

Natural Environments

Early Support for Infants and Toddlers (ESIT)

Practice Guide

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Washington State Department of
CHILDREN, YOUTH & FAMILIES

Purpose

The purpose of this practice guide is to explain existing requirements and evidence-based practices for providing and documenting services in natural environments.

What are Natural Environments and Why are They Important?

Natural environments refer to *everyday learning opportunities* which take place in *home and community settings* where children live, learn, and play.

Providing services in natural environments is not just the law, but more importantly, it reflects the core mission of early intervention, which is to support families to provide learning opportunities for their child within the activities, routines, and events of everyday life. ([IDEA Infant & Toddler Coordinators Association, 2000, p.1](#))

Providing services in natural environments supports the Washington State Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) Early Supports for Infants and Toddlers (ESIT) [Mission](#) and has many advantages for children, families, and communities. Services in the natural environment:

- Use the numerous learning opportunities available in everyday moments.
- Enhance the capacity of the family to support their child's development.
- Enable children to learn new skills within existing and familiar routines.
- Support the family's belonging in their communities.
- Enhance the capacity of communities to support individuals with disabilities.
- Foster the use and development of informal and non-specialized support systems.
- Encourage community inclusion.
- Promote the civil rights fought for and achieved in legislation, such as the [Individuals with Disabilities Education Act](#) (IDEA), [Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act](#) and the [Americans with Disabilities Act](#).
- Are consistent with professional consensus and evidence-based practices in the field of early childhood developmental supports.

Two Aspects of Natural Environments

The two main aspects of natural environments are:

1. Natural Settings
 - the locations in which services take place, and
2. Natural Learning Opportunities
 - the people, interactions, materials, and activities that make up a visit.

Much of the early interpretation of IDEA Part C natural environments requirements focused primarily on the location where services take place, the field has grown to understand that the context and activities that make up a support service (home visit) are just as, if not more, important than the setting.

Natural Settings

Definition

IDEA Part C federal regulations define natural environment settings as those locations that are “natural or typical for a same-aged infant or toddler without a disability” 34 C.F.R. §303.26.

Requirements

IDEA Part C services must be provided, “to the maximum extent appropriate in natural environments” 34 C.F.R. §303.126(a). [DCYF ESIT Policy and Procedures](#) and DCYF ESIT contracts with Provider Agencies affirm this requirement for all services conducted by ESIT service providers. See the Resources and Citations [Natural Settings subsection](#) of this document for more information.

Examples of Natural and Non-Natural Settings

A setting is considered “natural” if it is a location where same-age children without disabilities typically spend time. Some examples include:

- Homes of family and friends
- Grocery store
- Restaurant
- Playground
- Public library
- Children’s museum
- Childcare center
- Tribal community center with childcare, Early Head Start, and Early Childhood Education and Assistance Programs (ECEAP) available for all tribal members.

A setting is considered a non-natural environment if it is a place that was designed only for children with disabilities or a place where only children with disabilities would spend time. Some examples include:

- Services provided in the therapy clinic.
- Specialized therapy or teaching room designed or set aside for children with disabilities, even if that room is in a community setting, such as a special room in a community center.
- A community setting used after-hours only for children with disabilities, such as using an Early Head Start classroom for ESIT services, after all the other children have gone home.
- A rented space at the community library where only the child, family, and service provider(s) are in the room for a session.

Natural Learning Opportunities

Definition

Natural learning opportunities are those everyday opportunities that take place within a child and family’s typical routines and interactions. Determining if a service includes natural learning opportunities is more complex than determining if a setting is natural because there are more factors to consider, such as:

- People and social interactions
- Materials used

- Time of day
- Activities and routines.

Requirements

The Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), the federal program that administers Part C nationally, states, “Part C early intervention builds upon and provides supports and resources to assist family members and caregivers to enhance children’s learning and development *through everyday learning opportunities*.” ([Agreed Upon Mission and Key Principles, 2008](#)).

DCYF ESIT Policies and Procedures state that ESIT Part C services are provided “in a manner that will enhance the capacity of the family in facilitating their child’s development *through natural learning opportunities* at home or in community settings where children live, learn, or play” ([DCYF ESIT Policies and Procedures](#). Early Intervention Services. 2.A.12(I)).

Likewise, the DCYF ESIT contract with each ESIT Provider Agency states that providers must use practices that strengthen the capacity of parents and other caregivers to *provide everyday learning opportunities* for their child and increase child participation in daily activities and family routines.

