

# Concerned about your child's development?

For babies and toddlers (children who are younger than 3 years)



Young children are busy learning and growing in so many ways. They are working on:

- Moving, seeing, and hearing
- Talking and listening to others
- Forming relationships
- Doing things on their own
- Learning to think and solve problems
- And more!

Sometimes children struggle in one or more of these areas. These struggles can lead to behaviors that may be frustrating both for you and for your child. If you feel concerned about your child's growth or behavior, you can ask your child's doctor or nurse to check to see how your child is developing.

There are programs that can provide your family with services to help your child grow to his or her fullest potential, at no cost to you! Anyone—including parents, relatives, friends, childcare staff and doctors—can refer a family to programs that can check your child's development and offer your family support.

Children up to age 3 may be eligible for the [Mississippi First Steps Early Intervention Program](#), discussed more below. If you are interested in no-cost developmental services for children older than 3, you can contact the [Mississippi Department of Special Education Parent Hotline](#) at 1-877-544-0408. Advocates at the [Mississippi Parent Training and Information Center](#) can also give parents of all children more information and support, reachable at 1-800-721-7255.

## Mississippi First Steps Early Intervention Program

The First Steps Early Intervention Program (EIP) is run through the Mississippi State Department of Health. First Steps EIP is advised by a State Interagency Coordinating Council (SICC) that includes parents of young children with disabilities. SICC meetings are open to all. First Steps EIP has a team of people who can evaluate your child's development and support your family by connecting you with developmental resources in your community.

First Steps EIP wants to help your family support your child's development in the way you think is best. You can accept or deny the services they offer at any time. Meetings with program staff can be held at times and places that are convenient for you and in the language best for you and your child. You can invite anyone you want to go to these meetings with you. Your information will not be shared with anyone else unless you have given written permission first.

The First Steps EIP process has several steps, including referral, intake, an evaluation, and creating a plan for your child. Before you receive services, both you and First Steps need to decide that the program will work for your family. Here's what you can expect:

**Referral:** To refer a child to [First Steps EIP](#), call 1-800-451-3903. The earlier support begins, the better for the child's development. Professionals must refer a child to First Steps EIP within seven days of noticing a developmental concern.

**Intake:** If your child has been referred, a Service Coordinator will contact you to ask if you want to consider enrolling your child in First Steps EIP. You can say yes or ask the Coordinator to call back later. You can also say no.

If you want to consider enrollment, the Service Coordinator will:

- Fully explain the process and help decide if your child should be evaluated by First Steps
- Ask you to sign a consent form and complete other paperwork, including information about your child's developmental history, if you want your child to have an evaluation

- Ask for your written permission to look at your child's medical history and other important information
- Give you a copy of the Child and Family Rights/Procedural Safeguards Booklet, and explain it
- Give you contact information for your Service Coordinator and their supervisor, the Local Program Coordinator

**Evaluation:** If you give written permission for an evaluation, you will receive an invitation with the evaluation's time and place. At the evaluation the First Steps EIP team will measure your child's development using play activities and other methods and will talk with you about your child and your family. The evaluation will determine whether your child has, or is at risk for, a delay in development. You will get a copy of the evaluation results and will meet with the team to discuss them. If you disagree with your child's evaluation results, you can ask for another evaluation.

**Qualifying for Services:** Your child will qualify to receive First Steps EIP services if the evaluation results show a significant delay (33%) in one area of development or a moderate delay (25%) in two or more areas of development. Your child may also get services if he or she has a condition that is likely to lead to a developmental delay or if a team member has a clinical opinion that your child could benefit from services based on his or her behaviors.

**Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP):** If your child qualifies for First Steps, the team will work with your family to write an Individualized Family Service Plan. An IFSP lays out your child's goals, as well as the steps your family can take and the resources you can use to meet these goals. It is important that family members help design each part of the plan so that you can support your child's development both at meetings or appointments and at home. The First Steps team reviews the IFSP with you every six months and updates it at least every year.

**Choosing Services:** Your family will be connected with service providers who can help support your child's development goals. These services should begin within 30 business days after you sign the IFSP. You are free to say yes to some services and no to others. If you deny any services and later want to try them, you can contact your Service Coordinator and request that your IFSP be updated.

Services usually happen in places where your child regularly learns, like your home or day care, but First Steps can arrange them to be somewhere else if you prefer. After services start, your Service Coordinator will contact you at least once a month and visit you and your child about every three months to talk about your child's growth and other changes.

**When Your Child Turns 3:** Three-year-olds may receive IDEA Part B special education services, which are provided by the local school district. It's important to know that enrollment in First Steps EIP does not mean that a child will qualify for Part B special education services.

Before your child turns 3, you will meet with your Service Coordinator to make a plan to transition out of First Steps. Staff from your local school district can be invited to this meeting, if you wish, to help develop this plan and explain the evaluation process for special education services.

If your child already has an IFSP, First Steps EIP will send a notice to the Mississippi Department of Education and to your local school. The local school district can evaluate your child to find out if he or she qualifies for special education services.

**Your Rights:** First Steps EIP aims to help you support your child's healthy development. That means you are in control of the process. You can ask to see your child's records at any time and should get access to them within ten days. First Steps EIP will give you copies of new or relevant information in your child's records before meetings to discuss services. You can ask your Service Coordinator to change anything that looks incorrect in your child's records.

If you do not agree with any part of your child's program, you can:

- ask for mediation to assist you and First Steps EIP staff in reaching an agreement,
- ask for a due process hearing to resolve your complaint, or
- file a State Complaint if you don't feel the issue has been resolved. If you turn in a written State Complaint, an investigation will be completed within 60 days.



For more information please visit  
[www.MississippiThrive.com](http://www.MississippiThrive.com).