



Parent / Guardian Welcome Packet

Welcome to First Steps!

Your child has been referred to First Steps because of a concern about their development. First Steps believes that you know your child best, and we want you to be in control of decisions that affect them. This welcome packet contains information about the First Steps program to help your family make these choices and start working with us.

Our Mission

First Steps is Indiana's early intervention program. We partner with Hoosier families like yours whose young children are experiencing developmental delays and help connect you with services that help promote your child's development.

How First Steps Helps You

We believe families are the best teachers for their children. That's why we treat you as a partner and the central focus in your child's development.

Your child learns best through everyday activities such as play with familiar people in familiar settings, like your home or child care facility.

First Steps is here to empower your family, providing the right resources to help your child's development. We offer a statewide support network and aim to meet you where you are. Our ever-evolving practices are always based on current evidence and research to better fit your needs!

We're happy to join you on your child's development journey and are here to answer any questions you may have. Please do not hesitate to contact your Service Coordinator with any questions or concerns.

Service Coordinator Name

Phone Number

Email Address

Services

The goal of First Steps is to empower Hoosier families. We want what's best for you and your child and to connect you with a network of support to help your child learn and grow.

The Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP)

The Individualized Family Service Plan, or IFSP, is the action plan for the services your child and family will receive. Our assessment team and service coordinators work with you and your physician to address concerns about what services will be part of this plan.

First Steps Puts Family First

First Steps always puts the family first. Parents are a child's first and best teacher — the ones who know their child's routines better than anyone. Early intervention is most effective when parents are empowered as equal team members and play an active role in their child's development.

We encourage collaboration. Your provider will work with you to make sure your child is receiving the right care and instruction at every step of the journey.

First Steps Can Help You Connect With:

Audiology

Audiology involves a person trained to test your child's hearing and find out if there is hearing loss, how much of a loss, and what type of loss it is. Audiologists may recommend special equipment such as a hearing aid or other services to support your child's communication development.

Developmental Therapy (DT)

Developmental therapists have a full understanding of child development, learning and behavior. A developmental therapist can design environments and activities that promote your child's development in a variety of areas including cognitive processing, social interaction, language acquisition and challenging behavior.

Nutrition Services

Nutrition addresses eating habits and feeding skills. Registered Dietitians can help you look at how your child's growth is affected by eating and how to work with concerns like reactions to food texture, food density and weight gain necessary for strong brain development and growth.

Occupational Therapy (OT)*

An occupational therapist helps with the coordination of movement needed for feeding, dressing, playing and other fine motor skills. OTs may also have skills to address sensory processing issues.

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Physical Therapy (PT)*

A physical therapist helps your child improve the use of bones, muscles, joints and nerves. The physical therapist will help you plan a therapeutic exercise program and work with your child on range of motion, strength, flexibility and movement.

Psychological Services

Psychological services in early intervention focus on social emotional development. Psychologists can assist you in developing ways to manage your child's behaviors, including counseling, parent coaching and sharing helpful resources.

Social Work Services

Social work is concerned with supporting your family and helping you through life's challenges. Social workers provide family counseling and parent groups and link you with other community resources and supports.

Speech-Language Pathology (SLP)

Speech language pathologists focus on communication or language disorders and delays. SLPs will work with you and your child to improve language and communication skills. They may work with you to develop alternative ways to communicate, such as sign language, pictures or other alternative communication devices. Speech pathologists may also work with how your child uses his or her mouth for feeding and making sounds.

Vision Services

Vision services include identifying a visual impairment, blindness or vision loss that may affect your child's development. Possible intervention services may include an orientation and mobility specialist or blind/low vision specialist who works with you and your child to reach their highest potential.

*Both occupational and physical therapy address physical challenges. While the physical therapist focuses on gross motor skills (the ability to move and use legs, arms and head), the occupational therapist focuses on fine motor skills and self-help skills like dressing, feeding and toileting.