Evidence-Based Practices

Federal regulations, ESIT Policies and Procedures, and DCYF ESIT contract requirements state that ESIT services reflect scientifically based research, including evidence-based and promising practices. Natural learning opportunities have been consistently recognized by the early childhood education field to be evidence-based best practice for enhancing family capacity and promoting child development. See the Resources and Citations [Natural Learning Opportunities](#) subsection of this document for more information on the professional consensus behind using natural learning opportunities in early childhood services.

Examples of Practices Using Natural and Non-Natural Learning Opportunities

Practices that support natural opportunities include:

- Interacting with familiar people in the child’s life, in ways that are typical for their relationship.
- Using materials the child is familiar with or that the family has available.
- Prioritizing meeting at times of day that are convenient for the family and fit into their daily routines.
- Engaging in activities that the family is able and willing to participate in and that the child and family enjoy.

Practices that do not support natural learning opportunities include:

- Centering the session around the child’s interaction with the ESIT service provider.
- Providing services to the child during which the caregiver is not present or does not participate.
- Providing services in a group designed only for, or comprised of, a disproportionate number of children with disabilities.
- Bringing new toys, books and games to the home and taking them back at the end of the session.
- Scheduling sessions when convenient for the provider, but not for the family (e.g. during a child’s typical naptime or on a day when the family usually engages in some other important activity).

- Encouraging the child and family to repeatedly engage in activities which they find unfamiliar, unimportant, unpleasant, or culturally inappropriate, even if the provider thinks the activities would be beneficial.

Service, Setting, Method, Strategy, and Intensity

The Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) team, which includes the parents, is responsible for determining what ESIT services will be provided and documenting those services in the IFSP. The team first develops functional outcomes and then decides which services, providers, settings, methods, strategies, and intensities will support the child and family in achieving those outcomes.

Services

IDEA Part C requires that most Part C services be provided in natural environments to the maximum extent appropriate but *does not* specify where or how *non-Part C* services are provided. Having a clear understanding of which services are designated as Part C services can answer many natural environments questions that arise. Please see the Resources and Citations [Services, Settings, Methods, Strategies and Intensities](#) subsection of this document for more information.

Part C Services

Federal IDEA Part C regulations list seventeen types of Part C services that may be provided to an eligible infant/toddler and their family. See the [ESIT Qualified Personnel Guidelines](#) for a list of these seventeen services and the personnel who are qualified to provide them in Washington State. Additional services may be considered Part C services if they meet federal guidelines.

Pre-IFSP Activities

Part C activities that occur prior to issuing the initial IFSP, such as Child Find, intake, and initial eligibility evaluations, are not mandated to meet the IDEA Part C natural environments requirements. However, it is best practice to conduct an eligibility evaluation in a natural setting to see how the child functions in their everyday environment.

Other Services

Many families engage in services and supports that, while potentially beneficial, are not considered Part C services. These supports are recognized as “Other Services”, are not provided through Part C funds, could support IFSP outcomes indirectly, and should be documented on the IFSP. Please follow current training protocols to ensure accurate documentation of Other Services/Resources. Examples which may be defined in the following sections and include, but are not limited to:

- Parent to Parent Support Groups
- Early Head Start or another Home Visiting program
- Child Care
- Community Play Groups
- Medicaid/Apple Health
- Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) Nutrition Program

Other Services do not fall under IDEA Part C and are not mandated to be delivered in a natural environment. However, it’s important to remember that even if a service does not fall under legal or contractual

requirements to be provided in a natural environment, *research shows that early supports and services which incorporate natural learning opportunities in natural settings are much more effective in meeting the needs of young children and their families.*

See Appendix 1 and 2 for a decision tree to assist with determining if a service meets the natural environment requirements.

Setting, Method, Strategy and Intensity

The following terms are used as defined by the DCYF ESIT program. Please see the Resources and Citations [Services, Settings, Methods, Strategies and Intensities](#) subsection of this document for more information.

The service **setting** is the location where the parent or caregiver and child are when they participate in services and may be deemed either a natural or non-natural environment. Examples include child's home, community park and ESIT Provider Agency office or clinic.

