



EFFECT OF EARLY INTERVENTIONS ON CHILDREN WITH DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

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Abstract

All over the world, people believe that parenting is the most rewarding part of life. Families usually welcome a baby to the mix with great expectations. The birth of a child with a disability is an unanticipated event. No family- regardless of race, ethnicity or socioeconomic status- is immune to childhood disability, yet almost all are poorly prepared to cope with its occurrence. The importance of Early Intervention is acknowledged by professionals and non-professionals alike. It advocates the promotion of positive assets and development of the child and the family. Recent scientific evidence shows that early experiences literally shape our lives by affecting the way the young brain develops. The major purpose of Early Intervention is the prevention of disability and developmental delays. Early Intervention is both primary and secondary prevention. It is designed to be cost-effective. The ultimate goal of intervention is to enhance normal development and independent functioning of the child.



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INTRODUCTION

The idea of early intervention was born in the shadow of Brown v. the Board of Education, the 1954 Supreme Court desegregation case that affirmed the universal right of all children to a decent education. Separate educational systems for Black children were judged inherently unequal. Early Intervention is a term that refers to a broad array of activities designed to enhance a young child's developmental disabilities or developmental delays. The programs targeted for at-risk development. Ideally, early intervention starts with a comprehensive assessment of the child's and the family's strengths and needs and extends through the provision of appropriate supports and services to active monitoring and reevaluation as the child develops.

Early Intervention is defined as "The introduction of planned programming deliberately timed and arranged in order to alter the anticipated or projected course of development" (Siegal-1972).

“Many things can wait the child cannot. Now is the time his bones are being formed, his mind is being developed. To him, we cannot say tomorrow his name is today”. - (Gabriela Mistral)

The rapid advances in medical technology have successfully increased the survival of high-risk babies, thus adding to the number of babies who might end up with developmental delays and disabilities. The Persons With Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act, 1995 has made provisions for Early Identification and intervention for these infants and young children. The present scenario is that early intervention services for children with developmental delays are far too scattered and the existing Early Intervention services units are concentrated in the urban areas and hence they hardly reach the target population. Therefore, special focus is required to address the existing deficiencies in providing early intervention services.

Early Intervention Services are special services for infants and toddlers at risk for developmental delays. These services are designed to identify and meet children’s needs in five developmental areas, i.e physical, cognitive, communication, social or emotional development, sensory and adaptive development. To ascertain the eligibility of the child for early intervention certain screening and diagnostic measures are adopted. Some children develop more slowly than the others or develop in ways that seem different from other children. Any deviation from the normal development should be dealt with at the earliest as it may lead to a developmental delay or the child may be at risk of developing developmental delay or the child may be at risk of developing developmental delays.

“Developmental delay” is a term that means an infant or child is developing slower than normal in one or more areas (Anderson, Chitwood, & Hayden,1997).The child may or may not perform the motor, social, cognitive or other activities like children of his age. A child is considered to be at risk when the child’s development may be delayed unless he or she receives early intervention services. Primary reasons for intervening early with exceptional children are (1) Enhance the child’s normal development. (2) Provide support and assistance to the family. (3) Maximize the child’s and family’ benefit to society.

Child development research has established that the rate of human learning and development is most rapid in the early years of life. The timing of intervention becomes particularly important when a child runs the risk of missing an opportunity to learn during a state of maximum readiness. If the most teachable moments or stages of greatest readiness are not

taken advantage of, a child may have difficulty in learning a particular skill at a later time. It is possible through early identification and appropriate intervention that children can be helped to reach their maximum potential. Early intervention services also have a significant impact on the parents and siblings of an exceptional infant or young child. The family of a young exceptional child often feels disappointed, socially isolated and suffers from added stress, frustration, chronic sorrow, anxiety, and helplessness. The compounded stress with the presence of an exceptional child may affect the family's wellbeing which in turn may interfere with the child's development. Early intervention can result in parents having improved attitudes about themselves and their child, improved information and skills for teaching their child and more time for leisure and enjoyment. Intervening early is also beneficial to the society at large as it ensures the child's developmental and educational gains which will decrease its dependence upon social institutions. Thus the family's increased ability to cope with the presence of an exceptional child, and perhaps the child's increased eligibility for employment provide economic as well as social benefits. Therefore, Early Intervention is also the cost of efficiency.

The Rational for Early Intervention "The best inheritance a parent can give to his children is a few minutes of their time each day" M-Grundler.

