Intensive Behavioral Intervention

Parent Guide

For children who have self-injurious, aggressive, or severely maladaptive behavior, and severe deficits in communication, social interaction, leisure or play skills. The IBI Guide for Parents is a guide to assist parents in selecting appropriate services for their children and understanding what to expect from providers of those services.

It is the intention of the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare that all families seeking specialized services for their children will be fully informed of their options. This guide is one tool to assist you through the process of eligibility determination and as you choose the most appropriate services for your child. If you need further information, please contact your local Developmental Disability Program.

**Purpose: To help parents**

- Understand the intensive behavioral intervention service, its limits and requirements
- Assess and select the most appropriate provider to meet their child and family’s needs
- Know what to expect of intensive behavioral interventions
- Self-evaluate the quality of service and the gains his or her child makes
- Advocate for the child’s needs to be addressed

**Definition of Intensive Behavioral Intervention**

Intensive Behavioral Interventions are individualized, comprehensive interventions used on a short term, one-to-one basis that have been shown to be effective and produce measurable outcomes which diminish behaviors that interfere with the development and use of language and appropriate social interaction skills or broaden an otherwise severely restricted range of interest. Intensive Behavioral Intervention is only available to children birth through age twenty-one (21) who have self-injurious, aggressive or severely maladaptive behavior and severe deficits in the following areas:

1) Verbal communication; or
2) Social interaction; or
3) Leisure and play skills.

**How can I decide which services will be best for my child?**

Each family must assess their concerns, priorities, and their child’s needs when they are seeking diagnosis or treatment recommendations. Researching the benefits of various treatment methodologies and techniques will be an important step in finding the methods that will work best for your child.
Considerations for Assessments

It is important to identify children with developmental delays or disorders as early as possible. Interventions at earlier stages in the child’s development may have a greater chance of reducing the short-term and long-term negative consequences of these disorders (Guralnick, 1998).

There is no single way that disorders such as autism are first identified in young children; this will vary somewhat depending on the child. In addition, the sequence of an assessment process may vary, too. Regardless of the order that they occur, the following elements of the assessment process are important for professionals and parents to consider when assessing young children with severe and challenging behaviors or with possible autism.

- Appropriate screening tests are used and further assessment is conducted if heightened concerns or clinical clues are identified
- Instruments designed to assess specific areas of concern are used
- Multiple sources of information are used including direct observation of the child and interview with the family
- A comprehensive health evaluation is completed
- Cultural and familial differences are considered including the use of interpreters who speak the child’s family’s language, when needed
- The assessment is conducted in a setting(s) that is/are familiar and comfortable to the child and the setting is assessed for distractions
- Parents are helped to understand the assessment procedures to be used and the findings.
  1. Important terms and concepts are explained
  2. The results and implications of the assessment are clarified
  3. The child’s performance is described in comparison to developmental norms
  4. All professionals involved are in communication with one another
  5. Sources of other credible information are provided to the family

Choosing Appropriate Interventions

Parents will need to evaluate each available program and service for the types of interventions they provide as well as their philosophical orientation toward children and their families. It will be important for families to feel that the program’s priorities are compatible with those of their family and that the preparation and expertise of the therapists is well aligned to respond to the needs of the child.

*Recent research (1997) by Dawson and Osterling reviewed eight programs thought to provide “state of the art” services to young children with autism. Despite varying instructional strategies implemented across programs, Dawson and Osterling (1997) found six common elements shared among these effective programs for young children with autism. The six common elements among these effective programs included:
1. **Curriculum content.** The following five basic skill domains were found to be emphasized:
   - Attending/Staying on task
   - Imitation
   - Comprehending and using language
   - Play
   - Social interaction with others, including peers.

2. **Need for Highly Supportive (Structured) Teaching Environments and Generalization Strategies.** Skills are systematically taught and then generalized to more complex, natural environments.

3. **Need for Predictability and Routine.** Routines assist the child to transitions from one activity to another.

4. **A Functional Approach to Problem Behaviors.** Maladaptive behaviors may be used for children to communicate their wants and needs. Behaviors must be assessed. This includes recording the behavior, developing a hypothesis about the function of the behavior for the child, changing the environment to support appropriate behavior and teaching appropriate behaviors to replace problem behaviors.

5. **Plans for Transitions between Intervention Programs.** Current and future therapists and teachers and the child’s parents consider the skills the child will need in the next setting and develops a plan to build needed skills and prepare the child for the change.

6. **Family Involvement.** For services to be effective, it is critical to involve family members in the overall program. By including parents, children receive extended hours of intervention, greater maintenance and generalization of acquired skills are achieved and challenging behaviors are prevented and/or effectively addressed

**Other Considerations.** Lastly, effective programs provided a range of 15-40 hours of intervention work per week, with an average of 27 hours. As stated, all parents included a parent education component; therefore the number of hours of intervention each child received is likely more than the number of therapy/school based hours provided.

**Questions to Ask Providers**

1. What kinds of interventions, therapy, and services do you provide?

2. Do you have a particular philosophy on working with children with severe and challenging behaviors? (or with children who have _____?)