And So Much More

First Steps also connects you with services tailored for your child, such as assistive technology services, diagnostic medical services, health and nursing services, transportation and more. When you work with First Steps, you're connected with a supportive network of professionals across the state.

First Steps Families Have Rights.

Indiana's First Steps program works together with families who have young children with developmental delays or disabilities. We want families to feel confident speaking up for their child's needs. That's why we partner with families as a team, helping their children grow, learn and reach their full potential.

Did you know?

There is a federal law called the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. It guides special education for children with disabilities or developmental delays. One part of the law, called Part C, gives families with infants and toddlers important rights. All families who use First Steps are protected by these rights.

These are called procedural safeguards, and they are designed to protect you. Below are the important ways the law helps you and your child.

Families have the right to give written consent.

First Steps is a voluntary program, and eligible families may choose whether to participate. Before deciding, parents have the right to fully understand the programs and services available to their child. These services must be explained in the family's native language, unless it is not feasible to do so. A family's native language is the language they use every day, which may include sign language, braille or oral communication.

Parents must provide written consent before:

- Their child is evaluated
- Services begin or are changed
- Information about their child or family is shared with others

Parents have the right to:

- Decline one service while still receiving others
- Withdraw consent for a service at any time without affecting other early intervention services their child receives

Families have the right to prior notice.

This means parents must get written notice before an early intervention service provider starts, stops, changes, or refuses to start or make a change to the child's early intervention services. This includes decisions about doing an evaluation, identifying a

delay, deciding on services or changing where or how services are provided.

This notice is given at least 10 calendar days before any change is made. It must be in the family's native language, unless it is not feasible. It also must clearly explain what changes are being suggested, what options were considered, and why decisions were made. The notice reminds parents that they can ask questions and share concerns. Families may choose to move forward sooner than 10 days if they prefer.

Families have the right to an evaluation.

Every child has the right to receive an evaluation. The evaluation is free to families and is done by a multidisciplinary team of professionals who specialize in different areas of child development, such as physical, speech and language, occupational, and overall development. The team will look at the child's medical history, developmental milestones, and current skills to determine if they are eligible for early intervention services.

Eligible families have the right to an Individual Family Service Plan.

An Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) is written plan created for each child who qualifies for early intervention services. It must be created within 45 days of the child's referral to First Steps and provided

at no cost to the family. Parents help create the plan along with the First Steps service coordinator, early intervention providers and anyone else the family wants to include, such as a child care teacher or an advocate.

Families have the right to fully participate in the meeting, share their goals for their child, and work with the team to develop outcomes. The IFSP is a written, legally binding document that explains when, where, and how early intervention services will be provided.

Families have the right to confidentiality.

The federal law protects families' personally identifiable information. Before any information that identifies a child or their family is shared, parents must give written permission. If parents choose not to give permission, that's absolutely okay. Their decision will not affect the early intervention services their child receives.

Families have the right to see, check and ask for changes to records.

Parents have the right to see, check, and ask for changes to records about their child and family at any time. If they believe something is incorrect, they can request it to be changed. If something seems missing, they can ask for it to be added. If the program doesn't agree and denies the request to make the change, parents can ask for a hearing to challenge the decision.

Learn more!

For more information on family rights and how to request a dispute resolution, visit Indiana First Steps' Family Rights and Resolutions webpage by scanning the QR code or visiting www.in.gov/fssa/ddars/bcds/dispute-resolutions.

Contact First Steps directly at 800-545-7763 or firststepsweb.fssa@fssa.in.gov.

Families have the right to have services in their natural environment.

A natural environment is any place where a child usually learns, plays, and spends time with other children who do not have disabilities. This could be the family's home, a child care program, a community park or other typical early childhood settings.

Families have the right to formal dispute resolution options and may also request informal dispute resolution.

Families are always welcome to talk with their early intervention provider, service coordinator or the System Point of Entry director to informally discuss any concerns. These conversations can help everyone understand the issue, work together to find solutions and reach an agreement.