The **method** is the service delivery modality and may take place in a variety of natural and non-natural environment settings. Examples include in-person visits, videoconference calls, phone calls and in-person groups. Services provided virtually are considered to take place in a natural environment if the child and family are participating from a natural environment, like their home, and the ESIT service provider is in the ESIT Provider Agency office, or an agency approved workplace.

The **strategy** is the particular activity that will be used to meet an IFSP outcome, such as parent or caregiver coaching, turn-taking games, sand play, songs, imitation, using assistive technology, etc. Strategies may also include the use of particular programs and protocols such as DIRFloortime®, the Hanen Program®, Promoting First Relationships®, and the Hawaii Early Learning Profile (HELP®) curriculum.

The **intensity** refers to the frequency and duration of services and can also indicate whether the service is provided to only one family/child at a time or is delivered in a group format.

Infant and Toddler Groups

Part C services provided in a group format must also meet the natural environment requirement.

It is recommended that:

- The group is designed to meet the needs of infants and toddlers with a range of diverse learning needs and abilities.
- The group would continue to exist if no children with IFSPs were enrolled.
- The ratio of children with disabilities in the group is generally representative of the proportion of children with disabilities in the surrounding community. (The [National Institute of Health \(NIH\)](#) reports that approximately 11-18% of children experience some level of developmental delay.)

ESIT Provider Agencies may host or conduct groups at their own facility to support IFSP outcomes, however the above recommendations need to be met to consider the setting a natural environment. If the above criteria are not possible, the Part C service provided in these groups would require an acceptable justification with a plan to return to a natural environment documented on the child's IFSP.

Some examples of group settings which might be a natural environment for a particular child include community recreation centers, libraries, children’s museums, places of worship, along with Early Head Start, Early ECEAP, and childcare classrooms.

See Appendix 3 for more guidance on considerations for infant and toddler groups.

Example #1 (Natural Environment): A toddler and her parents participate in weekly home visits with an ESIT speech-language pathologist (SLP). Once a month, the family and the SLP attend a toddler playgroup at the local children’s museum. During the group, the SLP coaches the parents and group facilitator on ways to enhance the toddler’s communication with peers, which aligns with a goal on the family’s IFSP. *In this case, a family is participating in a Part C service (speech-language pathology) in a group format and the setting meets natural environments requirements.*

Example 2 (Non-Natural Environment): A toddler and her parents participate in weekly home visits with an ESIT SLP. Once a month the family and the SLP attend a playgroup at the local children’s library for toddlers with Down Syndrome. During the group, the SLP coaches the parents and the group facilitator on ways to enhance the toddler’s communication with peers, which aligns with a goal on the family’s IFSP. *In this case, the family is participating in a Part C service (speech-language pathology) in both a group format in a non-natural environment setting, and a natural environment setting at home.* If the IFSP team determines that participation in this group is essential to the toddler meeting her IFSP goals, a justification and a plan to return all services to a natural setting will be included in the IFSP. Eventually, the SLP might discontinue working with the family at the library group for children with Down Syndrome and will instead support the family at a setting that *does* meet natural environments requirements, such as an inclusive library group for all children in the community.

Parent-specific Services

Often parents attend Parent-to-Parent support groups with other families of children with disabilities to access connections and community with other parents of children with disabilities. Parents of children with disabilities may access many valuable supports which take place in non-natural environment settings such as medical clinics, hospitals, therapy centers, etc. Part C services provided specifically in support of an outcome written to support the parent or caregiver, and which do not directly include the child, are not required to take place in a natural environment.

Please see the Resources and Citations [Parent-Specific Services and Infant/Toddler Groups](#) subsection of this document for more information.

Justifications and Plans for Services in Non-Natural Environments

In rare situations, the IFSP team may determine that, even with supplementary supports, one or more IFSP outcomes cannot be met in the context of any natural environment. In that case, the team is required to document on the IFSP: 1) a justification for the decision to provide Part C services in a non-natural environment and 2) a plan to return services to natural environments. Please see the Resources and Citations [Justifications and Plans for Services in Non-Natural Environments](#) subsection of this document for more information.

Justification

Acceptable Justifications

An acceptable justification for providing Part C services in a non-natural environment is demonstrated by a comprehensive thoughtful process that is:

- Discussed and decided by the whole IFSP team, including the parent.
- Based on the child's IFSP outcomes.
- Evaluated/updated at each periodic review.

