

## HOW MUCH SERVICE DOES YOUR CHILD AND FAMILY NEED?

### *Key message*

*We cannot specify beforehand what amount of service or support any particular child or family will need – they vary too much in their capabilities and circumstances. Too much service can be as bad as too little.*

### **How much specialist support do you, your child and your family need?**

This is a question that all parents will face. Here are some general points to keep in mind when deciding how much support you need and what form it should take.

- ***There is no fixed amount of services that children and their families need to make progress*** – every child and family is different. While your first instinct may be to try and get as much help as possible for you and your child, this is not necessarily a good idea – it can place too much stress on your child and on your family. Odd though it sounds, sometimes you can get more value out of fewer services than more services.
- ***It's your call.*** Professionals will often recommend levels or forms of service that they think your child needs. But they don't know your circumstances, or the impact that what they are suggesting will have on your family life. So you are the ones who can decide what level of service is enough and when it is more than you or your child can cope with.
- ***Families vary in their circumstances and preferences***, and therefore will have different tolerance levels and capacity for involvement with early childhood intervention services. Think about what level of support you can manage without compromising your family's overall quality of life. Full-on participation in every activity that early childhood intervention services offer may or may not contribute to this.
- ***Focus on what you are trying to achieve.*** One way to help you decide what services you need is to focus first on the outcomes that are important to you, not how much money you can get, or what therapy services you can buy with the money. Decide what is most important for you, your child and your family, then think about what kind of support you need to achieve these. Once you are clear about this, you can begin to think about what actual services you need, and what help you want from those services.
- ***Your needs will vary over time.*** As you become more confident about what you are doing, you may need less external support over time. Then, at a later point, your circumstances and your child's needs may change, and you may need to get more support for a while.



- **Having positive support for you and your family** – from your own family, or from friends or other parents of children with disability – is critical for family wellbeing, so make sure that the services you receive do not disrupt your support networks.

### Issues to consider

Here are some pointers to keep in mind when deciding how much support you need and what form it should take.

- **Consider the impact of the services on you and the family.** The potential benefits of services need to be balanced against the potential burden on the family and the disruption of family life. Remember that families of children and young people with disability have the same core needs as all families.
- **Consider the demands on the child.** If your child's schedule is too full of visits to therapists and other appointments, then this may prevent them from enjoying the normal range of childhood experiences and activities
- **Consider the longer term.** If your child has a life-long developmental disability, then you need to set a pace that you, your child and the family can maintain without burning out. It's a marathon, so don't start at a sprint.

### Parental resources

Stacey Touma (2019). *Our journey to a family-centred early intervention experience*. Welcome Reception presentation at ISEI Conference 2019, Sydney, 25 June, 2019. <https://plumtree.org.au/our-journey-to-a-family-centred-early-intervention-experience/>

*The beginning of a family-centred early intervention experience - learning there can be a different and better way.* The Family Voices Podcast, Early Childhood Intervention Australia (Vic/Tas), April 29, 2022  
<https://familyvoices.podbean.com/e/family-centred-practice/>

### Professional resources

Bagnato, S. J., Suen, H.K. and Fevola, A.V. (2011). 'Dosage' effects on developmental progress during early childhood intervention: Accessible metrics for real-life research and advocacy. *Infants and Young Children*, 24 (2), 117-132.

Hanft, B.E. and Feinberg, E. (1997). Toward the development of a framework for determining the frequency and intensity of early intervention services. *Infants and Young Children*, 10 (1), 27-37.

Novak, I. (2012). Evidence to Practice Commentary: Is more therapy better? *Physical & Occupational Therapy In Pediatrics*, 32 (4), 383-387. DOI: [10.3109/01942638.2012.726894](https://doi.org/10.3109/01942638.2012.726894)



Statham, J. and Smith, M. (2010). *Issues in Earlier Intervention: Identifying and supporting children with additional needs*. DCSF Research Report DCSF-RR205. London, UK: Department for Children, Schools and Families.  
<http://publications.dcsf.gov.uk/eOrderingDownload/DCSF-RR205.pdf>

Wasik, B. A., Mattera, S. K., Lloyd, C. M., & Boller, K. (2013). *Intervention dosage in early childhood care and education: It's complicated* (OPRE Research Brief OPRE 2013-15). Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.  
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