

Respite can offer a break

Effective Sept. 1, 2016, the Early Childhood Intervention (ECI) program was transferred to the Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC). All programs with the Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services (DARS) have been transferred to either the Texas Workforce Commission or to HHSC.

Do you have a family in your early care and education program whose child receives Early Childhood Intervention (ECI) services? Did you know Respite Services are available to provide families a temporary break from the demands of caring for an infant or toddler with complex needs?

What is respite?

The word *respite* means break or relief. Respite services are designed to offer families a break from caring for their child with developmental delays or disabilities. Respite allows parents time to take part in activities that they find relaxing, entertaining, or restful while a respite provider cares for their child.

A respite break can mean an hour to take a walk while a respite provider stays in the home to care for the child. It may be a weekend away while the child is cared for outside the home. It can also mean time for the parent to take a nap or see a friend while the respite provider takes care of their child.

Traditional child care programs are scheduled on a daily or regular basis so parents can go to work or school. Respite, on the other hand, is typically provided on an irregular or short-term basis to provide the parent with a break from caring for their child with developmental delays or disabilities.

How can respite help a family?

Parenting is a difficult job, and every parent can benefit from a break. Caring for a child with developmental delays or disabilities presents additional challenges that go beyond the everyday stresses of parenting. As a result, a parent may need longer rest periods or more downtime.

Finding a qualified person to care for their child may also be more difficult. Respite services can provide them with the needed support.

You can offer families several resources to support

their respite needs. The Take Time Texas website administered by the Health and Human Services Department of Aging and Disability services provides many tools and a searchable provider database to access help and support for families.

Local ECI programs may have funds to help families pay for respite services. Let families know they can ask their ECI service coordinator about the following:

- the availability of ECI respite funds,
- levels of funding based on level of care needed,
- process for prioritizing requests,
- wait list policy,
- annual hourly limit, and
- annual total dollar limit.

Also, let the family know their ECI service coordinator can help find providers in the family's circle of friends and family or in their community.

Respite can help strengthen the whole family. It can help decrease stress and increase a family's health and well-being. In addition to giving parents and other caregivers some rest, it may help free up time to spend with other members of the family.

Here are additional tips you can provide families who may be interested in finding a respite provider:

- Ask family members, friends, other parents, or the child's doctor, teacher, or therapist for recommendations.
- Find providers in the community on this website, www.taketimetexas.org.
- Call the 2-1-1 information and referral line.
- Contact a local college to find students studying in fields such as child development, education, and nursing as well as physical, occupational, or speech therapy.
- Contact the local children's hospital. ■