

What Is a Service Coordinator?

A Guide for State Part C Coordinators and Program Leaders

Overview

Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) created statewide systems of family-centered, coordinated, comprehensive, multidisciplinary, and interagency early intervention services for infants and toddlers with disabilities and their families. This requires commitment to plan, implement, and evaluate services that enhance the capacity of families to meet the special needs of their child cooperatively and collaboratively. To accomplish this objective, IDEA requires the appointment of a **service coordinator** for each family whose child is eligible for Part C services.

Why This Matters

- Service coordination is the only required service provided for each infant and toddler eligible for Part C services. It must be provided at no cost to the family.
- Although this service is mandated, many families are unaware that they have a service coordinator, or they don't understand what the role involves.



What Is Service Coordination?

Service coordination refers to the activities carried out to assist and enable the eligible child and their family to receive the rights, procedural safeguards, and services authorized under the state's early intervention (Part C) program.

These activities include coordinating all services across partner agencies and serving as a single point of contact to help families obtain the services and support they need.

Service coordination is an active, ongoing process, not a one-time task. Although the legal definition is relatively straightforward, the roles and responsibilities of a service coordinator are complex in practice.

Statutory Responsibilities of a Service Coordinator

10 Core Duties

- 1 Assisting parents in obtaining access to needed early intervention services and making referrals
- 2 Coordinating early intervention and other services (educational, social, medical) the child needs
- 3 Coordinating evaluations and assessments
- 4 Facilitating and participating in the development, review, and evaluation of IFSPs
- 5 Conducting referral and other activities to assist families in identifying available EIS providers
- 6 Coordinating, facilitating, and monitoring delivery of services to ensure timely provision
- 7 Conducting follow-up activities to determine that appropriate Part C services are being provided
- 8 Informing families of their rights and procedural safeguards
- 9 Coordinating the funding sources for services
- 10 Facilitating the development of a transition plan to preschool, school, or other services

Note. IFSP = individualized family service plan; EIS = early intervention service.

What Service Coordinators Must Know

To carry out these responsibilities, service coordinators must demonstrate knowledge and understanding of:



Infant and Toddler Development

Recognizing factors that contribute to development (family context, relationships, culture, socio-economic considerations, environment, and experiences, etc.) that guide learning within natural environments



Family-Centered Practices

Respecting and supporting the distinctive qualities of each family, recognizing the family as the teacher, supporter, decision maker, and advocate for their child



Leadership and Teaming

Acting as an effective leader by building professional, supportive partnerships with families; collaborating and teaming with IFSP team members; and engaging with a variety of community partners



Coordination of Services

Coordinating and monitoring the timely delivery of identified evidence-based early intervention services



Transition

Implementing smooth and effective transition plans with families that identify events, activities, and processes associated with key changes between environments or programs during the early childhood years



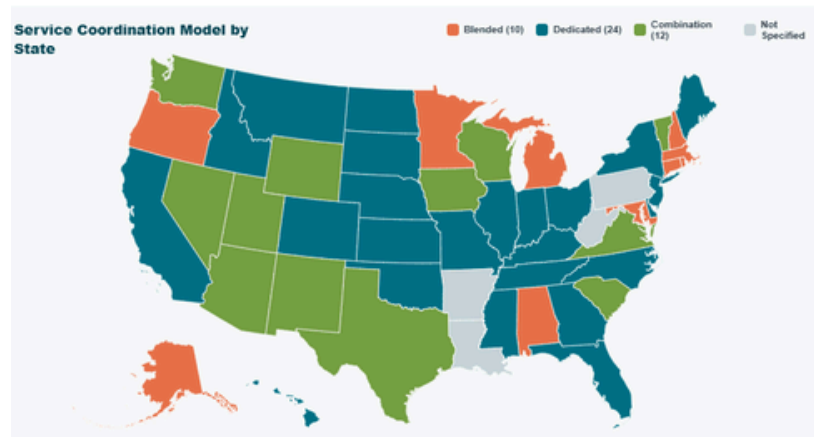
Professionalism

Using personal and professional boundaries; demonstrating flexibility, resilience, time management, and dependability; and engaging in ongoing professional development

Source: Workgroup on Recommended Knowledge and Skills for Service Coordinators (RKSSC), National Service Coordination Leadership Institute Group. (2020). Knowledge and skills for service coordination. <https://tinyurl.com/KSSC-8-12-20Final>

Service Coordination Models

The challenges of service coordination grow every day, compounded by the fact that each of the 50 states and five major U.S. territories—Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, Guam, American Samoa, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands—administers early intervention and service coordination differently.



Each state sets its own qualifications, credentials, and initial and ongoing education training requirements for service coordinators. As a result, there are no consistent criteria across states defining who can serve in this role.

Blended: A specific service provider also acts as a service coordinator while delivering Part C services, such as special instruction or speech and language therapy.

Dedicated: Service coordination is provided by an individual whose sole responsibility is to act as a service coordinator.

Combination: States may use both blended and dedicated models within their service delivery system.

How Leaders Can Support Effective Service Coordination

Leadership plays a critical role in Part C service coordination to navigate complex service systems across the local, state, and federal levels to meet the needs of eligible infants, toddlers, and families.

Establish & Support Training Standards for Service Coordinators

Leaders play a crucial role in ensuring high-quality service coordination by establishing clear training standards, including defining the qualifications, credentials, and educational requirements needed to serve in this role within a state's early intervention system.

Providing ongoing training opportunities and continuous professional development helps coordinators stay current with evolving best practices, regulatory changes, and effective strategies for supporting families.

Communicate Clearly With Families

Effective communication with families is essential for understanding the important role their assigned service coordinator plays in supporting their child and family. Families should also be informed about the tasks and responsibilities included in service coordination, such as:

- what types of support and assistance they will receive,
- how services will be coordinated across providers, programs, and agencies; and
- who will serve as their primary point of contact for questions or concerns about service delivery.

References and Resources

34 CFR Part 303–Early Intervention Program for Infants and Toddlers with Disabilities.

<https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-34/subtitle-B/chapter-III/part-303>

Division for Early Childhood of the Council for Exceptional Children & IDEA Infant and Toddler Coordinators Association. (2020). *Service coordination in early intervention joint position statement: Joint position statement*. <https://www.decdocs.org/service-coordination>

Fulton, K., Terol, A. K., Hardy, A., & Burke, M. M. (2025). Family perspectives of the roles of parent training and information centers and service coordinators in early intervention. *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education*, 44(4), 316–329.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 20 U.S.C. § 1400 et seq.

<https://sites.ed.gov/idea/statute-chapter-33/subchapter-i/1400>

Nichols, S. L., Connor, S. M., Kastanis, M. P., & Corso, R. M. (2023). Professional preparation, growth, and recognition in the service coordination workforce. *Infants & Young Children*, 36(1), 2–20.

https://journals.lww.com/iycjournal/fulltext/2023/01000/professional_preparation,_growth,_and_recognition.2.aspx

UConn Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities, UConn Health. (2020). *Service coordination resources*. <https://ecpcta.org/service-coordination-resources/>



This material was produced under the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs, Award No. H325Z230007. Anna Macedonia serves as the project officer. The views expressed herein do not necessarily represent the positions or policies of the U.S. Department of Education. No official endorsement by the U.S. Department of Education of any product, commodity, service, or enterprise mentioned on this website is intended or should be inferred.