



Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

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Guidance Letter

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To: SPOE Staff, On-going Service Coordinators, Service Providers

From: Margaret Strecker, Assistant Director, Special Education Compliance

Subject: Documentation of Referrals to First Steps

First Steps System Points of Entry (SPOEs) receive a variety of inquiries and referrals; some lead to evaluation to determine a child's eligibility for First Steps and some do not. This Guidance Letter is being provided to clarify procedures and documentation requirements related to referrals and inquiries routinely received from primary referral sources.

FIRST STEPS REFERRALS

First Steps referrals must be made by a primary referral source, as defined by Missouri Part C Regulations. When a referral is received from a primary referral source, the SPOE should evaluate the referral to determine if there is sufficient information to suspect that the child will qualify as a child with a disability in the First Steps system. The following procedures apply to the specific situations listed:

Referrals received from primary referral source other than the parent

- A. Information is sufficient to know or suspect that the child may qualify for First Steps:
 - a. Contact parent
 - b. If parent indicates a desire to pursue First Steps eligibility
 - i. record as a referral in the data system
 - ii. proceed with Intake
 - c. If parent indicates that they **do not** want to pursue First Steps eligibility at this time

- i. send acknowledgement letter to the parent with a copy of the Parental Rights Brochure
 - ii. record as a referral in the data system, then
 - iii. inactivate the child's record using reason "Withdrawn."
- B. Information **clearly** does not indicate there is a reason to suspect the child will be eligible for First Steps (see First Steps Early Intervention Practice Manual, Chapter 4):
 - a. If the referral is made **without** the parent's knowledge
 - i. Send a letter to the referral source thanking them for the referral and indicating that based on the reason for referral there is no reason to suspect the child will meet the eligibility criteria for First Steps
 - ii. Attach a copy of the First Steps eligibility criteria
 - iii. Inform the referral source that if they have any other concerns or information about the child that would indicate potential eligibility for First Steps, they should contact the SPOE.
 - b. If the referral was made **with** the parent's knowledge
 - i. Send the letter indicated in (a) above to the primary referral source
 - ii. Send a Notice of Action Refused to the parent with a copy of the Parental Rights Brochure
 - c. In both cases above, the SPOE will enter this as a referral in the data system and then inactivate the child using the reason "Part C Referral Refused by SPOE."

Contacts by parents

- A. Parent calls SPOE and it is apparent that he/she just wants general information about the First Steps system and is not ready to make a referral
 - a. Document the steps taken during and immediately following the inquiry using the *Missouri First Steps Early Intervention System Inquiry Form* (attached).
 - b. DO NOT enter this as a referral in the data system.
- B. Parent contacts SPOE and indicates an interest in making a referral, but after talking with the SPOE about his/her concerns about the child's development and the eligibility requirements for First Steps, it is apparent that there is no reason to suspect the child will be eligible
 - a. If the SPOE and the family both agree to **not** make a referral at this time, the SPOE should
 - i. Document the steps taken during and immediately following the inquiry using the *Missouri First Steps Early Intervention System Inquiry Form*
 - ii. Send the parent a letter confirming the contact and indicating that it was mutually decided that there was not a reason to suspect the child would be eligible for First Steps and that the parent should contact the SPOE any time in the future prior to the child's third birthday if they are still concerned and wish to have the SPOE again consider an evaluation for First Steps eligibility. (See sample letter attached.)
 - iii. Enclose a copy of the Parental Rights Brochure with the letter
 - iv. Do not enter this as a referral in the data system.
 - b. If, however, the parent still insists that they want to pursue the referral, even after the SPOE has discussed the First Steps eligibility criteria and the parent's concerns, the SPOE should

- i. Explain to the parent that they do not believe that a referral is warranted at this time
- ii. Send a Notice of Action Refused with a copy of the Parental Rights Brochure enclosed
- iii. Enter the referral in the data system and then inactivate the child using the reason "Part C referral refused by the SPOE."
- iv. Document the steps taken during and immediately following the inquiry using the *Missouri First Steps Early Intervention System Inquiry Form*.

