

Natural Environments

Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) services are required to be provided in natural environments, including home and community routines, activities, and settings in which children without disabilities would typically participate. When services are provided in natural environments, they are focused on training the parent(s) and other family members and are provided as part of a family’s typical routines and activities. The provision of early intervention services for any infant or toddler may occur in a setting other than a natural environment only if early intervention cannot be achieved satisfactorily for the infant or toddler in a natural environment.

Procedures for Identifying Settings on the IFSP

It is the responsibility of the Service Coordinator to ensure the family and child receive services in natural environments. For the initial and annual IFSPs, and any change review in which a service is added or changed, the Service Coordinator will facilitate discussion among all members of the IFSP team about service settings. The results of the state-approved family and child assessments will provide the IFSP team with information about difficulties a child is having in fully participating in the routines and activities of the family. Any IDEA/Part C services identified to support full participation must be provided during the routines and activities the family has prioritized.

Service settings for children in IDEA/Part C are reported each year to the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs. The setting must be identified for each service needed to support attainment of IFSP outcomes. On the BRIDGES’ Planned Services screen, the Service Coordinator will choose the setting in which the service will most often be delivered. BRIDGES will display the following options for service settings:

Natural Environment Settings	Non-Natural Environment Setting
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Community• Child Care Center (including home-based)• Home	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Hospital/Clinic• Other (Phone, Office, etc.)

Exceptions to Natural Environments

The following IDEA/Part C services are automatically exempted from the natural environment requirement due to the nature of the service:

- Fitting of Assistive Technology Devices
- Audiological services
- Medical Services:
 - Services provided by a licensed physician for diagnostic or evaluation purposes to determine a child’s developmental status and need for early intervention services.
 - Medical or other professional services provided by a licensed ophthalmologist or optometrist necessary for the habilitation or rehabilitation of visual functioning disorders, or both.
- Intake Coordination

- Service Coordination
- Activities related to initial eligibility for IDEA/Part C.
- Development and delivery of IFSP services prior to discharge from NICU.

All other services must be delivered in a natural environment setting. If the parent and all other members of the IFSP team agree the child is not making satisfactory progress due to the service setting, the IFSP team may choose a non-natural environment on a short-term basis. This option requires the Service Coordinator and other members of the IFSP team to:

- Provide data and documentation of concerns regarding the child’s progress in the family’s typical routines and activities.
- Provide a justification for services outside the natural environment on the Planned Services screen in BRIDGES that includes the steps the IFSP team will take to return the child to the natural environment.
- Review the justification within six months at the next periodic or annual review of the IFSP.

Special Considerations: All Early Intervention Services

Under no circumstances should an Early Intervention Service (EIS) provider change the service location from a natural to a non-natural environment without first pursuing a change to the IFSP. If an EIS provider has concerns about a child’s progress, he or she must inform the Service Coordinator so that an IFSP Change Review meeting can be held. Changing a setting without an IFSP Change Review may result in recoupment of EIS provider reimbursement, termination of the EIS provider agreement, or both.

In the event there are no EIS providers in the area where the child lives, the Service Coordinator may temporarily utilize providers working in non-natural environments. When an EIS provider becomes available to serve the child in the natural environment, Service Coordinator must call an IFSP Change Review meeting to change the provider and service setting in the IFSP.

- If the parent chooses to use a non-natural environment provider when an EIS provider who provides natural environment services is available, the Service Coordinator must inform the family that all costs associated with the service become their responsibility.
- The Service Coordinator would then conduct a change review of the IFSP to remove the service from Planned Services and document the change on the IFSP screen in BRIDGES, Section 5, “Other Services.”

Early Intervention Services

AUDIOLOGY

The audiological evaluation (AE) consists of two steps: a hearing screening, and if indicated, a comprehensive diagnostic evaluation. The entire AE (both steps) may be completed within the initial appointment or may require additional appointments to obtain conclusive diagnostic information.

Screening – Upon initial referral for audiology services, the child should receive a hearing screen and middle ear assessment, if indicated. If the child passes the screening, the child is discharged from audiological follow-up and results are reported in writing to the Service Coordinator.

If the child fails the screening, actions might include:

- Referral for medical evaluation (not covered by IDEA/PART C) with re-evaluation after treatment.
- Proceed with comprehensive audiological diagnostic evaluation.

Comprehensive Diagnostic Evaluation – A comprehensive audiological diagnostic evaluation should be performed using IDEA/Part C approved billing codes. If the outcome indicates normal hearing, the infant is discharged from audiological follow-up. Results should be reported in writing to the child’s IDEA/Part C Service Coordinator.

The following must be considered in delivery of this service:

- Children who have Medicaid or are below 250% of the federal poverty level and have a hearing loss that requires amplification are eligible for the SCDHEC Hearing Program. SCDHEC will provide hearing aids for eligible children, and cover ear molds, hearing aid kits, replacement batteries, etc., up to allowable program limits.
- When the child is referred for audiological services, IDEA/Part C will pay for one screening (if child passes) OR one comprehensive audiological diagnostic evaluation if child fails screening.
- IDEA/Part C does not cover routine follow-up visits necessary to monitor a child at risk for progressive or delayed on-set hearing loss unless this need is established by the IFSP team and incorporated into the child’s IFSP.
- Proof of the manufacturer’s invoice price for hearing aids is required prior to IDEA/Part C issuing reimbursement.
- Any costs directly related to cochlear implant use, maintenance, and training is not covered.
- IDEA/Part C will not cost share the price of the hearing aid(s) or services. This means that the total cost of the hearing aids must not exceed the IDEA/PART C established rate.
- Sign language interpretation services may be requested through the South Carolina School for the Deaf and the Blind, Division Outreach Services.

