

Manatee County’s Coordinated Screening and Early Identification Referral Process

In Manatee County, we are dedicated to ensuring that every child is prepared for kindergarten and receives the support needed for success. Achieving this goal requires a well-coordinated early intervention system that identifies and addresses developmental needs as early as possible. This collaborative effort involves various agencies working together with families. Below is an outline of the process, including the roles of agencies, families, child care centers, and medical professionals. This process benefits all families with young children, particularly those who may require additional support.

For Children from Birth to 36 Months

Research shows that a child’s first three years are the most important time for learning. Florida’s Department of Health’s Local Early Steps Program (Gulf Central Early Steps) provides early intervention services to eligible infants and toddlers from birth to 36 months, putting children on the right path to learn and develop at their full potential.

1. Referral Agencies Involved:



Developmental Milestones:



Birth to 6 Months

Motor Skills: Lifts head while lying on the stomach, starts to roll over, reaches for and grasps objects.

Cognitive Skills: Follows moving objects with eyes and begins to explore objects with hands and mouth.

Social/Emotional: Smiles at people, begins to recognize familiar faces, responds to affection.

Communication: Coos, babbles, and makes sounds to express pleasure or discomfort.

6 to 12 Months

Motor Skills: Sits without support, crawls, pulls to stand, and may start walking with assistance.

Cognitive Skills: Understands simple commands like “come here,” “wave bye-bye,” “clap your hands,” looks for hidden objects (object permanence).

Social/Emotional: Shows anxiety around strangers, enjoys playing games like peek-a-boo.

Communication: Says “mama” and “dada,” uses simple gestures like waving or pointing.



2. How Referrals Happen:

Gulf Central Early Steps

Referrals for services can come from various sources, including pediatricians, Neonatal Intensive Care Units (NICUs), Child Protective Services, families, the Early Learning Coalition, or Early Head Start.

- If you have concerns about a child's development, making a referral early can lead to better outcomes. **Learn more:** floridaearlysteps.com/eligibility-and-screening.
- Anyone with concerns can **make a referral online at any time at:** floridaearlysteps.com/make-a-referral.

Early Learning Coalition

Children enrolled in the ELC’s School Readiness Program are screened annually using the Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ) until they turn 5 years old.

- Families or child care providers must complete the ASQ within 45 days of a child’s initial enrollment or re-enrollment in the program.
- If the ASQ suggests that a child may benefit from special education services, the ELC will contact the family. With their consent, the ELC will assist in making a referral for further support.
- Child care centers contracted with the ELC for the School Readiness Program are encouraged to reach out to the ELC or refer families to the ELC if they observe any concerns related to a child’s development.

Early Head Start Program

The ASQ Developmental Screener is given within 45 days of a child starting the Early Head Start Program. If the ASQ shows any concerns, the child will go through a Remediation Process for 2-4 weeks, where activities are given to help the child improve. If there’s no progress after 4 weeks, the Inclusion Specialist will meet with the family to discuss further testing, and an evaluation request will be sent to Gulf Central Early Steps with family permission.

- Following a referral, a team member from Gulf Central Early Steps will attempt to contact the family within 5 days to make initial contact.
- A Service Coordinator will be assigned to each family and will contact the family to arrange an intake meeting.
- Referrals made within 45 days of a child’s 3rd birthday are redirected to the Early Learning and Family Support Center at the School District of Manatee County for further assessment (see steps for 36 months to Five Years).

Learn More/Act Early

While babies develop at their own pace, certain milestones—such as smiling, walking, and talking—usually happen at specific ages. These are called developmental milestones. **Learn more:** cdc.gov/ncbddd/actearly/milestones

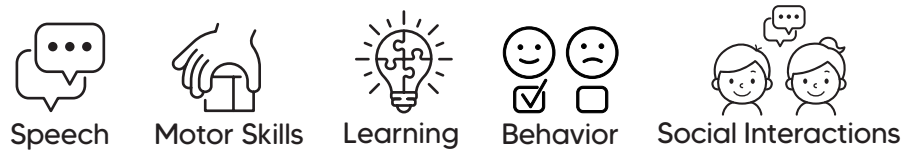
Families may **call the ELC’s warmline** if they have concerns about their child’s development at (941) 757-2900 ext. 2405 or **complete a free ASQ by visiting** elc-manatee.org/Child-Health-and-Development.

