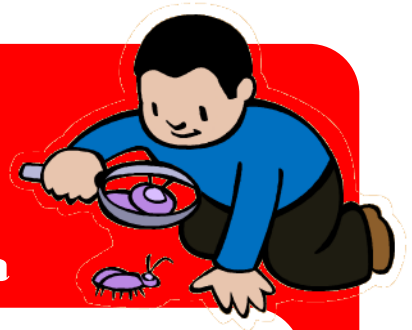


Family Focus

Early Intervention In Georgia



Focus On:

PRIMARY SERVICE PROVIDER

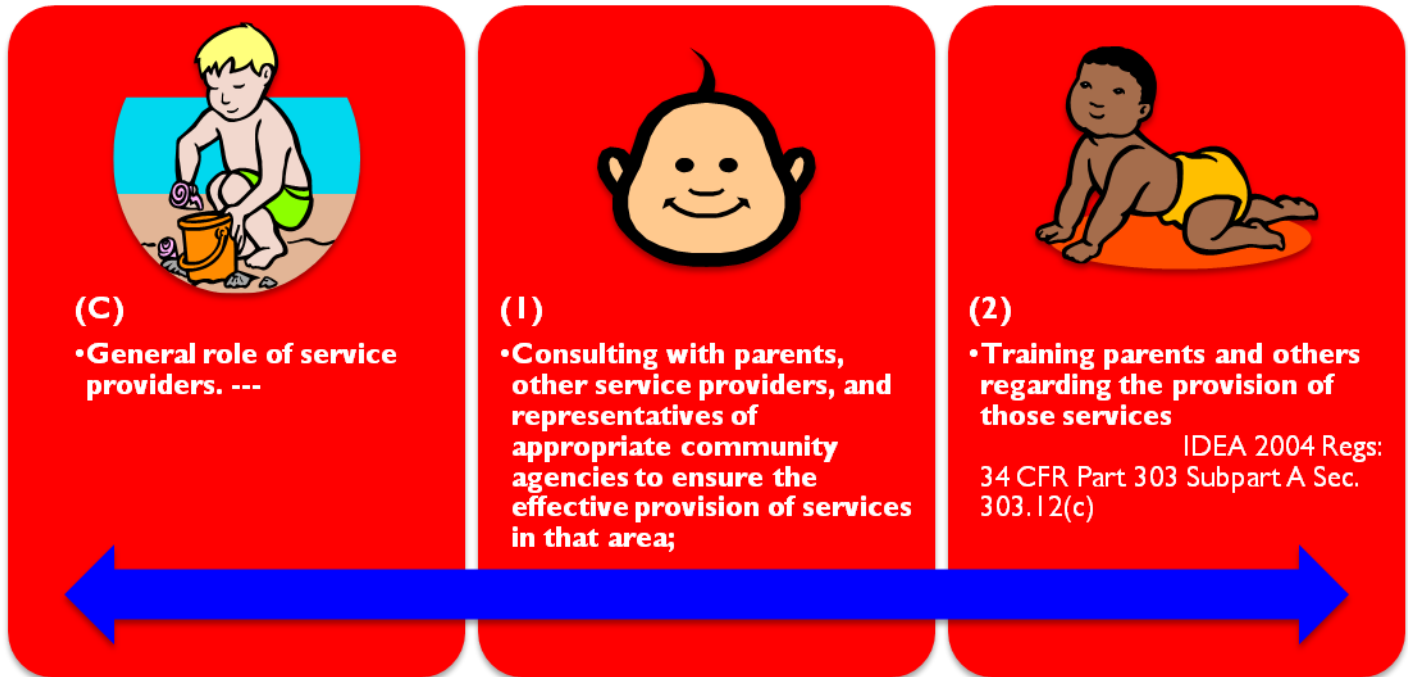
The Babies Can't Wait Program is Georgia's early intervention program for children with special needs. It is dedicated to providing effective supports and resources to eligible children and their families. This dedication means being open to making changes to the program that reflect best practices as indicated by current research. The field of early intervention is relatively young and as such, is constantly changing as research based evidence is identified. As recommended practices change due to current research, the state in turn changes the way services and supports are provided to children and families.

What are evidence based practices? They are practices based on research. This research provides evidence to identify which early intervention practices really make a lasting difference for children and their families. This is a period of history in which everything is constantly changing. Just as technology has undergone many transitions as a result of research, the field of early intervention is undergoing changes as the result of research. *This is not saying that the things done in the past were bad or wrong*, but that as new approaches or methods are shown to be more effective by research, these practices should be considered. The State of Georgia wants to provide the best and most effective resources possible to support children who are eligible for early intervention and their families.

The state office has been reviewing research, talking with national leaders in the field, and visiting with other states to find out what is working best for children and their families. After careful consideration, Georgia decided to move to an evidence-based practice that uses a primary service provider or PSP approach. It has been identified by research as an effective way of supporting children and their families. This early intervention approach has led many families to feel they are better able to meet the needs of their child. They feel more competent and confident.

