

*MEMORANDUM ADOPTED AT
1ST NATIONAL EARLY CHILDHOOD INTERVENTION CONFERENCE
18 – 20 November 2006, Penang*

1. Early Childhood Intervention is critical to optimizing the learning and development of Children with Disabilities or Special Needs

- The early childhood years (from 0-8) lay the foundation for all areas of development. They are of special importance to Children with Disabilities or Special Needs;
- Early intervention results in greatest benefits for the child, helps families to adapt to and learn to support the child's special needs, and facilitates successful transitions to pre-school and primary education;
- Delay in providing intervention leads to poor results for the child and higher costs to the family and society.

2. Crucial components of Effective Early Childhood Intervention

a. Early detection and prompt diagnosis

- Routine developmental surveillance/screening for ALL children from 0-8 years;
- Multi-disciplinary assessments for EVERY child with a disability or at risk of developmental delay, conducted in a child-friendly environment, in close partnership with parents or carers.

b. Effective, Integrated, and Conveniently Located Intervention Services

- Immediate access to early intervention programmes for ALL children identified with a disability or special need - no child to be denied access;
- Early Childhood Intervention units providing comprehensive therapies to meet specific needs and covering all major areas of development;
- Conveniently located and well-integrated intervention services with co-located multi-disciplinary therapies for convenient access;
- Delivery by well trained and highly skilled personnel committed to evidence based best practice;
- Regular and consistent services with reviews and modifications to meet changing needs.

c. Families as Focal Point of Positive Partnerships

- Empower parents, carers, and families as positive partners at every stage of screening, diagnosis, and intervention;

- Enable families to play effective roles in prevention and early detection through more information and education;
- Give special attention to disadvantaged and vulnerable families;
- Provide more financial support through disability allowance, increased tax relief benefits, and subsidies for intervention and rehabilitation needs of children.

d. Well trained, highly skilled, intensely motivated professionals

- Create more posts in Ministries of Health, Education, Rural Development and Welfare Department for necessary staff to provide intervention services;
- Recruit highly trained staff, motivated by commensurate salaries and professional recognition;
- Increase budgets for Pre-service and In-service training;
- Include modules on early childhood, disabilities and special needs in basic training of all relevant health professionals.

3. Meet Diverse Educational Needs of all Children

- All Children with Disabilities or Special Needs have the same right to basic formal education, including pre-school education, as their non-disabled peers;
- Mainstreaming should be the first option. Children with Disabilities or Special Needs should be granted the right to additional resources to enable and support them to access basic formal education;
- Every Child with a Disability or Special Need should have an Individualised Education Plan (IEP) to meet his/her specific needs, and should have access to all the necessary supporting specialist skills specified in the IEP;
- All early childhood teachers should be trained to detect disabilities or special needs and be equipped with basic skills to meet the learning needs of different children;
- Teachers of Special Classes should be trained to provide the highest standards of education to meet the varied learning needs of Children with Disabilities or Special Needs.

4. Create and Maintain a National Data Base – to provide reliable and accurate information for systematic analysis of the needs of the target population and enable effective policy formulation, budget allocations, and programme implementation.

5. Budget for the Needs of Children with Disabilities – special provisions in the annual budgets of all relevant government ministries to meet the objective of providing for the needs of ALL children with disabilities or special needs, from 0 to 8 years of age.

6. Formation of National Council on Early Childhood Intervention - to act as a forum to discuss, monitor and review all policies and actions related to Early Childhood Intervention.

When ALL families caring for a Child with a Disability or Special Needs are able to access appropriate, affordable, and responsive specialist intervention services, enabling each and every child to achieve their full physical, intellectual, social and emotional potential, we will have reached an important milestone in our journey towards becoming a fully developed and truly caring nation.