3. Intake & Evaluation with Gulf Central Early Steps:



Developmental Screener

During the intake meeting, a developmental screener may be employed. This tool is a brief and straightforward assessment designed to serve as a checklist to compare the child's abilities with age-appropriate milestones, highlighting strengths and areas requiring additional support. The assessment evaluates a child's development in areas such as:

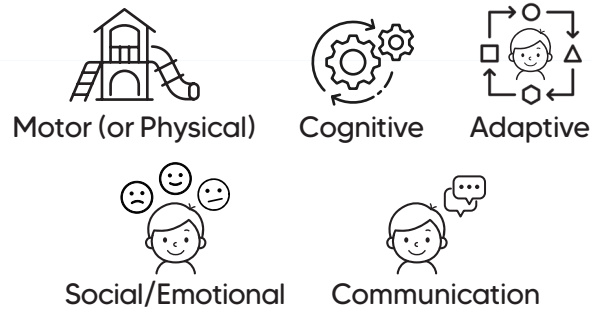


If the screener indicates potential concerns or the family has valid concerns, a more comprehensive evaluation will be scheduled.



Child Development Evaluation

This comprehensive assessment identifies areas where intervention may be needed to support the child's development effectively, and evaluations are used to support eligibility. The assessment reviews areas of:



Eligibility is determined through parent input, teacher input, standardized tests, and provider observations.



Developmental Milestones:



1 to 2 Years

Motor Skills: Walks independently, begins to run, scribbles with a crayon.

Cognitive Skills: Begins to use objects correctly (e.g., drinking from a cup), starts simple pretend play.

Social/Emotional: Shows more independence, may have temper tantrums.

Communication: Vocabulary grows to around 50 words, begins to combine two words to form simple sentences.

2 to 3 Years

Motor Skills: Kicks a ball, climbs furniture, begins to pedal a tricycle.

Cognitive Skills: Can sort objects by shape and color, follows two-step instructions.

Social/Emotional: Plays alongside other children, shows a wide range of emotions

Communication: Uses three- to four-word sentences, names most familiar things.

