



Wonderland Developmental Center provides therapeutic support to infants and toddlers with developmental delays and disabilities and their families. Early intervention has been shown to have positive results for children and families. According to a recent national study, 20% of children who received intervention before the age of 3 no longer required services once they reached school age, and another 15% no longer required special education services at kindergarten (NEILS Study, 2007). Such interventions are developed to improve a child's developmental trajectory, and improve the foundation for developing later skills that are crucial for success in school and life.

### Early Intervention in Natural Learning Environments

Evidenced based practices for supporting infants and toddlers with developmental challenges include supporting families in the child's "natural environment". This term is used in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act, Part C (IDEA, 2004) to describe settings that are typical for infants and toddlers without disabilities or delays. Contrary to more traditional "center based" intervention, therapy takes place in the family's home, community, child care or place of work. In order for intervention to have lasting results, it should occur in natural settings, through activities that are meaningful to them. Since the child's primary caregivers play such an integral part in the intervention process, our practitioners strive to build caregiver confidence and competence by helping them identify learning opportunities for their children.

Wonderland staff focuses on each child and family as a unique team, and works with them to develop relevant goals related to the family's concerns and priorities. We help families develop a foundation for healthy relationships, active engagement in learning activities, and participation in daily routines. Our practitioners include Occupational Therapists, Special Educators, Speech Language Pathologists, and Social Workers who provide direct support to the caregivers and children, and address a range of developmental areas, such as cognitive, communication, social-emotional, physical, or self help skills. Together, we develop a comprehensive plan to meet their specific needs. Our families are eligible to receive support until their child turns 3, at which time we may assist them with the transition to a community or school based setting.

### Primary Coach Model

In the beginning of 2007, Wonderland made an intentional shift towards a "coaching model" that required us to re examine our thinking about the way we support families. Coaching, as defined by Rush and Sheldon (2004) is "an interactive process of observation, reflection, and action in which a coach promotes, directly and/or indirectly, a learner's ability to support a child's participation in family and community contexts". A primary coach (or "PC") is a practitioner from one of our therapeutic disciplines (Speech Language Pathology, Physical Therapy, Occupational Therapy, Special Education, or Social Work), who is responsible for supporting all of the outcomes on an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP).

When a child is enrolled in our program, our team assigns a "primary coach" to each case. The primary coach will oversee all of the intervention, and consult (either outside of sessions or during joint visits)

with other practitioners of different specialty areas. This collaboration is integral to the success of our program, and requires commitment from each member of the team.

*What does intervention look like?*

When we work with families, we promote their daily activities and routines as “learning opportunities”. Sessions are individualized for the family’s needs and priorities. We meet them at their homes, in their communities, or while the child is in the care of other family or child care providers. We approach intervention with the goal of supporting the child’s development in naturally occurring routines, as well as promoting the confidence and competence of the families.

During our intervention, we draw from evidenced based approaches that have proven successful for young children with disabilities. Some of the strategies we may incorporate into our coaching sessions include:

- Scaffolding (practitioner models the desired behavior, and gradually shifts the responsibility to the learner) learning for parents and kids
- Helping children and caregivers move slightly beyond their zone of comfort in learning new skills
- Supporting families in how to identify opportunities within their routines, and how to incorporate specific strategies into these routines.
- Breaking tasks into manageable chunks within a meaningful context
- Encouraging caregivers to use natural reinforcements embedded within activity
- Finding and using what is naturally motivating for each individual child as a basis for interacting and communicating
- Using pictures, symbols, schedules and other visual cues individualized to the child and family
- Helping families move beyond their routine in preparation for transition to the next setting and to further their child’s development in some cases.
- Exploring individualized sensory and regulation needs, and incorporating modifications into the child’s daily routine.

*Want to know more?*

Early intervention has the potential to change a child’s developmental trajectory, build the confidence and competence of caregivers, and increase opportunities for children with special challenges to participate in and benefit society.

The following links offer you an excellent overview of early intervention in natural environments:

[www.coachinginearlychildhood.org](http://www.coachinginearlychildhood.org)

<http://www.ncei.org/ei/pdf/GrowingUpNaturally.pdf>

<http://www.aota.org/News/Consumer/40021.aspx>

<http://www1.dshs.wa.gov/iteip/>

<http://www.aota.org/Pubs/OTP/1997-2007/Features/2006/f-040306.aspx?css=print>

To refer a child to Wonderland, please contact our office at 206-364-3777.