IMPORTANCE OF EARLY INTERVENTION: We are passing through an era which has seen rapid changes in the concept of the child and is burgeoning ahead taking long strides in understanding normal child development. There is mounting evidence documented regarding the deleterious effects of disability and handicapping condition on the normal development of a child. It is also a fact that these effects can be minimized or prevented if children can be identified as those who are at risk or have a disability or a handicapping condition through Early Intervention programmes. Thus, early intervention programmes can be preventive, curative and remedial. To realize the importance of early intervention we have to rationalize our thinking on the subject. The early intervention programmes derive their support from the various theories of learning and the empirical research on human development. When we look back into the history of child development, "Predeterminism"- the concept which held hereditary and genetic endowment as the sole important factor for development. In this view, there was the mere unfolding of development which was predetermined and unaffected by external influences. Then came the controversy of nature versus nature. But the current theories support the dynamic interaction between the genetic endowment and the

environment and neither of them, in isolation, can account for normal development. One of the basic premises of Early Intervention is that it can bring positive changes and human traits are malleable.

IMPACT OF EARLY INTERVENTION: The process of evaluation to know the impact or effect of early intervention programmes is a very complicated subject. There are innumerable factors which have the effect on the outcome of the programmes and which have to be considered while evaluating. One of the main factors is the basic concept underlying. To some, it is a means of stimulating intellectual growth, learning new skills and acquiring knowledge and realizing the full potential and to some others, it is a prevention of a decline in intellectual growth and hence only supportive to development. The goals of the programme also differ according to the group of children who are beneficiaries. For children who are at risk for environmental causes, the programmes may be mainly supportive. Psychosocial interventions offer increased opportunities for normal development. On the contrary, for children with biological damage where there are no chances of reversing the pathology, the intervention programmes aim at maximizing the residual functions. Later it is the environment to give stimulation and encourage interaction most suited to the child's physical and mental capabilities. Some of the interventions can be corrective like surgery to correct deformities, treatment-oriented as in cretinism. In some the disability is compensated by aids and appliances (hearing aids). Some of them, in order to circumvent the limitations, find alternate methods of learning and performing. There may be a combination of these different methods in a single intervention programme. The areas of development as we all know are interdependent to a very great extent and a disability in one domain affects the development of the other and a "spillover of difficulties" in learning is observed. Each child's development even though follows some basic principles, may yet show some individual differences. The intervention also highly individualized keeping in view the differences in the child, the family, environment i.e. socioeconomic status, emotional and cultural differences etc. for a child with disability the degree of disability and the age of detection, the time of starting the intervention after detection have a profound effect on the outcome of the intervention programmes. The earliest detection and intervention in mild and moderate cases of disability and handicapping conditions have shown better results than those with severe disabilities and later interventions. The other factors of importance for the impact of early

intervention programmes are parent involvement, motivation, education type and availability of services.

ASSUMPTIONS OF EARLY INTERVENTION:

- A child grows very rapidly in early years. So, stimulating experiences may prove useful in promoting a child's optimum growth. No child is too disabled not to respond in some way, to carefully selected stimuli.
- By altering the environment, development of disabled infants can be facilitated both quantitatively and qualitatively.
- Early intervention produces a positive effect in a child, where due to learning of effective response pattern helps them to satisfy their curiosity, build an exploratory instinct that is important for learning and help them to gain control on the environment around them.
- The principle of nurturance applies to infants with a disability, which is a lifelong interactive process between persons. It primarily occurs within these surrounding, that growth of trust, attachment, feeling of self-worth, acquisition of skills. The emergence of the feeling of competence, and ability to cope with stress occur. therefore it is important to design early intervention programmes which encompass all kinds of services.

AIMS OF EARLY INTERVENTION

- ❖ Early identification of infants at risk
- ❖ Early identification of developmental delays
- ❖ Enhancement of normal development
- ❖ Acceleration of atypical development
- ❖ Acquisition of new behavior/ skills
- ❖ Increase in independent functioning
- ❖ Early detection and prevention of secondary handicaps
- ❖ Minimizing the effects of the handicapping condition
- ❖ Cost-effectiveness
- ❖ Psychosocial support to families.

ELIGIBILITY FOR EARLY INTERVENTION

Early intervention is intended for infants and toddlers who have a developmental delay or disability. Eligibility is determined by evaluating the child (with parents' consent) to see if

the little one does, in fact, have a delay in development or a disability. Eligible children can receive early intervention services from birth through the third birthday (and sometimes beyond). There is “Zero rejection” for such children in the early intervention unit. By zero rejection it is implied that children with all kinds of disabilities such as visual impairment, hearing impairment, cerebral palsy, speech-language and communication delay are offered early intervention services irrespective of the type of disability and degree of severity of the problem. A child is considered to have a developmental delay if there is a delay in development in one or more of the following areas.

