N.C. Infant-Toddler Program
Recommended Practices and Talking Points for Family Interactions

Purpose: This document provides recommended practices and talking points for CDSA staff to use during interactions with families from the point of referral through initial IFSP development. Application of these practices and points will help ensure that consistent information is shared with families statewide about the N.C. ITP.

Programmatic information shared with parents should be the same although CDSAs have varied intake models and staffing resources. Because of local CDSA processes and the individual needs of families, the information below may be discussed at different points of the referral and intake process and by different CDSA staff members. The practices and points in this guide are written generally with the understanding that staff will provide the specificity that the family needs, when the family needs it. This may mean that some points will be discussed with families more than once and in various ways to ensure understanding.

REFERRAL TO THE INFANT-TODDLER PROGRAM

Recommended Practices	Talking Points

• Ask what language the family usually speaks and if interpreter is required. Make necessary arrangements in advance. (*See NC ITP policy Guideline on Native Language*). It outlines times when information must be provided in parent's native language, unless not feasible to do so.
 	
• Establish rapport with family by speaking conversationally and using open-ended questions.
 	
• Describe Early Intervention as a system of supports and services.
	• Determine appropriate native language needs and preferred supports.
	 ▪ Ask probing interview questions to determine the need for interpreter/translator assistance and identifying appropriate resources *(See Procedural Guidance for Native Language Requirements.)*
	 Examples:
	   ♦ *Do you sometimes need help in understanding English, such as at a doctor's appointment, at work, or with your child's teacher?*
	   ♦ *If you need help understanding English and there is not an interpreter available, whom do you ask for help?*
	   ♦ *How often do you ask this person to assist you with interpreting/translating?*
	
	• Inform parent of referral source and reason for referral. Discuss parent's concerns about the child.
	
	• Explain the purpose of the NC ITP and describe early intervention as a system of supports and services.
	 ▪ The ITP offers a team of different disciplines to work alongside parents to help them and other important people in the child's life to support child learning and development within and across all daily life activities.
	 ▪ Children learn best through everyday experiences and interactions with familiar people in familiar contexts. Explain how services work to support caregivers in making the most of the many learning opportunities.
	 ▪ Family members are "experts" in understanding their child and family circumstances and interests.
	 ▪ Use the family's interests and concerns to offer concrete examples of how a service provider might work with the child and family.
	• Explain roles of the EISC and other CDSA staff who may be involved w/ the family during the referral & intake process.
	• Confirm role of 'Parent' as defined by State Policy and determine need for a surrogate parent. *(See NC ITP Policy for definition of parent and surrogate parent assignment)*
	• Explain how program eligibility is determined - evaluation or documented evidence. *(See evaluation and assessment section in this document.)*
	 ▪ Established Condition
	 ▪ Developmental Delay

	• Ask parent if interested in pursuing eligibility and/or assessment (if eligibility can be established with documented evidence.) • Discuss the initiation of urgent interventions and development of an interim IFSP (if appropriate). • Determine/verify if the family has Medicaid or private insurance, and inform of the following: ▪ services that are provided at no cost, ▪ family cost participation for some IFSP services, and ▪ Medicaid billing and/or private insurance with consent.

