

XVII. NATURAL ENVIRONMENTS**A. POLICIES**

1. *To the maximum extent appropriate, early intervention services are provided in natural environments.*
2. *The provision of early intervention services for any infant or toddler occurs in a setting other than a natural environment only when early intervention cannot be achieved satisfactorily for the infant or toddler in a natural setting.* (34 CFR 303.167(c))
3. *The Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) includes a statement of the natural environment, as described in 303.12(b), in which early intervention services will be provided, and a justification of the extent, if any, to which the services will not be provided in a natural environment.* (34 CFR 303.344(d)(1)(ii))

Note: With respect to the requirements in Sec.303.344(d), the appropriate location of services for some infants and toddlers might be a hospital setting—during the period in which they require extensive medical intervention. However, for these and other eligible children, early intervention services must be provided in natural environments (the home, childcare centers, or other community settings) to the maximum extent appropriate to the needs of the child. (34 CFR 303.344 Note)

B. PROCEDURES

1. The Lead Agency has developed the following strategies to ensure that the requirements of Part C are met:
 - a. A memorandum has been sent to all local interagency coordinating councils indicating the change in Part C of IDEA regulatory language effective July 1, 1998 and encouraging all local interagency coordinating councils (LICCs) to review the IFSP process steps for determining the natural environment in which services are delivered as outlined in the June 1994 Technical Assistance Document Early Intervention in the Natural Environment: What Does it Mean for Young Children?
 - b. The June 1994 Technical Assistance Document Early Intervention in the Natural Environment: What Does it Mean for Young Children? has been revised. The revised technical assistance documents are in the May 2000 manual, Family-Centered Early Intervention within the Context of Daily Activities and Routines of Children and Families; Development of the IFSP; Procedural Safeguards: Rights and Prior Notice. These manuals have been distributed statewide.
 - c. An early intervention service delivery approach which incorporates principles of family-centered care, consultative services and direct services in integrated/natural settings, and community resource-based services is being field tested in Virginia. Intensive training and technical assistance are being provided along with pre- and post-outcome measurements. Findings from this field test will be reviewed by the task force which developed the service delivery approach. Next step recommendations will be generated as result of the field test and depending upon the findings recommendations may include statewide implementation of training and technical assistance on the service delivery approach.
 - d. The Lead Agency is scheduling statewide training on the IFSP process which incorporates the natural environments requirements into all aspects of IFSP development.

- e. The Lead Agency is incorporating the natural environment requirements into the Monitoring and Improvement Measurement System (MIMS) for local self-study.
2. LICCs are responsible for developing and implementing policies and procedures (including mechanisms) that meet the above stated policies on natural environments. Local policies and procedures must specify the IFSP process steps used in determining natural environments for provision of services.