

# The Importance of Early Intervention

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# The State Diagnostic and Counselling Center

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- Established in 1986
- Financed by the state
- Operated under the Department of Social Services
- Serves all of Iceland
  - Population appr. 280.000
  - Appr 103.000 squarekm



# Clinical services - main objective

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- Evaluation of children and adolescents with various types of developmental disabilities
- Subsequent counselling to parents and other caregivers regarding
  - nature and cause of disability
  - prognosis
  - treatment modalities
  - educational needs
  - other services



# The State Diagnostic and Counselling Center

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- Total staff of 40 specialists
- Annual budget of 220 million Icelandic kronas
- Main government center for coordinating services for children with disabilities
- Interdisciplinary working model



## Specialties presented at the center

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- Neurodevelopmental pediatrics
- Psychology
- Physical therapy
- Occupational therapy
- Speech and language pathology
- Developmental therapy
- Social work



## Main objective – clinical services

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- A tertiary referral center
- Receives appr 250 new referrals each year – majority preschool children
- Emphasis on early intervention methodology
- Emphasis on long term intervention at the local level with support from the center
- Emphasis on mainstreaming and use of community resources



# Main objective – clinical services

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- A tertiary referral center
- Receives appr 250 new referrals each year
- **Emphasis on early intervention methodology**
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- Emphasis on mainstreaming and use of Community Services





# What is early intervention?

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Early intervention applies to children of school age or younger who are discovered to have or be at risk of developing a handicapping condition or other special need that may affect their development.

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# What is early intervention?

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Early intervention consists in the provision of services such children and their families for the purpose of lessening the effects of the condition.

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# What is early intervention?

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For all risk populations, early intervention is best conceptualized as providing preventive intervention; i.e., efforts to prevent or minimize the impact of risk factors on a child's development and general well-being

International Society On Early Intervention



# What is early intervention?

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The value of effective early intervention services for children with established disabilities and their families cannot be overestimated

**International Society On Early Intervention**



# What is early intervention?

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Early intervention can be remedial or preventive in nature--remediating existing developmental problems or preventing their occurrence.

Early intervention may focus on the child alone or on the child and the family together.



# What is early intervention?

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Early intervention may begin at any time  
between birth and school age

It may be center-based, home-based,  
hospital-based, or a combination

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## Aims of early intervention

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- To enhance the child's development
- To provide support and assistance to the family,
- To maximize the child's and family's benefit to society

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# What is not early intervention?

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Can “everything” that we do to help small children with disabilities or at risk be called early intervention?

Yes, but.....



# Hallmarks of effective early intervention

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## Intervention is started at an early age

- the rate of human learning and development is most rapid in the preschool years
- early intervention increases the developmental and educational gains for the child
- it probably also advances the biological neurodevelopmental process



# Hallmarks of effective early intervention

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## Early age of the child at the time of intervention

- requires early identification of disability/risk factors
- requires availability of early evaluation and monitoring of developmental progress

Early detection is an important part of early intervention: The earlier the intervention, the more effective it is



# Hallmarks of effective early intervention

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## Involvement of parents/family in their child's treatment

- Outcomes of family intervention include:
  - the parent's ability to implement the child's program at home
  - reduced stress that facilitates the health of the family
  - early intervention improves the functioning of the family



# Hallmarks of effective early intervention

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Includes social support for the parents and family unit

- family counselling
- financial support
- attention to the needs of other family members



# Hallmarks of effective early intervention

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Includes adjustments in the child's daily life and environment

- adjust demands to the abilities of the child
- takes into account its strengths and abilities
- offers interaction with other children with needed support
- adjusts the day care center and school to the child's needs
- offers necessary aids for the child and the environment



# Hallmarks of effective early intervention

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Successful programs are reported to:

- be more highly structured than less successful ones
- clearly specify and frequently monitor child and family behavior objectives
- regularly use child assessment and progress data to modify instruction



# Hallmarks of effective early intervention

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Successful programs are reported to:

- follow an individual education plan that is developed in cooperation of different professionals and parents
- include frequent evaluation of progress and goals
- is truly interdisciplinary



# Obstacles of effective early intervention

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Delay in the detection of a disability or of risk factors

Delay in diagnosis and evaluation following detection

Lack of community resources for proper services



# Obstacles of effective early intervention

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Lack of professionals with proper specialisation

