



El Priority Area 1:

# Services in Natural Environments (NES)

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Early Intervention (EI) services in Oregon are designed to support infants and toddlers with disabilities in natural environments, where children without disabilities typically participate. In alignment with 34 CFR § 303.126, services must be provided in settings such as homes, childcare centers, and community programs to the maximum extent appropriate for the child’s development. When services cannot be delivered in a natural environment, the Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) must include a justification, as required by 34 CFR § 303.344(d)(1)(ii). Oregon’s EI system ensures that children receive services within daily routines and activities, helping them build essential skills in familiar and meaningful settings.

# Ensuring Services Are Provided in Natural Environments in Early Intervention (EI)

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The purpose of this priority area is to ensure that Early Intervention (EI) services for infants and toddlers with disabilities are provided in natural environments, as required under IDEA (34 CFR § 303.126). Natural environments include settings where infants and toddlers without disabilities typically participate, such as the home and community-based settings like child care or inclusive playgroups.

EI services must be individualized and aligned with the unique developmental needs of each child and family. The Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) team—including the family, service providers, and other relevant professionals—collaborates to determine the most appropriate settings and strategies to support the child’s participation in everyday routines and activities. These decisions are not based on the child’s disability or developmental delay, the availability of services, or administrative convenience, but rather on what will best support the child’s learning and development.

When services cannot be provided in a natural environment, the IFSP must include a justification, explaining why the setting is not appropriate for the child’s needs. In all cases, supports and services should promote the child’s active engagement, interaction, and learning alongside typically developing peers to the greatest extent appropriate.

This priority area offers EI programs an opportunity to reflect on and strengthen their service delivery models, ensure services are family-centered and inclusive, and uphold compliance with IDEA requirements. Regular review of service settings helps ensure that children are receiving the supports they need to thrive in their natural environments.

By using this protocol, the Early Intervention (EI) ODE team will respond to a series of questions to assess whether the program is meeting key requirements related to providing services in natural environments as outlined in 34 CFR § 303.126. If noncompliance is identified, the EI program must correct these findings as soon as possible. In all cases, noncompliance must be fully corrected within one year of receiving written notification from ODE.

**Record Review Item: NE-1** 34 CFR §303.344 (d), 34 CFR § 303.126, OAR 581-015-2815 (h)

Record Review Item	Potential Documentation
<b>EI IFSP services occur in the natural environment unless nonparticipation justification is provided.</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• IFSP service page shows location of services (e.g., home, child care, park, library, etc.)</li><li>• IFSP includes a written justification for any service provided in a setting that is not considered a natural environment</li><li>• Progress notes and service logs reflect services delivered in natural settings</li><li>• Documentation reflects the child’s and family’s routines and settings as the context for service delivery</li><li>• Team discussion notes or meeting summaries describe how the setting supports the child’s outcomes</li><li>• Justification is specific to the child’s needs and not based on provider availability or administrative convenience</li></ul>

## Evidence of Compliance

YES

Mark  **YES** if there is evidence that all of the following are true:

- Services are delivered in settings where typically developing peers are found (e.g., home, child care, playground, etc.)
- Justification for any services not provided in a natural environment is clearly documented in the IFSP
- The IFSP reflects consideration of the child's and family's routines and activities in determining service locations

NO

Mark  **NO** if there is evidence that any of the following are true:

- Services are delivered in a clinical or segregated setting without a clear, individualized justification in the IFSP
- IFSP lacks documentation of service locations or explanation of why a natural environment is not appropriate
- Location decisions appear to be based on provider availability, scheduling, or convenience rather than individual child needs

**Record Review Item: NE-2 §34 CFR 303.344(a-d), §34 CFR 303.13 (b)(14), OAR 581-015-2815**

Record Review Item	Potential Documentation
<b>Services and supports enable infants and toddlers with disabilities to participate in everyday routines and activities within their natural environments</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Present Level of Development (PLOD) describes the child’s participation in daily routines and how the disability affects engagement</li><li>• Family input is documented in the PLOD, family outcome page and reflected in IFSP goals and services</li><li>• Goals are written in functional, everyday language, supporting participation in real-life routines</li><li>• Special instruction and other services are designed to occur in real-life settings, focusing on natural routines rather than isolated skill practice</li><li>• Instructional strategies include caregiver participation and embed intervention in daily activities</li><li>• Meeting notes include routines-based planning, reference family-identified priorities, and describe how services will support engagement in daily routines</li><li>• Evaluation reports reflect consideration of the child’s functioning within natural environments</li></ul>