IDENTIFY NEXT STEPS IN THE REFERRAL PROCESS

Recommended Practices	*Talking Points*

• Explore the parent's level of comfort with written documents.
• Offer information in multiple formats. Inform family of NCEI website at www.beearly.nc.gov to access electronic copies of documents, publications and other important program information.
• Continue building the rapport that you initially established with the family:
  ▪ Balance time listening to the family and sharing information with them.
  ▪ Let family know your interest in exploring their concerns and working with them to find solutions.
  ▪ Use communication styles and social behaviors that are warm, welcoming and respectful of family's culture and circumstances.
	IF family is interested in pursuing eligibility:
	• Discuss any recent evaluations and/or established conditions and process for CDSA obtaining documented evidence to determine eligibility.
	• Discuss behaviors related to possible delays in social-emotional development.
	• Explain next steps to family and schedule initial evaluation and/or initial child assessment and family-directed assessment.
	• Describe/discuss the evaluation and/or assessment process. *(See evaluation and assessment section in this document.)*
	• Provide copy of the *Parent Handbook* and review pertinent sections and information.
	• Provide copy of the *Notice of Child and Family Rights* and a verbal overview of related rights and procedural safeguards.
	  Examples:
	  ▪ *Just as the Infant-Toddler Program needs your written consent to get "Amanda's" records from other providers, we will not share the records that we will develop with anyone outside the program unless you give your permission. We will ensure your records are kept private.*
	  ▪ *The Infant-Toddler Program must give you prior written notice about any evaluations, services, or other actions that affect "Amanda." We believe that you know "Amanda" best. The information you share with us will help ensure that the evaluations and services are right for "her." The "paperwork" ensures that you get all the details before any activity is done.*
	• Inform the family that rights and procedural safeguards will be reviewed with them at different points throughout the process.
	• Provide prior written notice (including procedural safeguards) and obtain written consent for child evaluation and/or assessment.
	• Ask parent if s/he has questions and identify whom the parent should contact with questions and who will contact them. This is an opportunity to lay groundwork for future financial discussions concerning insurance information, financial consent, and verification of income.
	
	IF family is not interested in pursuing eligibility:
	• Explain that family can contact the early intervention program any time up until the child turns 3 years old.
	• Share with the family other appropriate community resources or services.
	• Mail the family the following documents:
	  ▪ *Referral letter* and
	  ▪ *Initial Notice of Confidentiality Rights at Referral.*

EVALUATION AND ASSESSMENT

Recommended Practices	Talking Points
Evaluation and Assessment • Plan with the family how to address relevant individual, cultural, and linguistic characteristics that may influence evaluation and assessment. • Evaluate and assess the functional needs and strengths of the child. • Use evaluation and assessment procedures that ensure collaboration between the family and providers, including supporting family's choice in how to participate. • Give equal weight to family's observations and reports about child's behaviors, learning, and development. • Throughout this process, reflect with the family about observations of the child's behaviors, summarize results, clarify and confirm that the family understands the process and results, and record the findings.	• Describe the evaluation and/or assessment procedures so the family is clear about expectations for the processes, including approximate length of time and number of events. • Describe the purpose and components of the evaluation process, IF a child needs an evaluation to determine eligibility. **Evaluation** determines eligibility for the NC ITP based on multiple sources of information, such as: ▪ *administering a standardized instrument;* ▪ *taking the child's history (includes interviewing parent);* ▪ *identifying the child's level of functioning in each of the developmental areas;* ▪ *gathering information from other sources such as family members, other caregivers, medical providers, social workers and educators, if necessary to understand the full scope of the child's strengths and needs;* ▪ *reviewing educational, medical and other records.* • Describe the purpose and components of the child assessment and family-directed assessment processes.
Eligibility Determination • Review and summarize findings from all required evaluation components (described above). Share perspectives among the team, which includes the family.	• Describe and discuss eligibility for the NC ITP. • If the child is <u>eligible</u>, provide prior written notice, including procedural safeguards, for the eligibility decision. • If the child is <u>not eligible</u>, explain the team decision, provide prior written notice for the eligibility decision, including procedural safeguards. ▪ Explain the process for filing a complaint, if they disagree with the decision. Discuss informal and formal complaint resolution. ▪ Discuss and provide information about available community resources, developmental milestones, and contacting the NC ITP in the future if needed. • Explain roles of CDSA staff and providers who are on IFSP team, such as service coordinator, staff involved in evaluations/assessments, and community service providers. • Ask family whom else they would like to invite to be on the IFSP team. • Inform the parents that they will receive written invitations and have the right to participate in all IFSP team meetings. Invitations will be sent to all team members early enough before the meeting date to allow attendance.