If a parent believes there has been a disagreement or a violation of IDEA Part C or Indiana law, they can file a request for a timely, formal resolution option. The federal law provides three options for families: mediation, a written state complaint and due process hearing.

While a disagreement or violation is being addressed, families may choose to continue early intervention services as they are written in the current IFSP. Services will stay the same unless the parent and team agree to make a change.



Future Steps

First Steps understands it's difficult for you and your child to leave the program. It can feel like a big change with too many options to choose from when looking to the future.

Luckily, your service coordinator can help you better understand these options and work with you to decide future steps. They will discuss options for future placement, services and support within your community as well as help you and your child prepare for changes. First Steps can even share important information about your child's needs with future providers for better care!

A transition meeting with your service coordinator is very important in determining your child's future with developmental services. We want to ensure that you can make informed choices about the wants and needs of you and your child pertaining to further assistance. This meeting allows for a warm handoff to future providers upon your child's graduation from First Steps. You will make a decision about your child's transition options at this meeting.

Below, we've listed potential options to discuss with your service coordinator at a transition meeting before your child graduates from First Steps on their third birthday.

Public School System

The public school system, starting with preschool, can help further evaluate your child's needs and provide services within the school environment.

- All public school systems offer similar help to First Steps, such as Communication Services, Occupational Therapy, Physical Therapy, transportation and more.

State Resources

The state can work in conjunction with school systems and provide specific services for your child at three years of age. The schools listed below are available to your child depending on determined needs.

- The Indiana School for the Deaf
- The Indiana School for the Blind

Head Start

Head Start is a federal program that promotes the school readiness of children under five. Like First Steps, Head Start is a family-first program.

- Head Start emphasizes the role of parents as their child's first and most important teachers. These programs help build relationships with families that support family well-being and many other areas of development.

Clinic-Based and Home-Based Therapy

Private therapy and development programs can start right after your child graduates from First Steps.

No Formal Intervention

First Steps is dedicated to helping families with their transition from our program. At the time of the transition meeting, you may choose not to enroll your child in public preschool special education services. If you decline this smooth transition process between programs and later change your mind, the determination of eligibility and the start of services will not be guaranteed by your child's third birthday.

- Please speak with your service coordinator about the details of each transition and how it affects your family.

Additional Options

You may be interested in investigating other early care and education options in your community such as a parent's day out program, preschool, parent teacher cooperative and child care options.

For more information, you may contact 211 or your local child care resource and referral agency.

Your First Steps Journey

Let's walk through the First Steps journey from start to finish!

1 Referral to First Steps

- Anybody can refer a child to First Steps! Families can "self-refer" to First Steps by contacting a system point of entry office directly. However, families may also be referred to the program by pediatricians, child care providers or social services agencies.

2 Intake

- A service coordinator will schedule a free assessment and evaluation with a multi-disciplinary team of professionals to identify developmental delays and determine program eligibility. There may be a fee for ongoing services depending on your family's income and insurance. Your service coordinator will work with you to determine if you will have a possible cost participation and what that may mean for you.

3 Connecting With the Team

- A service coordinator will work with you throughout your family's time in First Steps.
- Service coordinators are responsible for communicating with all the various agencies who may provide services for your child and family.

4 Developing a Plan

- The service coordinator, you and those you would like to include (e.g., other family members, child care providers, early intervention providers, etc.) will meet to review the results of the assessment, discuss concerns and priorities and determine your goals for your child, what services will be provided, and where and how progress will be measured.
- This information is compiled and written into the Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP).

5 Start of Services

- Based on information gathered from your IFSP, First Steps will connect you and your child to the right services in your area to begin early intervention.
- Services should begin soon after your IFSP is developed.

6 Reviewing the Plan

- An IFSP review is conducted every six months and program eligibility is determined annually.
- As your child and family's needs develop and change, so do our services.

7 Future Steps

- As your child meets their developmental milestones or begins nearing their third birthday, First Steps will work with you to find the right services as your child and family transition from the program.
- Your First Steps team will provide information and discuss options for future steps. We are available to assist with the transition to school and community-based settings.