- ❖ Physical Development, including fine and gross motor function
- ❖ Cognitive Development
- ❖ Communication Development
- ❖ Social-Emotional Development (or) Adaptive Development

EARLY INTERVENTION SERVICE

Early Intervention Services are special services for infants and toddlers at risk for developmental delays. These services are designed to identify and meet children’s needs in five developmental areas. These are physical, cognitive, communication, social and emotional development, sensory and adaptive development. Early intervention includes the provision of services to such children and their families for the purpose of lessening the effects of the condition. Early intervention can be remedial or preventive in nature—remediating the existing developmental problems or preventing their occurrence. Early Intervention Services are effective ways to address the needs of infants and toddlers with developmental delays or disabilities. Therefore, special focus is required to address the existing deficiencies in providing early intervention services.

PHYSIOTHERAPY IN EARLY INTERVENTION

The physiotherapist provides therapeutic interventions to promote the development of movement (motor) skills since early movement skills are the building blocks for many play skills and functional abilities this intervention includes:

- Helping infants, toddlers and preschoolers achieve typical motor milestones e.g. playing on their tummy, rolling, crawling, walking, and later milestones such as running, jumping, and balancing skills
- Looking at posture and body alignment— sometimes specific muscle groups need to be strengthened or stretched or advice required on a certain type of footwear

- Working on improving physical abilities and play skills, balance, coordination, strength, and endurance
- Preventing, overcoming or minimizing physical problems

OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY (OT) The first 3 years of life are a critical time for brain development, especially if a child is delayed or restricted in development. If a child needs support to develop optimally, occupational therapy can help. Occupational therapy is the use of assessment and treatment to develop, recover, or maintain the daily living and work skills of people with a physical, mental, or cognitive disorder. Occupational therapists also focus much of their work on identifying and eliminating environmental barriers to independence and participation in daily activities. Occupational therapists work with clients of all ages, ranging from infants to the elderly.

SPEECH THERAPY Effective communication is fundamental to all aspects of human functioning, particularly learning, and social interaction. The development of communication skills begins at birth. So families with infants and toddlers (birth–36 months) and in early childhood (3 years to 5 years of age) are eligible to start speech therapy as part of their early intervention program. Early Intervention Speech and Language Evaluation Speech therapy are usually provided in toddler’s natural environment because this is where he is most comfortable and functions the best. That means that he will receive therapy in the home or childcare setting. Occasionally, therapy may take place in a clinic or office setting.

BEHAVIOR MODIFICATION The changing of a person's reactions to certain situations or stimuli. Behavior therapy, a form of psychotherapy advocated in behaviorism, uses a variety of methods, such as assertiveness training, conditioned response, and hypnosis, to change unsatisfactory or deviant patterns of behavior. Behavior modification is a treatment approach, based on the principles of operant conditioning that replaces undesirable behaviors with more desirable ones through positive or negative reinforcement.

Children with developmental disabilities are at higher risk for internalizing and externalizing behavioral problems than children in the general population. Effective prevention and treatment programs are necessary to reduce the burden of behavioral problems in this population. A greater emphasis on the prevention of behavior problems in young children with developmental disabilities prior to the onset of significant symptoms or clinical disorders is needed. Multi-component interventions may be more efficacious for child behavior problems and yield greater benefits for parent and family adjustment.

MUSIC THERAPY- Music therapy is an effective intervention for maintaining and improving active involvement, social, emotional and cognitive skills, and for decreasing behavioral problems of individuals. Early intervention preschool programs and specific uses for music therapy therein. Implications for utilizing music therapy in the early intervention setting are discussed in an attempt to facilitate understanding of its legitimate inclusion as a unique part of an interdisciplinary approach.

- Promote the overall wellbeing of a child.
- Engage the child in fun, expressive social interactions
- Develop strong connections between child and caregiver.
- Improve and facilitate the child in achieving development milestones.
- To empower caregivers to strengthen the quality of their relationship with their child.
- Connect families and communities through the fun medium of music.
- To act as a role model in using music to facilitate the achievement of development milestones.

CONCLUSION

Early intervention is key in helping your child overcome any developmental delays. The field of early intervention is vibrant, generating expectations that systematic, comprehensive, experientially based interventions will alter developmental trajectories and prevent secondary complications. It emphasizes the importance of an overall developmental framework, what is known through intervention science and the emergence of guiding principles for programme design and development. Early Intervention is the prevention of disability and developmental delays. Prevention could be at the primary level when we seek to prevent the occurrence or development of the condition or it could be secondary prevention wherein we aim at reducing the impact and magnitude of disability or delay in development.

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