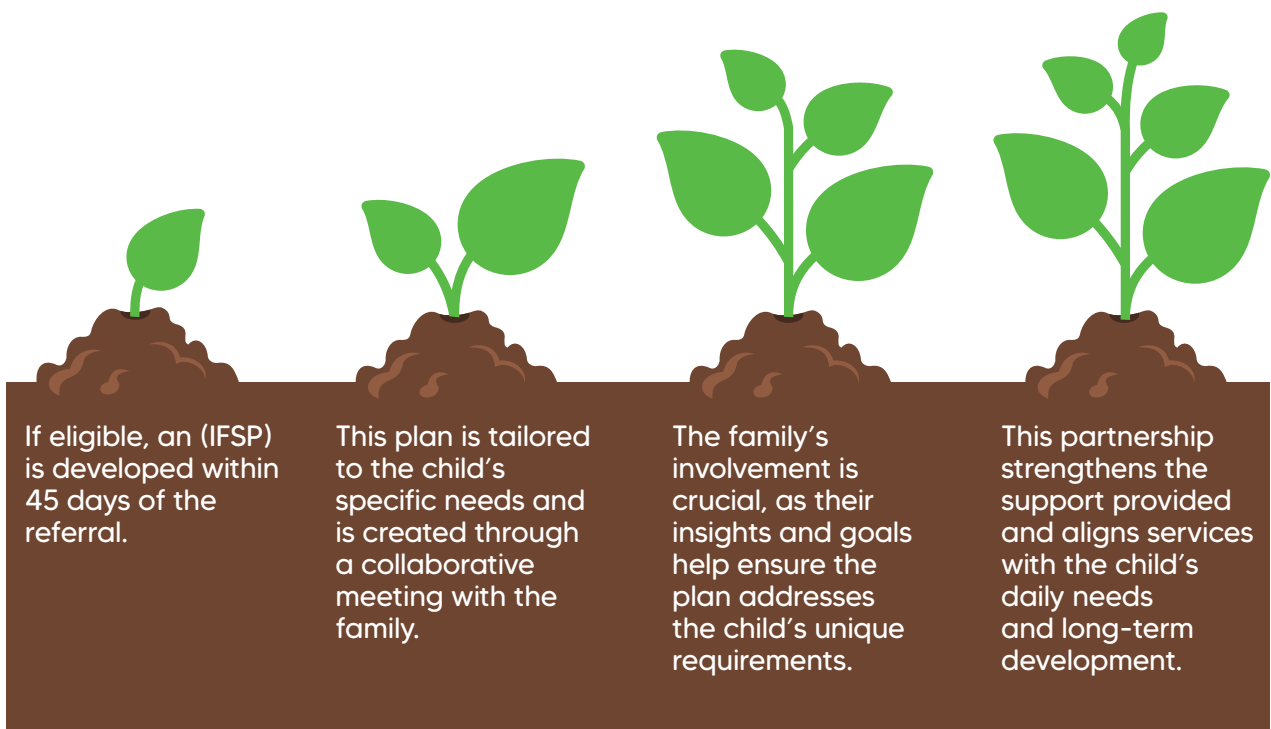


4. Creating a Support Plan with Gulf Central Early Steps:

Individualized Family Support Plan (IFSP)

Parents know their children best. That's why the Early Steps program works closely with families to construct an Individualized Family Support Plan (IFSP) to aid their child's development.

The IFSP identifies the main areas of concern and list of priorities parents have about their child's development. Parents are the most knowledgeable source of information on their child's needs, which is why their input and participation is an important piece of a child's IFSP. Gulf Central Early Steps strives to understand the whole picture of the family, culture, values, and perspectives to determine the most beneficial services and support for children and families.



Services specified in the IFSP commence within 30 days of the plan's completion.

5. Ongoing Support with Gulf Central Early Steps:

Children's progress is reviewed every 6 months, and the IFSP is updated as necessary, with assessments at 6 months and 1 year by the Early Steps Service Coordinator at Gulf Central Early Steps.

Prior to the child's 3rd birthday (usually between 27-34.5 months), a transition meeting is held with the family to move intervention services to the Early Learning and Family Support Center at the School District of Manatee County.



A subsequent referral packet is sent to the Early Learning and Family Support Center at the School District of Manatee County to continue age-appropriate support, if eligible.

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For Children Aged 36 Months to Five Years (Entry to kindergarten)

After age 3, the School District of Manatee County provides intervention services for children who qualify. To determine qualification, families work with the Early Learning and Family Support Center at the School District of Manatee County, known by names Pre-K Evaluation Center or Child Find.

1. Referral Agencies Involved:



Provides child care support and referrals to the Early Learning and Family Support Center at the School District of Manatee County when needed.



Delivers comprehensive child development and family support services and can refer children to the Early Learning and Family Support Center if necessary.



Provides early intervention coaching to families and makes referrals for children 3 or older.



Provides child care support and referrals to the Early Learning and Family Support Center at the School District of Manatee County when needed.

Developmental Milestones:

3 to 4 Years

Motor Skills: Catches a ball, hops and stands on one foot, draws simple shapes.

Cognitive Skills: Understands the concept of counting, begins to understand time.

Social/Emotional: Cooperates with other children and shows affection for friends.

Communication: Speaks in complete sentences, tells stories, knows basic grammar rules.



Learn More/Act Early

While toddlers develop at their own pace, certain milestones usually happen at specific ages. These are called developmental milestones.

