



# Early Intervention Engagement for Families Impacted by Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome (NAS) & Substance Exposed Newborns (SEN): A Model of Support

Developed for Providers by the Massachusetts Early Intervention  
NAS Stakeholders Group



## Vision

Our vision is that all eligible or potentially eligible families are connected to their local early intervention (EI) program at birth in order to ensure the earliest possible engagement in services that will promote the best possible outcomes.

Newborns with a diagnosis of Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome (NAS) are automatically eligible for one year of services by virtue of that diagnosis; and Substance Exposed Newborns (SEN) may be found eligible for EI's state-wide system of supports and services.

## Need and Rationale

Parents need support, empathy, and strategies to understand the unique symptoms of their infant. Secure, early attachments increase social, relational, physical and behavioral successes of infants, and are fostered when parents are attentive and able to respond to infant cues. EI can provide a non-judgmental continuum of care from hospital to home for parents dealing with recovery and environmental stressors, mental health concerns, and feelings of guilt and anxiety. Newborns diagnosed with NAS can be more difficult to care for in part due to:

- increased risk of low birth weight
- poor feeding
- sleep difficulties
- prematurity
- irritability

## Model

Early Intervention services are designed to help support families and caregivers, and to enhance the development and learning of infants and toddlers through individualized, developmentally appropriate activities embedded within the child's and family's everyday life activities. An Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) is developed in partnership with each eligible family that defines outcomes and services to be provided with the child, family and other caregivers.



## Hospital Transition and Referral

- Referral to Early Intervention (EI) may be made while the mother and infant are still in the hospital, allowing the collaboration and preparation for continuity of care upon release.
- In-hospital visits by an EI professional can happen, allowing a positive relationship to begin early and the reinforcement of interactions and techniques suggested by hospital staff.
- The referral to EI should be made to the town where the newborn will be living.
- EI services may continue for one year and up to three years, providing continuity of care and long term relationships that support healthy child and family outcomes.

## Family Education

- The family centered approach of EI allows families to make decisions based on their unique culture, values, priorities and routines. This allows engagement of all caregivers (grandparents, foster parents, etc.) who may have primary roles in the child's life.
- Open conversations about post-partum depression helps remove stigma and increases the chances of early referral and treatment, and may allow for preventive self-care strategies.
- EI staff are knowledgeable about and partner with community providers for medical care, addiction issues, mental health services, childcare, food and clothing needs and other supports.

## Strategies

- EI programs utilize a team approach, which includes the family. Services may be provided by a developmental specialist, physical therapist, speech-language pathologist, mental health worker, occupational therapist, social worker, nurse, and other specialty service providers.
- Setting short term goals in collaboration with the family allows for early successes.
- EI has adopted a home visiting philosophy with the focus on the mother-infant dyad to promote and reinforce confidence, competence and mutual enjoyment.
- EI professionals promote and reinforce interventions such as minimizing light and sound, swaddling techniques, reading and responding to infant cues, soothing techniques such as the "elevator hold" (up and down), and addressing feeding difficulties.
- EI prioritizes understanding what is important to families and builds services around these priorities.

## Where can I learn more about Early Intervention?

Call the Central Directory at 800-905-8437, or visit [www.massfamilyties.org](http://www.massfamilyties.org) for a listing of certified Early Intervention programs serving your city or town. Call and speak with a local EI program to make a referral or visit the Parent Leadership Project at [www.eiplp.org](http://www.eiplp.org) to learn more.