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## **NATURAL ENVIRONMENTS**

### **Notice to Coordinators**

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#### **BACKGROUND**

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Part C requires that eligible children ages birth to 36 months receive services in the child's natural environment to the maximum extent possible. Since 1989, IDEA Part C has required that early intervention take place in settings in which children without disabilities participate. In the 1991 amendments to IDEA Part C, Congress added the language of "natural environments" as part of the definition of early intervention services. Statute also states that the Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) must include how services will be provided in the child's natural environment and, if not, a justification why they cannot be provided in the natural environment.

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#### **REQUIREMENTS**

When determining where services are to take place, service providers shall:

- to the maximum extent appropriate, provide services in the natural environments of the child, including the home, and community settings in which children without disabilities participate; or
  - provide a written justification, if it is determined that services will not be provided in a natural environment.
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#### **REFERENCES**

The requirements delineated in this bulletin are referenced and supported in the following federal and state statutes, regulations, rules, and policies:

1. Public Law 108-446 Individuals with Disabilities Education Act 2004, Part C
  - 34 CFR 303 Early Intervention Services
2. 34 CFR 303 Early Intervention Program for Infants and Toddlers with Disabilities
  - 34 CFR 303.12(b) Early Intervention Services
3. 34 CFR 303 Early Intervention Program for Infants and Toddlers with Disabilities
  - 34 CFR 303.18 Natural Environments

4. 34 CFR 303 Early Intervention Program for Infants and Toddlers with Disabilities
    - 34 CFR 303.167(c) Individualized Family Service Plans
  5. 34 CFR 303 Early Intervention Program for Infants and Toddlers with Disabilities
    - 34 CFR 303.344(d)(1)(ii) Contents of an IFSP
  6. Implementation Guide to Natural Environments, November 2003
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## **DEFINITIONS**

**Natural Environment** means settings that are natural or normal for the child's age peers who have no disability.  
34 CFR 303.18

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## **DISCUSSION**

The IDEA Part C legislation has improved over the years based upon ongoing research from around the country that supported the concept that children learn best in their daily activities with everyday caregivers.

With the discovery about how infants and toddlers learn best, there comes a greater focus on listening and learning about the family's daily routines, culture, activities, and important rituals. In listening to the family, service providers can identify the strengths of the child in his/her daily relationships, interactions, routines and activities. Focusing on daily routines and the child's strengths, the IFSP team can develop a plan that integrates the family's daily activities. Families have an IFSP that can guide them in reaching the goals they have established for themselves and their child. The delivery of early intervention services for any infant or toddler shall be delivered in the natural environment, and only if it is determined that early intervention services cannot satisfactorily be provided in the natural environment shall services be delivered elsewhere. In that case, a written justification must be placed on the IFSP.