitably trained professionals, to review a child's progress
    - it is delivered by workers who are specially trained in the intervention and the support
- are child focused, which means it:
    - is focused on developing specific skills as outlined in the participant's support plan
    - includes strategies to help the child learn new skills and use them in different settings
    - prepares and supports the child to start school
    - supports inclusion by identifying ways of getting a child with a disability together with typically developing children (ideally of the same age)
- are supportive and structured, which means the intervention:
    - provides a supportive learning environment so the child feels comfortable and supported
    - is highly structured, well organised, regular and predictable
    - puts the child first at every point without neglecting the family.

Working with families

We will support families by:

- involving them at every stage of the child's journey
- developing opportunities for peer support with other families accessing our services
- providing advice, guidance and information on the interventions we are offering
- signposting families to additional support, e.g. help to manage stress.

Key management personnel responsibilities when supporting participants with early childhood intervention

- ensure workers supporting participants with early childhood intervention are trained and confident to provide this support
- regularly audit early childhood intervention support practices
- provide guidance to workers providing early childhood intervention supports or services.

Worker responsibilities when supporting participants with early childhood intervention

- have the required knowledge, skills and training to carry out agreed services
- provide high quality early childhood intervention supports and services in-line with the child and family's needs.