

EARLY CHILDHOOD INTERVENTION SERVICES

Specialist support services for children with disabilities and developmental delays, and their families

Young children with developmental problems

More than one in twenty young children (0-6 years) in Victoria have disabilities or developmental delays.

If these children are to thrive and realise their potential, they and their families need specialist support in their early childhood years.

Local services also need support to help them include children with developmental problems in their programs.

Why are the early childhood years important?

The early childhood years lay the foundation for all future development.

Recent scientific evidence shows that early experiences *literally* shape our lives by affecting the way the young brain develops. What happens to us in the early years has a major effect on our health and social development right through to adulthood.

Therefore, we must ensure that children's early experiences are positive – that they have a secure foundation for development.

The job of raising children has become more difficult in the last few decades. This is because of changing work demands on families, increased poverty, and changes in family structure. All these can have an impact on young children's development.

Why are early childhood intervention services important?

The early childhood years are just as important for children with disabilities and developmental delays as they are for other children. All their future development is based on the critical learning patterns laid down during this period.

The early years are also critical for the families of these children. This is when families can best begin to learn how to support and nurture their child, how to meet their child's needs, and how to adapt *positively* to having a child with a disability or a developmental delay.

To achieve these goals, they need the support of early childhood intervention services.

What are early childhood intervention services?

Early childhood intervention services are for ...

Young children with disabilities or developmental delays, and their families

Early childhood intervention services aim to...

- provide families with the support, knowledge and skills to meet the needs of their child and the family as a whole
- optimise children's development and their ability to function as well as possible in family and community life
- enable families and children to join in the life of their community to the fullest extent possible.

Early childhood intervention services provide ...

- specialist support and information services for families
- specialist educational and therapy services for children
- support for local services (such as child care, family day care, and preschools) to help them include children with developmental problems in their programs

Early childhood intervention services support families by ...

- working *in partnership* with them to find the best ways of meeting each child's needs, and the needs of the family as a whole.
- tailoring their services to each family's priorities and circumstances
- helping each family build on its strengths and develop new skills

Early childhood intervention services are delivered by ...

- government and non-government specialist teams and agencies

Others who can play important roles in supporting young children with developmental disabilities and delays include

- parent support groups
- regular early childhood services, such as playgroups, child care centres, and preschools
- respite care services

Starting early

Early childhood intervention services need to be available to children with disabilities and developmental delays and their families as early as possible. The evidence shows that:

- the earlier intervention starts, the greater the benefits for the child
- supporting families as early as possible helps parents to build a positive bond with their child right from the start
- the longer the delay in providing help, the harder it becomes to make changes

Early childhood intervention works!

Research shows that early childhood intervention can:

- significantly improve the development and functioning of children with disabilities and developmental delays
- make a substantial difference to families' wellbeing
- reduce both the child's and the family's dependence on costly specialist services in later life.

In these ways, early childhood intervention services benefit us all and deserve the support of the whole community.

How can people help?

To get the best outcomes for children with disabilities and developmental delays and their families, *everyone* needs to be involved – friends, neighbours, service providers, the whole community.

There are many ways that people can help, including:

- welcoming children with disabilities and developmental delays into community activities
- making sure that these children and families have the same access to regular early childhood services as other children and families
- becoming familiar with the local network of early childhood intervention services
- making sure that families of young children with developmental disabilities and delays know about the services that available to them
- supporting the work of the early childhood interventions agencies and teams

EARLY CHILDHOOD INTERVENTION SERVICES IN VICTORIA

■ **Department of Human Services (DHS)**

Contact with DHS teams can be made by

- Ringing Regional Offices for details of Specialist Children's Services Teams in your area.

For location and phone numbers of Regional Offices, see the Department of Human Services website (www.dhs.vic.gov.au) or your local White Pages telephone directory.

- Ringing the statewide phone number 1800 783 783

■ **Non-government agencies.**

Details of services provided by the above can be obtained through the DHS Specialist Children's Services Teams

- **Department of Education, Employment and Training (DEET).**
- **Local government.**

OTHER KEY RESOURCES IN VICTORIA

■ **Peak body representing early childhood intervention services**

Early Childhood Intervention Australia (Victorian Chapter)

c/- Centre for Community Child Health

Royal Children's Hospital, Flemington Road, Parkville VIC 3052

Ph: (03) 9509 5584 Fax: (03) 9345 5900

Email: eciavic@bigpond.com Website: www.eciavic.org.au

■ **Peak body representing parents of children with disabilities**

Association of Children with a Disability

590 Orrong Road, Armadale, VIC 3143

Ph: (03) 9500 1232 Fax: (03) 9500 1240 Freecall: 1800 654 013

Email: mail@acd.org.au Website: www.acd.org.au

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