Late Referrals to First Steps

Another situation that often occurs is a referral to First Steps shortly before a child turns three (approximately 60 days or less). In these situations, the Intake Coordinator will talk with the family about First Steps and the timelines that are allowed for conducting an evaluation and convening an initial IFSP meeting. Following are several situations related to late referrals and the procedures to follow for each:

- A. Family agrees there is insufficient time and asks Intake Coordinator to assist in facilitating a referral to the Part B system
 - a. Document the steps taken during and immediately following the inquiry using the *Missouri First Steps Early Intervention System Inquiry Form* (attached).
 - b. Send the parent a letter confirming the contact and indicating that it was mutually decided that a referral to First Steps will not be made because there was not enough time for an evaluation to be conducted to determine if the child would be eligible and, if the child were eligible, there would not be enough time for the child to benefit from First Steps services. However, the SPOE has agreed to assist with the referral to the local school district to request consideration for an evaluation to determine if the child might be eligible for Early Childhood Special Education Services.
 - c. Enclose a copy of the Parental Rights Brochure with the letter
 - d. DO NOT enter this as a referral in the data system.
- B. Family insists on pursuing a referral to First Steps
 - a. If there is sufficient information to know or suspect that the child may be eligible for First Steps, the SPOE should
 - i. Enter the referral in the data system
 - ii. Proceed with Intake
 - b. If there is **not** a reason to suspect that the child will be eligible, the SPOE should
 - i. Explain to the parent that they do not believe that a referral is warranted at this time
 - ii. Send a Notice of Action Refused with a copy of the Parental Rights Brochure enclosed
 - iii. Enter the referral in the data system and then inactivate the child using the reason "Part C referral refused by the SPOE."
 - iv. Document the steps taken during and immediately following the inquiry using the *Missouri First Steps Early Intervention System Inquiry Form*

Date of Referral

It is extremely important that the date of the referral to First Steps be accurate, both on the completed paperwork and data entered into the First Steps data system.

The date of referral is the date the SPOE is made aware by a primary referral source that the referral source would like for the SPOE to consider an evaluation of the child to determine eligibility for First Steps.

For example, if the SPOE staff comes into the office on Monday and picks up a referral form that was faxed from a physician, NICU, etc., on the previous Friday evening, the referral date is the date that someone in the SPOE first picked up that fax (Monday)—not the date it was faxed by the referral source. When the SPOE receives a referral form by fax or mail, the date of referral should be written or date stamped on the referral form, since it may be different than the date the referral source entered on the form at the time the form was actually completed.

In some cases, it may be necessary for the SPOE to contact the primary referral source to gather additional information related to the developmental concerns mentioned in the referral. When this occurs, the date of referral is documented as shown above, the referral date is not adjusted based on the time necessary to gather the additional information.

Date

Parent Name

Parent Address

City, State, Zip

Re: Child's name

Dear Parent Name:

This letter is in response to your telephone referral to our program for Child's Name on Date.

Our program accepts referrals for children ages birth to three who demonstrate a developmental delay or have a diagnosed condition associated with developmental delay or disabilities. Children who qualify for our program without a diagnosed condition must be at a 50% delay (half-age) for a specific skill area.

During our conversation, we both agreed that Child's name current skill level does not reflect delays near the 50% range. Since there is no reason to suspect that Child's Name would be eligible for First Steps, we determined that no evaluation would be conducted at this time. If in the future you feel your child's skills do not progress or if your child begins to show regression in skills, please contact our office again to discuss making a referral. Record of your phone inquiry will be kept on file here at the First Steps office.

I have enclosed a document describing your parental rights under First Steps.

Please contact our office at Phone Number if you have any questions regarding the information in this letter. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Name

Service Coordinator

Cc: Inquiry file

MISSOURI FIRST STEPS EARLY INTERVENTION SYSTEM INQUIRY FORM



COMPLETED BY: _____ **DATE OF INQUIRY:** _____

CHILD'S INFORMATION:

Name: _____			Date Of Birth: _____	Gender: Male	Female
Last	First	Middle		Ambiguous	
Address: _____					
Street / Apartment / Post Office Box Number					
City/Town: _____, MO		Zip Code: _____	County: _____		

FAMILY INFORMATION:

Parent's Name: _____		
Last	First	Middle
Relationship: _____		
Address: _____		
City/Town: _____	State: _____	Zip Code: _____
Home Phone: () _____	Work Phone: () _____	

CALLER INFORMATION: (If other than parent)

Caller's Name: _____		
Last	First	Middle
Relationship: _____		
Address: _____		
City/Town: _____	State: _____	Zip Code: _____
Home Phone: () _____	Work Phone: () _____	

COMMENTS (summary of phone call with parents and/or caller and reasons why referral was not pursued):

Decision:

_____ **Information Request Only**

_____ Resources Sent (if applicable)/Date _____

_____ **Referral Discussed - Consensus not to Proceed**

_____ Letter Sent/Date _____

_____ Parental Rights Sent/Date _____

_____ **Referral Refused**

_____ Notice of Action Sent/Date _____

_____ Parental Rights Sent/Date _____