

In the Home: Parents are Children's First and Best Teachers

Parents are a child's first teacher. Strategies to support parents include home visiting, resource centers, literacy programs, informal community supports, classes, online resources, and early intervention. These strategies are available to stay at home parents as well as parents who may use out of the home early care and education programs depending on what community they live in. Below are examples of strategies that reach parents in their home.

Early Head Start (EHS)

Early Head Start (EHS) is a comprehensive program designed to promote healthy prenatal outcomes for pregnant women, enhance the development of infants and toddlers, and promote healthy family functioning. Early Head Start was created by Congress in 1994 as part of the Head Start Act. In creating this program, Congress was responding to strong evidence suggesting that early intervention through high quality programs enhances children's physical, social-emotional, and cognitive development; enables parents to be better caregivers and teachers to their children; and helps parents meet their own goals, including economic independence.

Services are offered to children and families through a home based, center-based or combination program model. Four grantees in Alaska offer Early Head Start services, two through a center-based model and two through home based models. In home based settings, children and their families are supported through weekly home visits and bi-monthly group socialization experiences. The program responds to the unique strengths and needs of each child and family. Health and developmental screenings are administered to enrolled children to identify any potential developmental delays. Services are coordinated with early intervention providers for children with disabilities.

Early Intervention/Infant Learning Program (EI/ILP)

The Alaska Early Intervention/Infant Learning Program (EI/ILP) assures early intervention services are available for families with infants and toddlers (birth to age three) with special needs. Early intervention services are federally governed by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). A federal law passed in 1986, IDEA requires states to ensure young children who may have disabilities or developmental delays receive an evaluation to identify the potential need for early intervention services. The Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA), signed into law on June 25, 2003, requires that each state have provisions and procedures in place to ensure every child under the age of three involved in a substantiated case of child abuse or neglect be referred to early intervention services for screening/evaluation to identify the potential need for services. EI/ILP is administered by the Department of Health and Social Services, Office of Children's Services, Early Intervention/Infant Learning Program. EI/ILP partners with grantees around the state to provide services directly to families at a local level. Grantees include school districts, mental health associations, Alaska Native corporations, parent associations, and other nonprofit organizations. Services may include: developmental screening and evaluation; individualized family service plans to outline goals for the family and their child; child development information; home visits; physical, occupational, and speech therapy; specialized equipment; and/or referrals to other needed services.

Parents as Teachers (PAT)

Parents as Teachers (PAT) is a parent education and family support program serving families with young children. Some programs serve families throughout pregnancy until their child reaches three years of age, while others continue to serve families until their child enters kindergarten.

Families enrolled in a Parents as Teachers program receive:

- *Personal Visits:* Parent educators share age appropriate child development and parenting information, help parents learn to observe their child, and address parenting concerns.
- *Parent Group Meetings:* Parents and children are given an opportunity to gather together to share information about parenting issues and child development. Parents learn and support each other, observe their children with other children, and practice parenting skills.
- *Screenings:* Children's overall development, health, hearing, and vision are all assessed to ensure children are developing appropriately.
- *Resource Network:* Parent educators are knowledgeable about other community resources.

PAT programs in Alaska are either independent or part of another program such as Early Head Start, Head Start or Infant Learning Programs. There are currently 17 PAT programs in Alaska that provided services to 1,557 families (1,738 children) during the 2006-07 program year. Funding comes from federal grants, including Alaska Native Education Equity grants.

Program Cost:

- \$3000-\$4000 per year, per family