

North Carolina Infant-Toddler Program Policy and Procedure Manual Introduction

The North Carolina Infant-Toddler Program of "Together We Grow," the state's interagency system of early intervention services for children birth to age five with special needs and their families, is firmly rooted in both federal and state legislation. At the national level, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, both Part C (birth to age three) and Part B (ages 3 to 21), provides the legal framework for this early intervention system. In North Carolina, Part C is known as the Infant-Toddler Program and Part B as the Preschool Program. Responsibility for the operation of Preschool Program is assigned by federal law to the Public Schools of North Carolina. The federal law sets forth requirements for states in such key areas as the required components of the early intervention system, the specific types of early intervention services which must be made available, procedural safeguards that must be in place to protect the rights of children and their families, and expectations regarding the evaluation of children, the development of intervention plans, the provision of services in natural environments, and the involvement of families.

In July of 1993, the North Carolina General Assembly established the North Carolina Infant-Toddler Program in response to the 1986 changes to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. The Infant-Toddler Program underwent major administrative changes in 2001 when the General Assembly reassigned the state lead agency status to the Division of Public Health of the Department of Health and Human Services giving it the responsibility for ensuring that eligible infants and toddlers and their families receive services that are delivered in accordance with established federal and state regulations. This change was taken a step further the following year when the General Assembly directed the Division of Public Health to reorganize the local service delivery system. In response, the Division formed a diverse workgroup comprised of parents, representatives of state and local offices of the involved agencies, legislators and the North Carolina Interagency Coordinating Council. The workgroup developed recommendations, which were adopted by the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services and the General Assembly.

These reorganization recommendations called the *North Carolina Early Intervention Design Plan* included two primary components. The existing statewide network of Developmental Evaluation Centers, renamed Children's Developmental Services Agencies, were designated to carry out the role of local lead agency. Regional Interagency Coordinating Councils were created to serve as planning partners with the Children's Developmental Services Agencies. The existing Infant-Toddler Program operational policies and procedures were reviewed and revised as a result of this reorganization that went into effect July 2004.

The purpose of this Manual is to set forth Infant-Toddler Program policies and procedures as well as provide information on recommended practices related to implementing the federal and state's early intervention requirements. The information in this Manual comes from a variety of federal and state documents, including the:

- *Division of Public Health Privacy and Security Manual;*
- *Federal Register*, 34 CFR parts 303 and 300;
- *Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act* (FERPA), 34 CFR part 99;
- *Health Insurance and Portability and Accountability Act* (HIPAA), 45 CFR Parts 160 and 164;
- *North Carolina Administrative Code*, Subchapter 43G – Developmental Evaluation Centers: Specialized Services Branch;
- *North Carolina Early Intervention Design Plan;*
- *North Carolina Interagency Agreement for the Provision of Early Intervention Services to Children with or at Risk for Disabilities Ages Birth Through Five and Their Families Under Parts C and B of the IDEA*, and
- *Procedures Governing Programs and Services for Children with Special Needs* (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction).

Copies of these documents may be obtained from the Children’s Developmental Services Agency.

The Infant-Toddler Program is a statewide, comprehensive, coordinated, multidisciplinary, interagency system of providers of services and supports for eligible children birth to age three and their families. Key agencies include:

- Defense Department;
- Division of Child Development;
- Division of Medical Assistance;
- Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities, and Substance Abuse Services;
- Division of Public Health;
- Division of Social Services;
- Division TEACCH (Treatment and Education of Autistic and related Communication handicapped CHildren);
- Eastern Band of the Cherokee Indians;
- Head Start;
- North Carolina Partnership for Children, and
- Office of Education Services.

The North Carolina Interagency Coordinating Council serves as the principal advisory body and designated planning partner to the Early Intervention Branch and to these agencies related to their role in early intervention.

All early intervention agencies referenced above, as well as any other public or private agencies or professionals receiving public funds, are considered participating agencies in the Infant-Toddler

Program and responsible for embracing the Program's philosophy and adhering to its requirements. Although local community differences and needs produce acceptable variations among early intervention programs across the state, the requirements outlined in this Manual must be followed by each service provider in order to ensure the equity of services for children and their families throughout the state and compliance with federal and state regulations.

This Manual covers all the required components of the Infant Toddler Program. Each Policy Bulletin is designed to cover a particular component. Cross references are cited to provide Manual users with easy access to additional information related to specific topics. Early intervention providers use many words and acronyms with which readers may not be familiar. A Glossary of many of these can be found at the end of this Manual. An Index that provides a quick cross reference for the topics that appear in multiple locations may be found at the end of this Manual. As state and federal regulations change or new requirements are added, Policy Bulletins will be updated or developed and disseminated for substitution or inclusion in this Manual. The Children's Developmental Services Agencies are responsible for the dissemination of Manual up-dates to enrolled Infant-Toddler Program service providers.

Policy Bulletins are designed to delineate Infant-Toddler Program requirements and provide basic philosophical and background information to assist the reader in understanding the intent of the regulations and to guide implementation of established expectations. This Manual is not intended to provide extensive details regarding recommended practice. Readers may obtain technical assistance from the Regional Early Intervention Consultants. Questions related to any aspect of the Infant-Toddler Program should be addressed to the Children's Developmental Services Agency, who will seek guidance and information from the Regional Early Intervention Consultants and other Early Intervention Branch staff, as appropriate. Contact information for the Children's Developmental Services Agencies and the Regional Early Intervention Consultants may be found at www.ncei.org.

The North Carolina Infant-Toddler Program wishes to acknowledge the use of policy and procedure documents from other states in the development of this Manual. Specific recognition is extended to Iowa's Early Access Program for the early intervention principles found in "Policy Bulletin #1 - Statement of Philosophy" and to the Infants & Toddlers Connection of Virginia Program for information found in "Policy Bulletin #24 - Service Planning and Delivery."

Note: The word "parent" is used throughout this Manual to mean the legal and custodial guardian of the child. For most children, this individual is the child's biological parent. However, because this may not always be the case, readers must evaluate each situation and abide by appropriate custody regulations and practices. (*For additional information, see Policy Bulletin #3 - Parents.*)

For the sake of simplicity, the word parent has been used in the singular form. If there is more than one parent, both should be involved to the maximum extent possible.

Similarly, the pronoun "he" has been used as a generic reference to specific individuals rather than the use of the more cumbersome he/she.

Unless otherwise noted, all references in this Manual to the Service Coordinator or to service coordination refer to Infant-Toddler Program Early Intervention Service Coordinators and service coordination as defined and required under the Infant-Toddler Program.

Unless otherwise noted, all cross references to Policy Bulletins are Policy Bulletins in the *North Carolina Infant-Toddler Program Policy and Procedure Manual*.

While the director of the Children's Developmental Services Agency has the ultimate responsibility for fully implementing the North Carolina Infant-Toddler Program in his region, he may designate staff of his choosing to carry out the various responsibilities.