## Evidence of Compliance

YES

Mark  **YES** if there is evidence that all of the following are true:

- IFSP PLOD includes descriptions of the child's current functioning and participation in everyday routines and activities, along with family input
- IFSP goals support the child's participation in real-life situations using functional language
- Services are planned and described in the IFSP to occur in natural environments using routines-based strategies
- Meeting notes show discussion of routines-based planning and family-identified priorities for participation

NO

Mark  **NO** if there is evidence that any of the following are true:

- IFSP PLOD does not describe how the child engages in routines or lacks family input
- Goals focus on isolated skills not connected to real-life routines or environments
- Special instruction is not connected to natural routines or excludes caregiver involvement
- Documentation lacks evidence of routines-based planning or discussion of how services support participation

**Record Review Item: NE-3** 34 CFR § 303.344, 34 CFR § 303.344(d)(2), OAR 581-015-2815

Record Review Item	Potential Documentation
<p><b>The most recent EI IFSP contains a description of EI Services to be provided including:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Anticipated method, amount, and frequency for each service;</b></li> <li>• <b>Anticipated location for each service;</b></li> <li>• <b>Anticipated duration for each service; and,</b></li> <li>• <b>Projected date of initiation for each service.</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• IFSP Services Page clearly includes for each service:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Method (e.g., direct, consultative, coaching)</li> <li>○ Amount (e.g., 30 minutes)</li> <li>○ Frequency (e.g., 2 times per week)</li> <li>○ Location (e.g., home, child care setting, community site)</li> <li>○ Projected Start Date (month, day, and year)</li> <li>○ End Date or Duration (e.g., 6 months or specific date)</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Meeting notes reflecting discussion of service delivery details</li> <li>• Prior Written Notice reflecting decisions made about services</li> <li>• Parent communication logs confirming understanding of services</li> <li>• Service data reports matching the services described in the IFSP</li> </ul>

## Evidence of Compliance

YES

Mark  **YES** if there is evidence that all of the following are true:

- Each EI service in the IFSP includes a clearly documented method, amount, frequency, location, duration, and start date
- Language used is clear, specific, and understandable to families (e.g., “2 sessions per week for 30 minutes each”)
- Location and duration are specific and not ambiguous (e.g., “home” rather than “TBD”; “through 12/31/2025” rather than “ongoing”)
- Service coordination is documented as a service
- Documentation reflects that the team, including the family, understands the what, where, and how often of each service

NO

Mark  **NO** if there is evidence that any of the following are true:

- One or more required service components (method, amount, frequency, location, start date, duration) are missing or incomplete
- Language used is vague or non-specific (e.g., “as needed,” “varies,” “when requested”)
- Service location or duration is not clearly defined
- Services are listed without a defined start or end date
- Team decisions about services are not clearly documented in the IFSP or supporting materials

**Record Review Item: NE-4 34 CFR § 303.344(e), OAR 581-015-2815(m)**

Record Review Item	Potential Documentation
<p><b>The most recent EI IFSP contains a description of other services, such as medical, that are not EI, and the funding sources or the steps to secure funding.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• IFSP section describing non-EI services (e.g., medical, diagnostic, social, or community-based services)</li><li>• Community or medical referral forms</li><li>• Documentation of funding source(s) or steps to obtain funding<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ IFSP indicates:</li><li>○ Type of non-EI service (e.g., audiology, nutritional support, physical therapy through insurance)</li><li>○ Provider (who will deliver the service)</li><li>○ Location</li><li>○ Method (how it will be delivered)</li><li>○ Start and end dates</li><li>○ Funding source (e.g., Medicaid, private insurance, community agency) or steps being taken to secure funding</li></ul></li><li>• Meeting notes or PWN documenting family awareness and team planning around non-EI services</li></ul>

## Evidence of Compliance

YES

Mark  **YES** if there is evidence that all of the following are true:

- The IFSP includes a description of relevant non-EI services the child/family needs (e.g., medical, vision, dental, social supports)
- The IFSP specifies who will provide the service, how and where it will be provided, and includes projected start and stop dates
- The IFSP identifies the funding source or includes a plan/steps to pursue funding through public or private sources
- Documentation shows coordination between EI services and other services the child/family needs

NO

Mark  **NO** if there is evidence that any of the following are true:

- Non-EI services needed by the child or family are not documented in the IFSP
- Funding source is not identified and there are no steps documented to secure it
- Description of other services is incomplete or missing key components (e.g., provider, location, dates)
- There is no documentation showing how the IFSP team addressed other necessary services for the child/family