Recommended Practices	Talking Points
Child Assessment • Observe the child's authentic behaviors in typical routines and activities. • Use child assessment methods that capture information about the child's interests, engagement, social relationships, and independence in natural settings. • Offer positive feedback about how family uses specific strategies to support the child's learning. Use concrete examples of how the family supported the child's skills during assessments. • Observe and discuss with the family how they help their child learn. *Family-Directed Assessment* • Encourage family to share only information they are comfortable sharing. • Conduct assessments as personal interviews and **not** forms for the family to complete. • Use an interview tool to guide and document notes about the interview process. • Employ a 'conversational' approach to help the family be more comfortable with the interview process.	**Child Assessment and Family-Directed Assessments** are necessary to gather information for developing the initial IFSP. • Discuss the need to observe the child during typical routines and activities for child assessment. Example: ▪ *You know "Michael" best, so during the assessment process we will explore the opportunities he has to take part in your daily activities, what he likes to do, and what you, members of your family, and other caregivers are doing and can do to help him take part in these activities. We will also discuss any concerns you may have about how to support "Michael's" development.* *Child Assessment* includes: ▪ making personal observations of the child, ▪ reviewing evaluation results, if completed, and ▪ identifying child's needs in each of the five (5) developmental areas. *Family Assessment* includes: ▪ information shared voluntarily by participating family members, ▪ information obtained through an assessment tool and through an interview with family members, and ▪ family's description of its resources, priorities, and concerns related to enhancing the child's development.

Recommended Practices	Talking Points

Initial IFSP
• Schedule meeting times/locations convenient for the family.
• Describe **Natural Environments** as a practice rather than just a location for services.
    o With <u>natural learning environment</u> practices, everyday activity settings are used as the sources of learning because they provide frequent opportunities for the child to use existing abilities and to develop new skills.
    o Child interests are used because children are more likely to focus on a person or activity longer if they are motivated and engaged, which in turn, provides more practice and learning opportunities.
    o Service providers will ensure that parents know and understand how to support their child's learning within and across activity settings.
	• Describe the IFSP document to the family as a plan that:
	    ▪ is dynamic.
	    ▪ is developed by the team of which they are a part.
	    ▪ guides the provision of early intervention supports and services.
	    ▪ is based upon the changing needs of their child and family.
	• Explain the meeting process thoroughly.
	    ▪ Emphasize the family's role as an <u>equal</u> team member in developing, implementing, evaluating, and revising the IFSP over time.
	    ▪ Describe how evaluation and assessment information will be used for development of the IFSP.
	• Explain pertinent rights and procedural safeguards to parent.
	• Inform parent that rights and safeguards will be reviewed throughout the child's enrollment in the NC ITP.
	    Examples:
	    ▪ *With the other members of your child's IFSP team, you will consider which services can best help you accomplish the outcomes that you want for your child and family. You will be asked to give your <u>written consent</u> for those services that you want. You do not have to agree to all services recommended. You can say "no" to some services and still get the services that you do want. If you decide to try other services at a later date, you can give your consent then.*
	    ▪ *If you and the IFSP team do not agree on plans or services, or if you have other <u>complaints</u> about your experience with the program, there are procedures for resolving your concerns quickly. If informal ways of sharing your concerns with your team and the CDSA don't work, you may file a complaint. Mediation will be offered as a voluntary first step.*

References:

Workgroup on Principles and Practices in Natural Environments (Final Draft 11-07) Agreed upon practices for providing early intervention services in natural environments. OSEP TA Community of Practice- Part C Settings. www.nectac.org/topics/natenv/natenv.asp

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Understanding Procedural Safeguards: Examples of Explanations and Implications for Families, Updated 2012 - from Hurth & Goff (2001) *Assuring the Family's Role on the Early Intervention Team*, NECTAS.

Shelden, M. & Rush, D. Script for Explaining an Evidence-Based Early Intervention Model. Briefcase, vol. 1, number 3 (January 2008). http://fipp.org/static/media/uploads/briefcase/briefcase_vol1_no3.pdf