

# Supplement: Iowa Best Practice Guidelines ECSE Supplement for Those with Autism Spectrum Disorders

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## Introduction

This document is meant to accompany:

- *Best Practice Guidelines for Program Planning for Those with Autism and Related Disorders*
  - *Assessment of Persons Suspected to Have or Diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorders*
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## Purpose

The accompanying document addresses issues specific to children 0-6 who display learning patterns similar to children with autism spectrum disorders.

This document clarifies the application of the best practice documents as they impact services for children 0-6 and their families.

It reflects the work of the state wide Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) Autism Planning Group.

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## Planning Considerations for Best Practices for Autism

In considering planning for young children with autism and related disorders, best practices in early childhood need to be considered.

It is important to develop services that are individually appropriate addressing the language, social, and behavioral needs of young children with autism and related disorders while accessing the least restrictive environment.

Teams must plan for and teach skills and behaviors necessary for young children to access less restrictive environments or in the case of a child, birth to three, the natural environment.

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**Determining Services**

There are many issues in choosing the natural (0-3) or least restrictive (3-5) environment for all young children with disabilities which are further complicated by the needs of young children with autism.

The Iowa Rules of Special Education must be followed in determining services and supports that encompass special education.

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**Determining Appropriate Placement**

Individualized Education Plan (IEP) teams will find *3-4-5 Thrive: A Guide to Providing Educational Opportunities the Least Restrictive Environment for Iowa's Preschoolers with Disabilities* helpful. The feasibility study in Appendix A assists teams in determining appropriate placement for a child based on services indicated on the child's IEP.

These resources are designed to assist teams in more appropriately addressing functional family and child outcomes.

For Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) teams serving children birth to 3, the Early ACCESS Technical Assistance team will be providing further information about the process and procedures to determine the natural environment.

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**General Environment**

Least restrictive and natural environments for young children with disabilities are complicated by the variability of systems that exist in the general education environment for all young children.

The general environment is an array of services, centers, and systems governed by a variety of agencies and standards.

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**Qualifications in  
Community  
Based Early  
Childhood  
(CBEC)  
Programs**

Qualifications for Community Based Early Childhood (CBEC) providers range from a teaching license in early childhood, to a high school diploma. Due to this variability, Area Education Agency (AEA) and Local Education Agency (LEA) personnel play an integral role in supporting young children with autism in CBEC programs.

This range in personnel qualifications has implications for the AEA support of CBEC personnel as well.

A collaborative relationship must be developed and maintained to support appropriate staff development as well as ongoing monitoring necessary to achieve the outcomes described on the IEP/IFSP.

CBEC personnel will need specific instruction regarding the supports and strategies required for young children with autism to be successful in general education or the natural environment. In some instances, if determined appropriate by the IEP/IFSP team and associate may accompany a child to provide one to one instruction or other needed assistance.

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**Staff  
Development**

Staff development is not only needed for CBEC personnel, but also ECSE personnel delivering services in AEA/LEAs. The strategies and supports available in ECSE warrant continued expansion to appropriately support language, social, and behavioral needs of this population.

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## Best Practice Guidelines for Program Planning

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### Characteristics of Autism and Pervasive Development Disorder (PDD) Spectrum Disorders

It is expected that the following groups meet acceptable criteria:

- All service coordinators and case managers for IFSP/IEPs
- AEA/LEA special education personnel
- Community based child care providers working in centers and family child care homes

It would not be expected that CBEC providers would recite Iowa Educational Definitions, but rather explain the characteristics of autism and briefly discuss areas of concern.

AEA administrators of early childhood special education programs would support personnel by understanding the rationale for staff development regarding autism.

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**Individual  
Students with  
Autism and  
Related  
Spectrum  
Disorder**

Autism Resource Teams need to be a part of the problem solving process with ECSE and Early ACCESS (EA) personnel.

It is imperative all ECSE and EA personnel understand the implications and recognize the need for assistance in providing an individualized plan that reflects the unique learning needs of this population.

Individualized service delivery models must be examined to reflect the inclusion of these beliefs:

- Some young children with autism require a higher intensity of instruction to develop certain skills
- Intervention must be well designed and accompanied by planned, systematic performance monitoring
- Performance data are used to make decisions regarding changes in interventions and outcomes
- The degree of intensity of any given intervention must be assessed according to its effectiveness or outcome
- Traditional ECSE and EA services may not be effective for young children with autism
- Duration and continuity of services are important components in early childhood

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**Developing an  
Educational  
Plan Based on  
Assessment of  
Strengths and  
Weaknesses**

Interpretations of basic concepts include:

- School environments refer to the typical environments in which young children interact:
  - Home
  - Community
  - School
  - Childcare
  - Other community based early childhood settings
- Educational plan refers to a broad range of skills and competencies beyond academics or pre-academics, including:
  - Social language
  - Functional play
  - Following routines

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**Planning and  
Delivering**

For young children with autism the following issues should be routinely addressed:

**Education  
Activities to  
Support the  
Goals and  
Objectives of  
the Educational  
Program Plan**

- A variety of communication strategies to address understanding and functional communication should be systematically applied.
  - Social interaction and functional toy play may be enhanced through siblings, or other playgroups
  - AEA/LEA staff may need flexible support models to provide consultation to CBEC programs on an as needed basis
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**Data  
Monitoring  
Procedures to  
Evaluate  
Progress, Define  
Problem Areas,  
and Guide  
Decision Making**

Clarification:

- Standard Practice in early childhood would dictate a variety of relevant sources and settings to be considered during the assessment process
  - Problem analysis should involve persons, including family, who have responsibility for shared decision making
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## Best Practice Guidelines Assessment

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### Assessment by Knowledgeable Staff

Staff or teams serving young children need knowledge regarding these areas:

- Developmental norms and assessment techniques for the determination of need for special education
  - Recognizing and accessing contact persons with expertise in autism
  - Characteristics and learning styles have implications for appropriate interventions
  - Sensitive communication with families regarding observation of behavioral patterns that indicate specialized interventions are required
  - Linking the fields of early childhood special education and autism to effectively implement specialized strategies and family centered service
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### Staff Assessment of Comprehensive Needs of the Student

When assessing comprehensive needs of the young child, teams may utilize:

- Family information
  - Information from other agencies and providers working with the child and family
  - Information from multiple environments
  - Information from systematic observation of the child as well as informal/formal assessment
  - Persons knowledgeable in autism
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