The following support adequate documentation of an acceptable justification on the IFSP:

- The decision process the IFSP team went through to make the determination.
- Evidence that the decision was made by the entire IFSP team with evidence to support the team's decision.
- Evidence that a variety of natural environment options were explored.
- A description of how supports and gains made in a non-natural setting will be carried over into the child's daily settings, activities, and routines.

Unacceptable Justifications

The following should not be used as justifications for providing services in non-natural environments:

- Parent convenience.
- Parent need for networking with other parents of children with disabilities.
- Provider preference or convenience.
- Provider agency staffing capacity or financial considerations.

Addressing Parent Preference

Providing supports in a natural environment is a core principle and practice of IDEA Part C services. It's possible this core principle might not be a good fit for some families, and they have a right to seek services elsewhere. However, if, after a thorough conversation about what ESIT services include, the family decides not to pursue ESIT services, refer the family to other appropriate services. Other appropriate community services might include developmental services provided by local hospitals, non-ESIT therapy clinics, or programs like Early Head Start or Home Visiting. The family may also benefit from referrals to non-developmental services such as community events and classes, support groups, or learning centers.

Plan

Along with the justification, providers must document a plan and timeline for moving or returning services to the natural settings and learning opportunities for a particular child and family. The following support effective plans to return to the natural environment:

- Steps that will be taken.
- Supports necessary to complete the plan.

Examples of Justification and Plan to Return Services to Natural Environment

Example #1: A toddler's initial IFSP team (consisting of a Family Resources Coordinator (FRC), Occupational therapist (OT), Developmental Specialist, and the child's mother) created functional outcomes related to feeding, stability while sitting upright, and sustained attention. When it came time to decide on a setting for services, the child's mother disclosed that it is unsafe for her to have visitors at her home as her partner is jealous and becomes violent once the visitors leave.

The FRC discussed safety planning and local resources with the child's mother. The IFSP team discussed virtual sessions and community settings, such as the park, library, mall and a local fast-food restaurant. The mom stated that the best time to meet is 7:30 am. Home-based virtual options were not possible as her partner did not allow her to use the home computer. The library and mall are not places where feeding routinely happens and are not yet open at 7:30 am, so those locations were eliminated as options. Winter weather was not conducive to meeting outside, so the park option was eliminated. A local fast-food restaurant was an option for breakfast at 7:30, but the mother was unsure if she could afford to eat there every week and, with the toddler's attention challenges in public settings, she felt it would be stressful and difficult to focus on the sitting and feeding skills at a restaurant.

The mom stated she would feel safe in the clinic setting and that the quiet environment would allow her son to focus on feeding skills without the extra stimulation of a public environment. The team decided to begin services in the non-natural clinic setting. The plan for transitioning services to a natural environment included:

- Begin work on maintaining attention in increasingly stimulus-rich activities in the clinic.
- After 2 months, sessions will focus on carrying over new skills into public settings and the FRC will initiate another safety planning discussion with the mom.
- If home safety is still a concern when spring weather returns in April, consider a park location or other community location.

Example #2: A foster mother is very concerned about the social emotional development of the 2-year-old child in her care, especially related to peer interaction. The IFSP team, consisting of a FRC, a Developmental Specialist, and the foster mother, created an IFSP outcome for emotional regulation and positively interacting with others, including adults and children in the home. They determined that the Developmental Specialist would provide home-based services through coaching and use the Promoting First Relationships curriculum to assist with building early relational health between foster family and child.

The foster mother is also interested in attending a weekly toddler group to provide opportunities for the child to practice skills within another environment, especially since the child is nearing the age of transition to preschool. The FRC added toddler group participation as a strategy to the outcomes as an additional way for the foster mother and Developmental Specialist to enhance the child's social emotional development through peer interaction.

The IFSP team discussed the range of toddler groups available in the community to support the IFSP outcome. These included the neighborhood library with weekly story time and a music exploration group for toddlers held in the basement of the local church (the FRC could arrange for a scholarship). Additionally, the ESIT

Provider Agency has a weekly toddler group that focuses on peer play, group participation, and pre-literacy activities for children enrolled in their ESIT Program with children from the community sometimes in attendance (ratio of children with and without disabilities are not met or are not consistent).