Learn more: cdc.gov/ncbddd/actearly/milestones

Families may **call the ELC’s warmline** if they have concerns about their child’s development at (941) 757-2900 ext. 2405 **or complete a free ASQ by visiting** elc-manatee.org/Child-Health-and-Development

2. How Referrals Happen:

Referrals for children aged 34 months to 5 years can come from the Early Learning Coalition, Head Start, pediatricians, Gulf Central Early Steps, or the family.

Families can call (941) 721-2300 to make a referral to the Early Learning and Family Support Center at the School District of Manatee County.

Gulf Central Early Steps

Children between 27-34.5 months, the Early Steps Service Coordinator discusses transitioning to the School District’s Part B/pre-K program. The IFSP is reviewed and updated based on the transition meeting, and a referral packet is prepared for the Early Learning and Family Support Center at the School District of Manatee County, with family consent.

Early Learning Coalition

Children in the ELC’s School Readiness Program are annually screened using the Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ). If the ASQ suggests potential special education needs, the ELC will contact the family to discuss a referral.

Child care centers contracted with the ELC for the School Readiness Program are encouraged to reach out to the ELC or refer families to the ELC if they observe any concerns related to a child’s development.

Head Start Program

The ASQ-3 Developmental Screener is administered within 45 days of program entry. If concerns are noted, a Remediation Process is undertaken for 2-4 weeks. If there is no progress, further testing is discussed with the family, and an evaluation request is sent to the Child Find/Early Learning and Family Support Center at the School District of Manatee County.

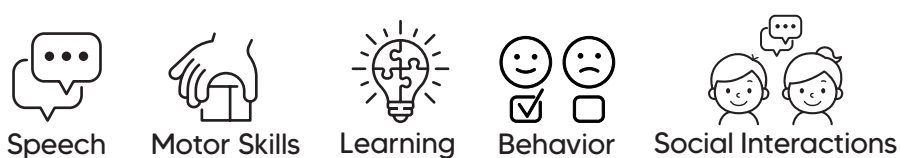


3. Intake & Evaluation:

Once a referral is received, a Child Find Specialist from the Early Learning and Family Support Center will reach out to collect necessary intake paperwork and schedule a screening.

1. Developmental Screener

During the intake meeting, a developmental screener is employed. This tool is a brief and straightforward assessment designed to serve as a checklist to compare the child's abilities with age-appropriate milestones, highlighting strengths and areas requiring additional support. The assessment evaluates a child's development in areas such as:



(If another agency has already conducted a screening, this step may be bypassed.)

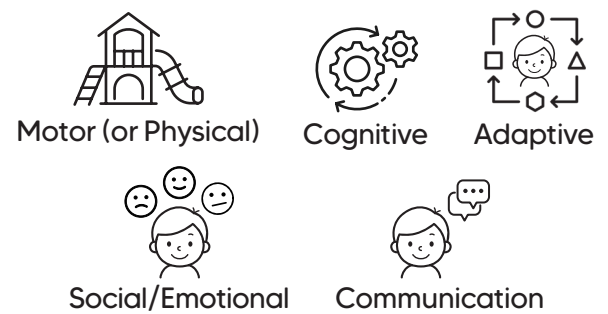
3. Post-Evaluation

Post-evaluation, a meeting is held to determine eligibility, which usually takes about 6 weeks. If the child is deemed ineligible, families are encouraged to continue working with their children using available resources at flbt5.floridaearlylearning.com/families.

Following the screening, if concerns are observed, the Child Find Specialist will outline recommended evaluations and schedule a multi-team evaluation, typically within 1-2 months.

2. Child Development Evaluation

Child Development Evaluation identifies areas where intervention may be needed to support the child's development effectively, and evaluations are used to support eligibility. The assessment reviews possible areas of:



Eligibility is determined through parent input, teacher input, standardized tests, and provider observations.

4. Individualized Education Plan (IEP)

If eligible, an Individual Education Plan (IEP) is developed for the child to receive necessary services and instructional support.

Developmental Milestones:



4 to 5 Years

Motor Skills: Stands on one foot for 10 seconds or longer, can skip, begins to draw people with body parts.

