

# How to Identify and Explain Your Child's Needs: Tips for Parents

Whether your child is very young and receives services through the Birth to Three System, or is closer to three years old and preparing for the transition out of the Birth to Three, it is important that you as a parent can explain your child's developmental needs.

**Why is this important?** Eligibility for both early intervention and special education preschool services is determined by your child's strengths, abilities and, most importantly, concerns. Simply put – a child's individual needs determine his eligibility for services, and the type and amount of services he will receive.

**Where can you get this information about your child?** It is important for you to understand that concerns about your child's development must be clearly identified in a measurable way. Scores from standardized assessments which the Birth to Three or school teams use to evaluate your child is one method of measuring his developmental challenges. Other sources of information include observations by community providers, medical records pertaining to your child's health and developmental history, and, of course, your input as a parent.

**What is a need?** Once you have a clear picture of your child's delays in a particular developmental area, you can then identify a specific need. A need is a challenge or problem that requires some action to be taken, either by the child, or by another person helping the child.

**What is a service?** If possible, the team identifies a way to help the child meet the need himself. When help or support from others is required, the help or support given is the service.

**The IFSP and IEP development process work best when the team focuses on a child's unique needs rather than focusing on potential services.**

## How can a parent identify, describe, and quantify a specific need?

Let's look at an example. A parent feels his daughter needs to talk more because she gets frustrated when she can't tell him what she wants. He wants his daughter to receive more speech therapy each week. At first glance, an increase in speech therapy appears to be what would help the child to "talk more." But in order to accurately address the need and solve the problem, the parent needs to know:

- how delayed his daughter's expressive language is, and
- why her speech is delayed.

So the parent reviews his daughter's most recent evaluation report, and notes that she is significantly below age-level in her ability to speak because of difficulty coordinating the muscles in her mouth. He checks his daughter's current IFSP to determine if there is an outcome which helps her to improve her oral-motor coordination, and, if so, what kind of progress she has made with this skill. If additional support is needed to help improve her oral-motor coordination, then an IFSP review meeting to discuss a change in services may be necessary.

**When parents understand and can clearly state their children's needs then they are better positioned to advocate for the services that offer the greatest potential for helping their children to learn new skills.**

---

## Resources:

CT Birth to Three System (July 2010). A Family Handbook – Guide 1: Referral and Eligibility Evaluation.

Pages 4 – 6. [www.birth23.org/families/FamilyHandbookI.pdf](http://www.birth23.org/families/FamilyHandbookI.pdf)

PACER Center (2008). How to Communicate Effectively with Early Childhood Professionals.

[www.pacer.org/parent/php/php-c159.pdf](http://www.pacer.org/parent/php/php-c159.pdf)

Center for Early Literacy Learning (2010). What's Your Letter? Symbols and Letters from the "Especially for Parents of Toddlers" Activity Series.

[www.earlyliteracylearning.org/cellpract\\_parent/toddler/PG\\_1\\_T\\_WhatLett\\_WM.pdf](http://www.earlyliteracylearning.org/cellpract_parent/toddler/PG_1_T_WhatLett_WM.pdf)



Distributed by Connecticut Parent Advocacy Center, Inc., 2011

[www.cpacinc.org](http://www.cpacinc.org) \* 1-800-445-2722