The Developmental Specialist offered to attend any of these toddler groups with the family to further coach the foster parent with follow-through during home visits. The IFSP team explored the pros and cons of each group and believed that all these options were appropriate, however the foster mother felt the group hosted by the ESIT Provider Agency (considered a non-natural environment) would be a good first step towards the goal of attending the group hosted at the library (considered a natural environment). The team decided participation in the ESIT Provider Agency group with more support would prepare the child for a more inclusive setting in the library group. The team's steps towards the decision were described in the justification and timelines were outlined in the plan in the IFSP. The plan for transitioning services to a natural environment included:

- Foster mother and Developmental Specialist will support child in active engagement and participation in ESIT Provider Agency toddler program through December (for 3 months).
- Foster mother and Developmental Specialist will support child in active engagement and participation in story time at library through March (for 3 months).
- Foster mother will support child in active engagement and participation in story time at library with coaching follow-up through the existing home visits with Developmental Specialist as child transitions to preschool.

Documentation of Settings and Natural Environments

All anticipated settings, along with details on whether those settings are natural or non-natural environments, must be documented on the IFSP.

Selecting Setting on the IFSP

- If the service is provided in both natural and non-natural environments, enter the service separately on the IFSP for each setting.
 - Example Scenario: Billy participates in OT services once a month in the clinic and three times per month in his home. In the Part C Services section of the IFSP, the FRC enters OT twice; one entry indicates OT once a month in the non-natural clinic setting, and one entry indicates OT three times a month in the natural home setting.
- If one or two sessions unexpectedly need to take place in a non-natural environment, this can be documented in the child's record and the IFSP does not need to be reviewed. However, any *planned* sessions in a non-natural environment need to be included on the IFSP, with the accompanied justification component.

Changing Setting on the IFSP

- A change of settings from *one natural environment to another* (e.g. from home visits to park visits) *does not* require an IFSP Review and can be updated during the next scheduled IFSP Review or Annual Update.

- A change of settings from a *natural environment to a non-natural environment* (e.g. from home visits to clinic visits) or a change in settings from a non-natural environment back to a natural environment (e.g. clinic visits to home visits) *does* require a full IFSP Review with a justification and plan to move back to the natural environment.

Resources and Citations

What are natural environments and why are they important?

- IDEA Infant & Toddler Coordinators Association (2000). Position Paper on the Provision of Early Intervention Services in Accordance with Federal Requirements on Natural Environments
- ESIT Guiding Concepts: Mission, Principles and Outcomes (2020)
- Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (2004)
- Section 504, Rehabilitation Act of 1973
- Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990
- American Academy of Pediatrics Clinical Report (2013). Early Intervention, IDEA Part C Services, and the Medical Home: Collaboration for Best Practice and Best Outcomes.
- Dunst, Bruder & Esperwindt (2014). Family Capacity-Building in Early Childhood Intervention: Do Context and Setting Matter?

Natural Settings

- IDEA Part C Code of Federal Regulations
 - Natural Environments. 34 C.F.R. §303.26
 - Early intervention Services. 34 C.F.R. §303.126
 - Early Intervention Services. 34 C.F.R. §303.13
- Part C State Performance Plan/Annual Performance Report (2021). Compliance Indicator 2.
- Children Receiving Inpatient Medical Care ESIT Practice Guide
- ECTA Center: Federal Requirements on EI Services in Natural Environments
- DCYF ESIT Policies and Procedures
 - Natural Environments. 2.A.29
 - Natural Environments. 1.D.18
 - Early Intervention Services. 2.A.12(G)
 - Natural Environments Policy. 11.A

Natural Learning Opportunities

- Workgroup on Principles and Practices in Natural Environments, Office of Special Education Programs TA Community of Practice: Part C Settings. (2008). Agreed upon mission and key principles for providing early intervention services in natural environments.
- Division for Early Childhood. (2014). DEC recommended practices in early intervention/early childhood special education 2014. E1 p. 9.
- DCYF ESIT Policies and Procedures
 - Early Intervention Services. 2.A.12(G)
- Dunst, C., (2020). Everyday learning opportunities of young children with and without developmental disabilities or delays. *International Journal of Early Childhood Environmental Education*, 7(3), 23-41.

