



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.

Procedural Safeguards

Our Vision

First Steps wants all Indiana families to have a strong foundation to advocate for their infants and toddlers to grow and flourish to their highest potential. This is why we work as a team with you and your child, advocating for their development and providing the right services we choose together.

Through teamwork, we will help your child acquire the skills, development and knowledge to thrive and meet their developmental milestones.

Families Always Have Rights

Parents of children in First Steps have many protections under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). These protections, known as “procedural safeguards,” ensure that you receive information and give your permission before certain activities are carried out, that confidentiality and access to your child and family’s records are protected, and that you have access to multiple methods to address disagreements and disputes that may arise.

1 Families have the right to consent.

Parents can choose to give or withhold permission to participate in services. Our goal is to empower you to make fully informed decisions for your child and family.

2 Families have the right to prior notice.

Parents will be given written notice before key activities or changes in services take place. This ensures you are aware of how we propose to work with you and your child and have time to consider whether you want to proceed.

3 Families have the right to privacy.

Privacy is a top priority for First Steps. Any information that personally identifies you, your child or your family will not be shared outside of the program without first receiving your permission, except where allowed by law.

4 Families have the right to disagree.

We believe that families know their children best. You have the right to disagree, and we will work with you to find new solutions. You also have the right to formal dispute resolution options to address your concerns.

All families working with First Steps are guaranteed these rights by federal law. Your service coordinator will explain your rights throughout your family’s time in the First Steps program and share a more detailed guide to procedural safeguards with you. You are encouraged to review these materials and keep them as resources.

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.