

Distance Learning Considerations for Infants, Toddlers and Preschool Children with Disabilities

Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) teachers and providers of related services understand the importance of embedded learning opportunities (ELOs) to developmental gains made by young children with disabilities. This guidance and related resources are intended to support members of Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) and Individualized Education Program (IEP) teams to support families in a meaningful way that respects the challenges faced by all families, acknowledging that many parents are now trying to telework while being responsive to the needs of their children. Maximizing ELOs just makes sense.

Embedded instruction involves multiple, brief teaching interactions between a teacher and child during everyday classroom activities. By identifying functional behavior targets, selecting classroom activities best suited for embedded learning opportunities, and using planned and intentional instructional strategies, teachers can help children learn new behavior for participating in classroom activities throughout the day. (DEC Recommended Practices). The key characteristic of ELOs is that “the instructional interaction is planned and embedded, as naturally as possible, within an ongoing classroom or home activity or routines” (Sandall, Schwartz, Joseph and Gauvreau; 2019).

The concept of embedded instruction can support ECSE team members to develop individualized distance learning plans for each child that address IEP goals and objectives within activities that children and their families or other caregivers are most likely doing daily. In addition to creating a framework for distance learning, a focus on routines can create predictability for young children and help reduce any stress they might be experiencing.

Minnesota’s IFSP template already emphasizes the use of daily routines so early intervention providers are already accustomed to thinking about natural learning opportunities and the importance of building the capacity of families or other caregivers to enhance the development of their eligible infant or toddler. Preschool ECSE teams can utilize a similar structure and caregiver coaching within their distance learning plan.

In *Building Blocks for Teaching Preschoolers with Special Needs* Sandall et. al. identify the basic steps for embedding learning opportunities. These steps build upon steps IEPs have already taken to identify a child’s present levels of performance and the goals which address identified needs. A critical step that can be taken by teams now to support distance learning is to develop an activity matrix to select activities or routines in which a parent or other caregiver can embed instruction with coaching support from the IEP team.

Activity Matrix Template

Daily Routine	IEP Goal #1	IEP Goal #2	IEP Goal #3	IEP Goal #4	IEP Goal #5

Resources to Support Your Transition to Distance Learning using ELOs

There are many professional resources available on embedding intervention. Please explore these highlighted supports.

[Centers of Excellence for Young Children with Disabilities: INSPIRE ACTION-Intentional within Routines.](#)

[Head Start guidance on enhancing inclusion using embedded learning opportunities](#)

[Using the DEC Recommended Practices](#)

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