

NATURAL ENVIRONMENTS REQUIREMENT

Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires that Early Intervention services be provided in “Natural Environments”. Section 303.26 of Part C defines Natural Environments as **“settings that are natural or typical for a same aged infant or toddler without a disability”**. Therefore, the provision of Early Intervention in natural environments is not just a guiding principle, but is also required by Federal law.

In 2004 IDEA was amended to include changes to the following statement: “The provision of early intervention services for any infant or toddler *with a disability* occurs in a setting other than a natural environment *that is most appropriate, as determined by the parent and the individualized family service plan team*, only when early intervention cannot be achieved satisfactorily for the infant or toddler in a natural environment”. In addition, the Federal Office for Special Education Programs (OSEP) has had a longstanding interpretation of the IDEA that Early Intervention services must be provided in a natural environment, unless a written justification exists for providing these services in other settings.

Based upon the above federal regulations, **effective July 1, 2005 all Service Coordinators and providers were required to use the “Natural Environment Justification Worksheet” at the IFSP meeting to justify all services that would not be provided in a child’s most natural learning environments**. Family centered functional outcomes **must** be written **prior** to the determination of service delivery decisions (see definition section for functional outcomes, within the *Service Description, Billing Codes and Rates* – EI Provider Handbook). Once the functional outcomes have been written, if it is determined that the outcomes cannot be met in the child’s natural learning environment, the IFSP team must complete the Worksheet.

The Worksheet requires the IFSP team to justify why it was determined that it was not appropriate to provide the service(s) in the natural learning environment. Justification must be based on the needs of the child and the “Principles of Early Intervention” and not on any of the following, which are considered unacceptable justification reasons:

- Administrative convenience; and/or
- Fiscal reasons; and/or
- Personnel limitations; and/or
- Parent/therapist preferences; and/or
- Medical needs rather than developmental needs.

In addition, justification must indicate why the recommended setting is necessary to achieve the identified outcome, as well as why no other natural learning environment is appropriate. An IFSP team should always maximize their efforts to support the family within the child’s natural learning environments before contemplating the need for any justification process. Justification for each outcome must include a plan to transition interventions into the natural setting.

Natural Environments Worksheet

Child's Name:

Date:

Natural Environments Justification

Outcome #:

Service(s):

Environment in which service(s) will be provided:

Explain why the IFSP team determined that it was not appropriate to provide this service in a Natural Environment:

Outcome #:

Service(s):

Environment in which service(s) will be provided:

Explain why the IFSP team determined that it was not appropriate to provide this service in a Natural Environment:

Outcome #:

Service(s):

Environment in which service(s) will be provided:

Explain why the IFSP team determined that it was not appropriate to provide this service in a Natural Environment:

Natural Environments Justification Worksheet

Review area	1 (unacceptable)	3 (acceptable)	5 (best practice)
<p>A. Adequate information and evidence is provided to support the rationale that a child's needs and outcomes cannot be achieved in natural settings.</p>	<p>The IFSP identifies one or more services that are not in a natural environment for the child and family.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">AND</p> <p>There is no justification or the justification is not based on the needs of the child but appears to be for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ administrative convenience, and/or ▪ fiscal reasons, and/or ▪ personnel limitations, and/or ▪ parent/therapist preferences. 	<p>The child is receiving most services in natural environments.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">AND</p> <p>When a service is provided in a setting that is not a natural environment, a justification is included in the IFSP that is based on the needs of the child, justifying that the setting is necessary to achieve the outcome.</p>	<p>All services are provided in natural environments.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">OR</p> <p>The child is receiving most services in natural environments.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">AND</p> <p>When a service is provided in a setting that is not a natural environment, a justification is included in the IFSP that is based on the needs of the child, justifying that the setting is necessary to achieve the outcome.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">AND</p> <p><u>For each service justified there is a plan to transition interventions into natural settings.</u></p>