Chapter 15

Early Intervention in Child Development

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ABSTRACT

Early intervention refers to programs developed for infants and young children with developmental delays or inadequacies or who are at risk group, and their families. The aim of the early intervention is providing services for children with disabilities, minimizing their developmental delay and disability levels and guiding parents for positive development of children. Early intervention includes extremely important studies for children in need of developmental support and their families. The effective early intervention treatment requires a gradual progress, teamwork with a multidisciplinary approach, and family should be considered as the most important element of the treatment and participate in the decision-making at every phase, alongside effective use of the Individualized Family Service Plan and updating the plan when it is necessary. It should be noted that early intervention is an ongoing process. In this process, the family and the child should be considered as a whole and supported in a holistic way.

INTRODUCTION

Early childhood period is the most important period in a child’s life. In such an important period, when the development process is adversely affected, it causes children to experience developmental delay or developmental delay risk. Early childhood is very important for children with developmental delay. The earlier a child with developmental delay is diagnosed, the greater the likelihood of benefiting from early intervention programs to address the child’s needs (Bruder, 2000). Therefore, determining the risk of delay in children as early as possible and initiating the necessary early intervention studies is of great importance in minimizing the problems that may occur in later periods (Akoğlu & Şipal, 2012).

Early intervention consists of programs developed for families of infants and young children who have developmental delays or inadequacies or are at risk group. In the most general definition, they are programs aiming to minimize or prevent the effects of cognitive physical and social-emotional limitations by supporting the development and learning of children who have developmental disabilities.
Early intervention and prevention are more focused on the long-term social and economic benefit of the child, the family, and therefore the community, rather than solving a problem. In this direction, children whose development is appropriately supported in the early stages of their lives are more likely to adapt easily to social life in the future and are less affected by negative environmental conditions. Therefore, the most important objective of prevention and early intervention studies is to change the balance between risk and protective factors (Aytekin & Bayhan, 2015).

Early intervention programs with family participation aim to reduce the effects of adverse situations for children and their families, as well as to teach healthy and effective parenting practices or gain skills necessary for those practices (Kılınç & Aral, 2015). Early intervention programs serve purposes such as providing parents with social support, providing information on topics like the importance of family support in the early years in the development of the baby, child development and discipline, providing education and job opportunities. For these purposes, early intervention programs must be developed systematically and conducted in a planned manner. In this process, it is very important that professionals from different disciplines and families act as a team and cooperate. (Karoly, Kilburn & Cannon, 2005).

In this section, information regarding the importance of early intervention programs, their historical development, early intervention stages, early intervention models and the importance of teamwork in early intervention are presented.

Importance of Early Intervention

Early intervention is a practice aimed at supporting children’s development in the best possible way with a comprehensive program including children and their families, including the family and the environment, for children between the ages of zero and eight who have developmental disabilities or are at developmental risk. According to another definition, early intervention means practices that are focused on long-term benefit to the child, family and society (Knitzer and Lefkowitz, 2006).

The aim of early intervention was to prevent the developmental disability, reduce the negative effects of developmental risks for the family and the child, and support the child and his/her family to maximize what the child can do (Bayhan, 2012). The objectives of early intervention are generally as follows.

- Providing social support to the family
- Informing the family about child development
- Developing parenting skills of families
- Providing parents with educational opportunities
- Supporting the development of infants and children with special needs and minimizing developmental delays
- Providing children with learning experiences according to their needs
- Trying to meet the needs and support the development of children of families especially with low socioeconomic status, living in rural areas or in institutional care and (Akoğlu & Şipal, 2012; Blackman, 2002).

For these purposes, early intervention services should be started as soon as possible. Early intervention services are very important especially in the first three years in terms of preventing and reducing the risks that may occur in the development of children. Early intervention services have very important
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