Cognitive Skills: Can count 10 or more things, understands the concept of "same" and "different."

Social/Emotional: Wants to please friends, can distinguish between real and make-believe.

Communication: Speaks clearly, can say their name and address, tells simple stories with full sentences.

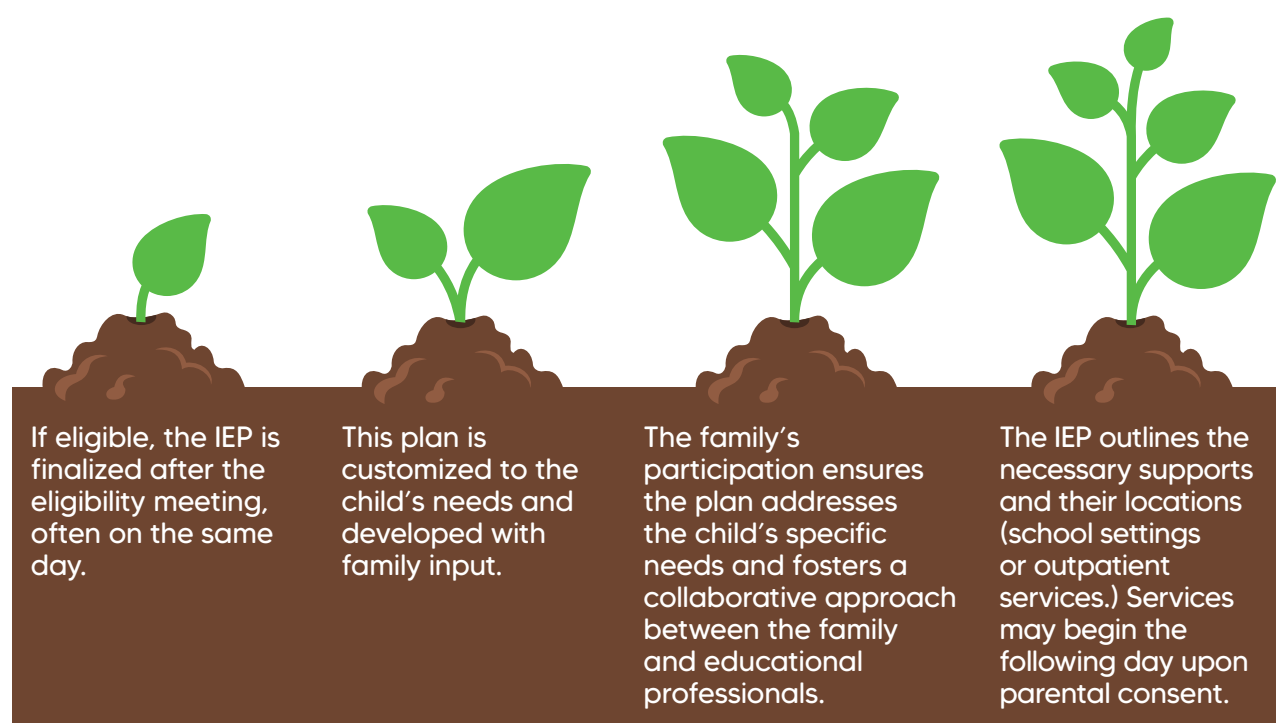
These milestones can be useful to parents and caregivers as a reference to understand typical child development, and they can help identify any areas where a child may need additional support.



4. Creating an Individualized Education Plan:

The Individualized Education Plan (IEP) is a document that is designed to meet a child's unique educational needs. It is not a contract, but it does outline the necessary support and services that are agreed upon and written for a child.

At the least, the IEP must contain a child's present levels of educational performance, goals, and special education and related services.



5. Ongoing Support:

- The IEP is a legally binding document that provides individualized support to a child's educational needs.
- It is reviewed and updated annually, involving both school professionals and the family. Family engagement is essential in this process.
- Families have the right to request IEP meetings as needed to address any concerns or adjustments.