Services, Settings, Methods, Strategies, and Intensities

- ESIT Qualified Personnel Guidelines
- IDEA Part C Code of Federal Regulations
 - Early intervention services, 34 C.F.R. §303.13
 - Early Intervention Services, 34 C.F.R. 303.344(d)(2)
- DCYF ESIT Policies and Procedures
 - Natural Environments Procedures. 11.B.2

Parent-Specific Services and Infant/Toddler Groups

- Early Intervention Program for Infants and Toddlers with Disabilities, 76 Federal Register 60157 (to be codified at 34 C.F.R.) Natural Environments.
- OSEP Response to Letter to Yarnell, Pennsylvania, October 19, 1999, as cited in Infant & Toddler Connection of Virginia (2002) Natural Environments Correlations with Federal Regulations, Policies and Procedures and OSEP Policy Letters. p. 11.
- OSEP Response to Letter to Honorable Ike Skelton, June 14, 2001, as cited in Infant & Toddler Connection of Virginia (2002) Natural Environments Correlations with Federal Regulations, Policies and Procedures and OSEP Policy Letters. p. 5.
- OSEP Response to Letter to Honorable Diane Feinstein, California, March 21 2001 as cited in Infant & Toddler Connection of Virginia (2002) Natural Environments Correlations with Federal Regulations, Policies and Procedures and OSEP Policy Letters. p. 11.
- Targeted Universalism: Policy and Practice. (2019) Haas Institute for a Fair and Inclusive Society.
- Universal Design for Learning. Head Start Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center.
- Universal Design for Learning. Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center.

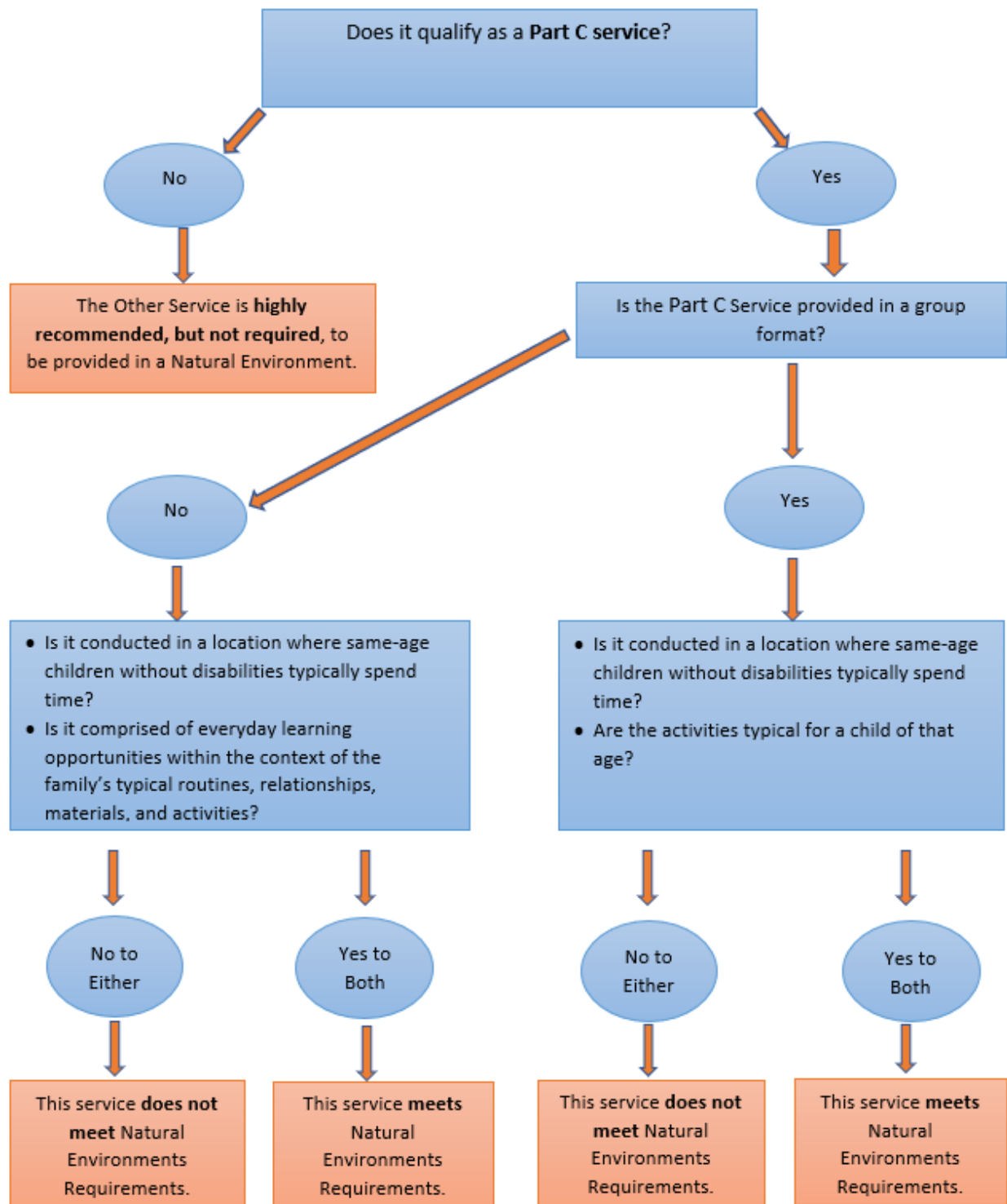
Justifications and Plans for Services in Non-Natural Environments