What is a primary service provider (PSP)? Instead of having multiple people come into your home, research supports developing a relationship with one primary service provider. One staff member or contractor of the Babies Can't Wait program is selected based on qualities that would be useful for supporting the family and other care providers and that individual acts as the primary service provider (PSP). This will be the person with whom the family and child have the most contact. The primary provider and the family will have consistent access to an entire team of early intervention professionals for supports. These other team members are available to help whenever their expertise is needed. The team will meet frequently ensuring that each child has access to any needed services or supports. The key is individualization and flexibility. Resources and supports are available as the child and family need them. They have access to an entire team of trained professionals. The frequency of the visits will be determined by the team (that includes the family) based on the current situation. It's not all about the service provider "working with the child" although this will be a part of what the PSP will be doing.

What does the law say about the role of service providers?



How do primary service providers (PSP) fit into early intervention as described by the law? The law requires early intervention to support families as the families support their child. The primary coach will be supporting family members (Mom, Dad, Grandma...), child care providers, and other professionals on the team. The focus will be on outcomes that will promote the child learning and being involved in real-life outcomes that the family identifies as being important to them.

Many people have the expectation that the therapist would work with just the “patient” or child but the regulations are clear that the roles of service providers include consulting and working with parents and other providers. This may seem a little different, but it really does make sense.

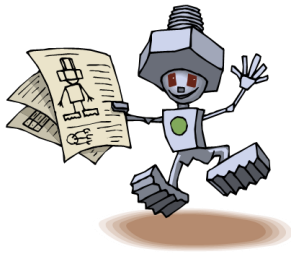
The primary coach receives coaching and supports from other program staff members through joint visits and ongoing interactions.

- *Joint visits (if needed) occur at the same place and time and for a limited period of time
- *Ongoing interactions (e.g. team meetings) provide opportunities for reflection and information sharing
- *Program staff providing coaching to the primary coach varies depending on the need for timely input/feedback

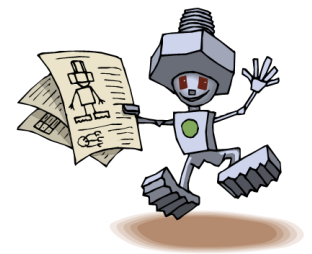
The Primary Service Provider is chosen by the team which in Babies Can’t Wait always includes the family. The choice of primary service provider is based on a combination of many things. It can include a trusting relationship that a family may already have with a provider, the priorities identified by the family, and the expertise of the team members.

One of the hardest things for families and providers is not knowing exactly what this will look like. There isn’t any one answer. It will be very individualized. The program standards that guide BCW are the same for each family but the actual intervention may look different for each family as the Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) is developed to meet their individual circumstances.

Knowing what to expect may help families feel more comfortable as they enter the Babies Can’t Wait program and allow them to take a more active role in the early intervention process. Here are a few helpful expectations or Nuts ‘n Bolts for families in the Babies Can’t Wait program.



Nuts 'n Bolts for Families



- **Determine if BCW is a good match for their family.** Families determine whether they would like to participate in Babies Can't Wait. It is a voluntary program. The Part C early intervention system is only one choice available in the scope of programs and services available to young children and their families.
- **Determine what outcomes are important to them.** Families will need to help the team understand what outcomes are important to them. What are their hopes, dreams, and priorities for their child and family.
- **Select the daily activities and routines.** In addition, families will need to help make the team aware of what activities are important in the life of the child and family, what activities that they want to happen (playing with other children, trips to the park) and those that have to happen (like feeding, diapering, etc.)
- **Help identify other caregivers.** Another important role that families assume in the early intervention process is helping to identify other caregivers in the child's life who may be able to assist such as child care providers, grandparents, sisters and brothers. Often times, children spend a good bit of their time in childcare or at a grandparent's house. These caregivers play a large role in supporting children and it is important for them to be identified and invited to participate if parents give permission.
- **Inform the service coordinator/provider if supports are not meeting the needs of the child/family.** Sometimes services or service providers are just not a good match with a family for many reasons. It's important that families let the service coordinator know so that the situation can be addressed. Sometimes it may be as simple as scheduling a joint meeting with the family, service coordinator, and service provider to discuss concerns and come up with a joint plan.
- **Inform providers if they need to cancel/reschedule an appointment.** Use family time and provider's time wisely. Life is going to happen and things will come up. Families should let the provider know if an appointment needs to be canceled and rescheduled. Family time and provider time are valuable resources. A "no-show" for an appointment wastes both.
- **Be present and actively participate in all visits because the family IS the agent of change in their child's life.** The most important thing that families can remember is that they ARE the agent of change. Their active participation in learning how to support their child is critical. Without the family, it MAY NOT happen.

Adapted from Infant and Toddler Connection of Virginia:
Philosophy and Considerations for Individualizing Early Intervention Services 2003

From the very beginning interview with Babies Can't Wait the type of information being requested will look different.

The team will want to know:

- *How does the family and child spend their time?
- *What do they like to do?
- *What activities that they need to do?
- *What activities that they want to do.

The information gathered from these questions will be used to help the team know what is important to the family and child, their interests, assets, priorities, and resources. They are not trying to intrude into the family's private life but they are trying to get information needed to help the team provide whatever supports and resources are needed for the child and family. In many ways in the old method, the family joined the therapist but now the therapists will be joining the family as they live out their life.