3. How many hours per week do these services require, and how much of this is one-to-one with my child?

4. How would you describe a typical day or session?
5. What experience do the therapists have in working with children with severe and challenging behaviors?

6. Will the people serving my child be certified as professionals or will they be paraprofessionals?

7. What experiences does the person who supervises the program have? How closely does the supervisor work with the therapists and parents?

8. What kinds of ongoing training do your full and part time staffs participate in?

9. Are parents involved with planning as part of the intervention team? How?

10. Do you provide parent training program?

11. How much and what kinds of involvement are expected of parents and family members?

12. Are parents welcome to participate in or observe therapy?

13. What techniques do you use to manage difficult behaviors?

14. Do you ever use physical aversive or any physically intrusive procedures? If yes, please describe them.

15. Please describe your program for communication and language development. Do you use a picture communication system, sign language other kinds of communications systems or all of these?

16. Are there opportunities for integration with typical and/or higher functioning children?

17. How do you evaluate the child’s progress, and how often?

18. How do you keep parents informed of the child’s progress?

What treatment services are available for my child?

Early intervention services

The Idaho Infant Toddler Program provides early intervention services to infants and toddlers from birth to three years and their families through the provisions of the Individualized Family Services Plan. Children must have a chronic medical condition, a developmental delay, or a developmental disability to qualify for services. Individualized planning with the family is required to assure comprehensive, coordinated services to maximize the potential of each child.

Special education and related services

Local school districts provide special education and related services through the provision of Individualized Educational Programs for children who are eligible. Children from three to twenty-two years must have a significant delay or disability that affects their educational performance to be eligible. Individualized planning is required to develop a program for each child. All services the child is receiving should be in coordination with his/her school program so methods are compatible and skills are generalized across settings.
DDA services

Developmental Disability Agency (DDA) services are available to children and adults who are eligible for Medicaid and have a developmental disability. These community agencies are licensed providers of rehabilitation and habilitative services. Services are to be provided in community-based settings in natural environments such as home, work, leisure or center-based settings, based on the consumer needs, interests or choices. Services provided by DDAs promote independence, participation, and inclusion of people with developmental disabilities in their neighborhoods and communities. Services provided through DDAs include evaluation, diagnostic and treatment services that include:

- Medical
- Occupational therapy
- Social Physical therapy services
- Speech Language Pathology
- Developmental
- Intensive Behavioral Interventions
- Psychological or psychiatric

Approaches for Behavioral and Educational Intervention

Behavioral and educational interventions have become the dominant approach for treating children and adults with autism. In recent years, several intensive intervention programs have been developed using a systematic behavioral approach, often referred to as applied behavioral analysis. Behavioral techniques include specific approaches to help individuals acquire or change behaviors. Behavioral therapies are sometimes also called behavioral modification methods. The techniques refer to specific procedures aimed at teaching new skills and behavior. Intensive behavior intervention programs use an array of behavioral techniques that change over time as the child progresses and as different skill areas are addressed.

Behavioral and educational intervention programs include:

- Systematic use of behavioral teaching techniques and intervention procedures
- Intensive direct instruction by the therapist, usually on a one-to-one basis
- Extensive parent training and support so that parents can provide additional hours of intervention

Consideration in determining the frequency and intensity of intervention include:

- Age of the child
- Severity of symptoms or challenging behaviors
- Rate of progress
- Other health considerations
- Tolerance of the child for the intervention
- Family participation
It is important to clearly identify target behaviors that need to be addressed for each child and to individualize strategies including selection of any reinforcers. A continuum of behavioral strategies may be important as the child progresses from more individualize (structured one-to-one session) to more general interactions (such as with peers in social groups).

As the child progresses it is important to use behavioral techniques that facilitate generalization of new behaviors from structured environments to more natural settings.

It is important that a reinforcer assessment is done to determine which items or activities will serve as reinforcers for a particular child. A reinforcer is a consequence that increases the probability of appropriate response. It is important to recognize that there are several types of potential reinforcers, such as sensory, edible (food or drink), and social (such as praise). There are varieties of techniques used for specific needs. They include techniques for reducing maladaptive behaviors, techniques to improved communication, techniques to improve social interactions, and parent training.

It is recommended that parent-training programs be included as an important part of comprehensive intervention programs for children with severe, challenging behaviors. These programs are useful because they:

- Help support the family in caring for the child
- Provide an opportunity to include the parent in the intervention
- Help the family to use the intervention strategies in the daily routines of the child

**Other Experiential Approaches**

Other intervention approaches for young children with autism include a diverse collection of therapeutic models and approaches. Some of the approaches for the basis for intensive intervention programs while others are more limited in scope. Some of the approaches are commonly used; others are less commonly used, and some are controversial. The approaches include:

- The Developmental Individual Difference Relationship (DIR) model sometimes referred to as “floor time”
- Sensory integration therapy
- Music therapy
- Touch therapy
- Auditory integration therapy
- Facilitated communication
- Medication and diet therapies

Parents should explore that adequate evidence has been found to prove that any specific treatment approach is effective. *Only methods that are shown to be effective and produce measurable outcomes, which diminish behaviors that interfere with development and the use of language and appropriate social interaction skills, should be used for Intensive Behavioral Interventions.*