

**Module: Family-Centered Practices
for Infants and Toddlers With Visual Impairments**

Session 1: Building Reliable Alliances

Handout C

DEC Position on Services for Children Birth to Age Eight With Special Needs and Their Families

Division for Early Childhood, Council for Exceptional Children. (1998). *DEC position on services for children birth to age eight with special needs and their families*. Position paper. Retrieved December 11, 2002, from <http://www.dec-sped.org/positions/birtht08.html>

The Division for Early Childhood, Council for Exceptional Children

Adopted: December 1993 Reaffirmed: July 1998

DEC strongly supports and encourages the identification and delivery of comprehensive and coordinated supports and services to children with special needs and their families as early as possible, in accordance with the priorities of their families. Young children with special needs are those between birth and age eight who have disabilities, developmental delays, are at-risk for future developmental problems, or who are gifted and talented.

This position is based on the following beliefs: (1) all young children are valued and full participants in their families, communities and schools; (2) high quality early intervention can help ensure that all young children reach their full developmental potential and attain functional skills in the areas of communication, mobility, social competence, cognition and self care; and, (3) families benefit from consistent and supportive partnerships and collaborations with service providers such as early childhood special educators, early childhood educators, related service personnel, child care providers and others who provide supports and services to their children. This position is derived from: the professional literature, which provides ample research evidence for the efficacy of early intervention for young children with special needs and their families; parental leadership and collaborations across the country; and federal, state, and provincial policies that encourage and support early intervention and early childhood special education services.

DEC proposes that all young children with special needs are entitled to early intervention services that reflect recommended practices as presented in the literature and the DEC Recommended Practices (1993). These practices emphasize the individualized nature of service delivery as determined collaboratively by families and professionals through the Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) or Individualized Education Program (IEP) process. This process guarantees each child a comprehensive assessment to identify individual strengths and needs; appropriate intervention at the intensity and scope

warranted by the child's etiology and developmental profile, research and best practice related to these variables, and family preference. Further, the IFSP or IEP process should monitor child progress to assure service modifications as needed.

All children in need of early intervention or early childhood special education should be able to attain basic skills in the areas of communication, mobility, cognition, social competence and self care through the delivery of individualized and comprehensive supports and services.

DEC recognizes that the family is the constant in the life of a child and the purpose of early intervention is to enhance the capacity of the family to facilitate their child's development. Children aged birth to eight spend most of their time with their family or other care givers. Early intervention and early childhood special education services should be designed in response to the concerns and priorities of each family as related to the development of their child, and service delivery should reflect a respect for each family's uniqueness and family system. Service providers should respond to families within the cultural context of both family and community. Similarly, culturally competent community based service systems should be designed to support the participation of children representing the full range of diversity; diversity not only of ethnicity, economics, language and culture, but of ability, as well.

DEC supports the rights of all children, regardless of their diverse abilities, to participate actively in natural environments within their community. A natural environment is one in which a child would spend time if he or she did not have special needs. Family-centered and community based care means that service providers not only provide support for children, but they provide support to families and those in the community as well. Service providers should be able to facilitate parent-to-parent connections and link young children and their families to community-based natural supports such as babysitters, play groups and libraries. Instead of providing direct supports and services only to young children and their families, service providers should also serve as consultants, coordinators, advocates, facilitators, and team members with community providers.

DEC believes that there is a particular need to develop personnel standards that support the practice of serving all young children in natural and inclusive early childhood setting. While acknowledging that related service personnel, early interventionists, and early childhood special educators will require training within their particular disciplines, we believe that there is a common core of knowledge that all such professionals should possess. In addition, early childhood educators should also possess a core of knowledge about serving children with special needs.

Certification standards should be developed to ensure not only that service providers possess the high degree of specialization that their discipline requires, but also to guarantee that service providers from all disciplines possess the common core of knowledge and skills they need in order to work with young children with special needs in inclusive settings.

DEC is aware of the complex needs of young children with special needs and their families. It is highly unlikely that any individual professional or agency will be able to address all of the needs of children and families. A coordinated and collaborative approach is needed to ensure the availability of comprehensive supports and services by families. The delivery of coordinated supports and services requires a commitment to a common framework of operation guided by a philosophical foundation of collaboration. In many instances, this

means the design of new service structures and models of personnel deployment across a variety of disciplines. It also requires that personnel have the requisite knowledge and skills to work with individuals from other professional disciplines and engage in collaborative efforts. Within programs, this means collaborative teamwork skills in assessment and intervention. Across programs, this means collaborative abilities to coordinate and integrate services. DEC believes that policy makers, institutions of higher education, professional organizations and other sources of technical assistance, and local service delivery systems share responsibility for ensuring that services from a variety of disciplines are available and are delivered in a collaborative and integrated manner.

DEC believes that the complex needs of families are best met when every family has access to a service coordinator who becomes a partner with them as they seek appropriate supports and services for themselves and their child. In some cases this coordination role is best met by the family themselves. The coordinator's role is to support families in identifying and obtaining the supports and services (both formal and informal) they want. The service coordinator, to the extent that each family desires, can assist all family members in obtaining the skills needed during the early childhood years and beyond. As with other service providers, there is a need for a sufficient number of skilled service coordinators who are able to deliver culturally competent services. We believe that members of each and all disciplines share with families a responsibility for advocacy on behalf of children with special needs. However, service coordinators have a special responsibility to identify and eliminate gaps in the service system, thus developing a model of service integration for individual families, as well as the service delivery system in general.

DEC believes that great strides continue to be made toward meeting the needs of infants and young children with special needs and their families. While appreciating and honoring the effort resulting in these gains, we also recognize that many children and families remain unserved or under served, and that ensuring that services and supports are of the highest quality remains a challenge. We recognize the responsibility that DEC and its members have in working toward services that are sufficient in both availability and quality to meet the needs of all young children who have disabilities or developmental delays, are at-risk for delay, or are gifted and talented.

DEC Task Force on Recommended Practices. (1993). DEC recommended practices: Indicators of quality in programs for infants and young children with special needs and their families. Reston, VA: Council for Exceptional Children.

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