- IDEA Part C Code of Federal Regulations
 - Early Intervention Services. 303.344 (d)(ii)
 - Early Intervention services in natural environments. 34 CFR 303.126
- DCYF ESIT Policies and Procedures
 - Content of the IFSP. 10.B.2(B)(2-3)
 - Natural Environments Procedures. 11.B
 - Natural Environments Policy. 11.A

Documentation of Settings and Natural Environments

- IDEA Part C Code of Federal Regulations
 - Early Intervention Services. 303.344 (d)(ii)
 - Early Intervention services in natural environments. 34 CFR 303.126
- DCYF ESIT Policies and Procedures
 - Content of the IFSP. 10.B.2(B)(2-3)
 - Natural Environments Procedures. 11.B
 - Natural Environments Policy. 11.A.

Appendix 1. Does the Service Meet Natural Environments Requirements? Decision Tree



Appendix 2. Does the Service Meet Natural Environments Requirements? Decision Tree (Screen Reader Version)

Does it qualify as a Part C service?

- If no, the Other Service is highly recommended, but not required, to be provided in a natural environment.
- If yes, is the Part C service provided in a group format?
 - If no,
 - Is it conducted in a location where same-age children without disabilities typically spend time?
 - Is comprised of everyday learning opportunities within the context of the family’s typical routines, relationships, materials, and activities?
 - If no to either, this service does not meet Natural Environments requirements.
 - If yes to both, this service meets Natural Environments requirements.
 - If yes,
 - Is it conducted in a location where same-age children without disabilities typically spend time?
 - Are the activities typical for a child of age?
 - If no to either, this service does not meet Natural Environments requirements.
 - If yes to both, this service meets Natural Environments requirements.

Appendix 3: Considerations for Infant and Toddler Groups

ESIT providers are uniquely positioned to support the expectation of inclusion and belonging for families with young children as they begin their journey through the education system. The information in this appendix is designed to encourage a thoughtful approach to groups as a method for service delivery and appropriate setting for facilitating IFSP outcomes.

Type of Group	Location	NE Justification Required?	Benefits, Challenge, Considerations
Specialized groups for children with special needs	agency office, clinic, or center	Yes-justification and plan required	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There may be an occasional benefit to working for a limited time period with a small group of children who have special needs such as when there are factors that may require special attention related to health or safety of the child/ren or family members.
Inclusive group with *typical ratio of children with and without delay or disability *Typical Ratio: The National Institute of Health (NIH) reports that approximately 11-18% of children experience some level of developmental delay	agency office, clinic, or center	No- justification is not required, however proceed carefully**	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This approach may be expedient if there are no appropriate community play groups or the community lacks accessible, universally designed play settings. Because this is an inclusive approach children would be able to continue to participate even if they no longer qualify for services. **There may be challenges inherent in meeting the typical ratio for children with and without disabilities. **This does not typically provide a place where families can return after hours or on weekends. **As an alternative to creating agency hosted play environments consider advocating for universal design in community play spaces and supporting the expansion of opportunities for families with young children to interact in the community.
Existing community group activity or playgroup	community setting	No- justification is not required	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This approach will increase family awareness of community resources.

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Families can return to the group or setting at other times or when services are no longer needed. • This approach creates an expectation that children with disabilities are <i>accommodated</i> and <i>included</i> in community activities. • Provides an opportunity for ESIT providers to support inclusive community events or activities or advocate for universal design in play setting for infants and toddlers • When children with a range of disabilities are included and accommodated in community programs alongside their non-disabled peers, it fosters a sense of belonging to children and their families.
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