EARLY INTENSIVE BEHAVIORAL INTERVENTION (EIBI)

The following information is required to be entered in BRIDGES for prior authorization of EIBI services by the IDEA/Part C State Office. Once entered, the Service Coordinator then e-mails BabyNet@scdhhs.gov with the child’s BRIDGES ID number and a statement that they are seeking prior authorization from IDEA/Part C State Office for initiation of EIBI services.

Evaluation/Assessment Screen:

- Select the domain to add new evaluation.
- Select Service Coordinator health summary.
- Select the correct type of evaluation/assessment based on the current IFSP.
- Select the diagnosis Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) (Pervasive Developmental Disorder)-F84.0 (choose the diagnosis without the ‘z’ in front).
- Enter the date of verification as the date the evaluation/screening was done.
- Enter the health status. If the child is found to be at risk or has been diagnosed with an ASD, select major concern.
- Enter the clinical observation which would include date the report was received; what type of assessment was done and the result of that assessment.
- Enter the name of the evaluator who completed the assessment as well as their credentials (Psychologist, Developmental Pediatrician, DDSN Regional Staff etc.).
- Enter any recommendations from the examiner and any follow up that is to occur.

Screening Page (to be completed any time the MCHAT or STAT is completed):

- Enter the date the screening was conducted.
- Enter the informant’s name and relationship to the child.

- Enter to type of screening procedure that was used.
- Enter any previous screenings that have been completed.
- Enter the type of autism screening that was completed and the date it was done.
- Enter the screening results.
- Enter any action that is to follow.

Planned Services Screen:

The IFSP team will determine the frequency and limits to be authorized based on the individual child. The codes and limitations are listed below. List only the codes that IFSP has approved.

Behavior identification assessment (ABA):

- CODE: 97151.
- Unit Limitation: 32 units per year (15-minute units).
- Previously referred as the “workshop”.
- Entered into BRIDGES as 1 time semiannually for 8 hours.
- Can only be authorized one time per year.

Line therapy: Adaptive Treatment Behavior by Protocol:

- CODE: 97153.
- Unit Limitation: 160 units per week (15-minute units).
- Previously referred to as “paraprofessional treatment”.
- Entered into BRIDGES as one time per month for 160 hours.

Adaptive Behavior Treatment with Protocol Modification:

- CODE: 97155.
- Unit Limitation: 64 units per Month (15-minute units).
- This service was not previously included.
- Entered into BRIDGES as 1 time per month for 16 hours.

Family Training Family Adaptive Behavior Treatment Guidance:

- CODE: 97156.
- Unit Limitation: 48 units per year (15-minute units).
- This service was not previously included.
- Entered into BRIDGES as 1 time semiannually for 6 hours.

IFSP meetings must also be authorized in planned services.

Documentation and Billing information for Contracted Providers:

Program Consultants (or designee) will be responsible for all documenting and billing of any autism services within the child’s record in BRIDGES. Autism paraprofessional services will be summarized, and documentation entered on a weekly basis.

Payment information:

Payment will only be made to EIBI providers who have valid provider agreements with Medicaid **and** IDEA/Part C, and who are enrolled as users in the BRIDGES system. All reimbursement will be made directly to the provider, who is then responsible for payment for paraprofessional services as appropriate.

For additional information, please see the Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) Services Manual on the SCDHHS website at: <https://www.scdhhs.gov/provider-manual-list>.

HEALTH SERVICES

Limitations:

Consultation by physicians unfamiliar with a child and their IFSP are not covered, nor is medical diagnostic evaluation of unknown conditions or diseases.

Health Services under IDEA/Part C do not include the following:

- Services that are surgical in nature (i.e., cleft palate surgery, surgery for club foot, shunting of hydrocephalus, etc.).
- Services that are purely medical in nature (i.e., hospitalization for management of congenital heart ailments, prescribing of medicine or drugs for any purpose, etc.).
- Devices necessary to control or treat a medical condition.
- Medical-health services, (i.e., immunizations, “well-baby” care, etc.) that are routinely recommended for all children.

NUTRITION

Limitations:

Children in need of nutrition services should be referred to DHEC Family Support Services (FSS).

OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY, PHYSICAL THERAPY, AND SPEECH-LANGUAGE PATHOLOGY SERVICES

Services must be provided with the parent or other primary caregiver present and actively involved for the entire session. EIS providers must document adaptations and interventions provided to the family/caregiver to support the child’s participation in activities and routines that occur in home and community settings. Ongoing consultation/training to family members, caregivers and other team members will be documented in the child’s progress notes by the therapist.

Limitations:

Services will be provided as established on the IFSP and as scheduled with the parent/caregiver. Direct service should never be provided without consultation to family members, caregivers, and other team members. Some children have sustained acute injuries that have resulted in developmental delays (i.e., fractured leg, car accident, orthopedic surgery, etc.). Acute rehabilitative therapy is a medically based service outside IDEA/Part C.

SERVICE COORDINATION

The Service Coordinator is responsible for the following when authorizing services on an IFSP:

- Ensuring that Part C dollars are used only as payor of last resort.
- Ensuring that referrals for IDEA/PART C services are only made to qualified personnel.
- Ensuring that services being authorized are listed on the IFSP.