Lack of commitment of the “authorities”

Lack of coordination and cooperation

Parents have to assume the role of “case managers”

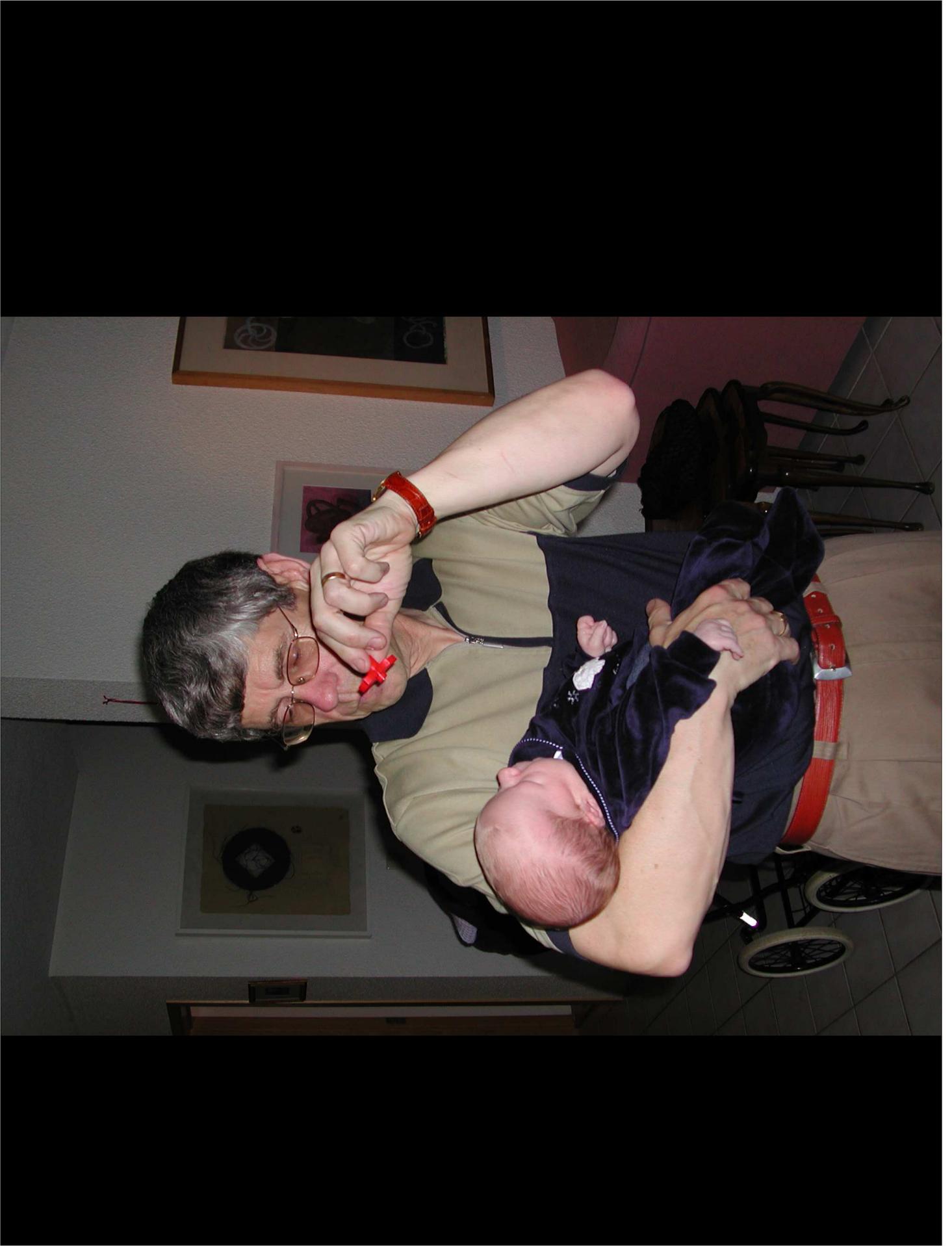


# Is early intervention effective?

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After nearly 50 years of research, there is evidence-- both quantitative (data-based) and qualitative (reports of parents and teachers)--that early intervention increases the developmental and educational gains for the child, improves the functioning of the family, and reaps long-term benefits for society.

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# Welcome back to Iceland



# Welcome back to Iceland

