



Early Childhood Programs and Foster Care

Quick Reference Guide

| Early Childhood Program Name | Description | Foster Care Specific Policies |
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| IDEA Part C/Early Intervention (EI) | EI provides therapies and developmental supports for children age birth-3 with disabilities and their families. Children must be evaluated and determined to have or be at-risk of a developmental disability or delay to be eligible. Children with certain medical conditions are automatically eligible. There is no cost associated with referral, evaluation, or development of a care plan. The percentage of delay that qualifies a child for EI varies by state. | States may elect to serve children at risk of developmental delay, which can include children in foster care. Per federal law, all children that experience maltreatment must be referred to EI; states may elect to screen children who experience maltreatment for delays and disabilities before making a referral to EI. |
| Early Head Start and Head Start (E/HS) | Early Head Start (age 0-2) and Head Start (age 3-5) programs support school readiness, social-emotional development, comprehensive health needs, and whole family needs. Programs can be center-based or home-based. Families must have incomes under 100% FPL or meet categorical eligibility criteria to be eligible. | Children in foster care, families experiencing homelessness, and families who receive public assistance or SNAP are categorically eligible for E/HS regardless of income. Children in kinship care living with relatives or who have been placed in care away from their parents due to experiences of homelessness may be included in this automatic eligibility. |
| Child Care Development Fund (CCDF) | CCDF provides financial assistance to eligible families to pay for child care for children up to age 13 or up to 19 if the child has a disability. Families must meet income and work/education requirements, as determined by states. | States must provide children in foster care with a grace period for complying with immunization and other health and safety requirements. States may also waive work/education requirements or co-pays for foster parents. Policies vary by state. |

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| PreK | PreK (sometimes called Pre-Kindergarten) are typically school or community based programs that serve children ages 3-5. PreK programs are often more focused on school-readiness and funded differently than child care programs. | PreK program eligibility and design vary widely by community. Those programs operated by schools must comply with relevant education laws regarding children in foster care. Some states may offer priority enrollment or income eligibility exceptions for children in foster care. |
| Home Visiting | Home visiting is a voluntary program that supports expectant parents and caregivers of young children through parent education and coaching, health and developmental screenings, and referrals to needed services. | Available home visiting models vary by state; all models have guidance for how to serve foster children and their families. |