

# Natural Environments

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Natural environments are settings that are natural or typical for a same-aged child without a disability and may include the home or community settings.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Part C Regulations mandate that, to the maximum extent appropriate to the needs of the child, early intervention services must be provided in the child's natural environment. In addition, the state must ensure that the provision of early intervention services, for any infant or toddler with a disability, occurs in a setting other than a natural environment that is most appropriate, as determined by the parent and the Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) team, only when early intervention cannot be achieved satisfactorily for the infant or toddler in a natural environment.

An IFSP must include a statement that each early intervention service are provided in a natural environment for each child to the maximum extent appropriate, or a justification as to why a service will not be provided in the natural environment. Determination for the appropriate service settings for a child, including justification for not providing a service in the natural environment must be made by the IFSP which includes the parents, consistent with the provisions in §§303.13(a)(8), 303.26, and 303.126, and be based on the child's outcomes in the IFSP identified by the IFSP Team.

Providing services in natural environments is not just for the purpose of cooperating (compliance) with federal law. It reflects the core mission of early intervention, which is to provide supports and services to families to help their children develop to their fullest potential.

Children learn best when they learn in natural contexts. They need multiple opportunities to practice early learning skills and abilities throughout their day. Generalization research indicates that it is much easier for a child to generalize newly learned skills when the skills are learned within the context of meaningful, functional activities as they naturally occur.

Natural environments are the places where children live, learn, and play. Examples of natural environments include:

- Home
- Gymnastics programs
- Parks
- Child care centers
- Neighbor's home
- Grandparents home
- Neighborhood play groups
- Church activities
- Library
- Swimming pools
- Restaurants

Examples of service settings not considered natural environments (unless a justification has been identified by the IFSP Team) include:

- Clinics
- Hospitals
- Therapist office
- Rehabilitation centers
- Group setting (only for children with disabilities)