



When an individual contacts the First Steps System Point of Entry (SPOE), s/he may be making an inquiry about the program or may be referring a child. The purpose of this guidance is to distinguish between an inquiry and a referral, and the procedures for processing each.

Inquiry

An inquiry occurs when it is apparent that the individual only wants general information about the First Steps program. Some examples include:

- Inquiry about the purpose of the First Steps program
- Inquiry about a child who is not birth-3 years of age
- Inquiry about program eligibility criteria

If sufficient information (e.g., contact information, the name of the child, age of the child, etc.) was provided by the individual, the SPOE would enter the inquiry into WebSPOE and inactivate the child's record using the reason: "Inquiry Only." This contact is stored as "Inquiry Only" data and not referral data.

If sufficient information was *not* provided by the individual, the SPOE cannot enter the contact in the WebSPOE. The SPOE may maintain the information received if they choose, but this is not required.

Referral

A referral occurs when a primary referral source contacts the SPOE with developmental concerns or medical information about a child who is birth to 3 years. The SPOE must determine, based on information obtained during the initial contact, whether it is appropriate to proceed with the referral.

Medical / Newborn conditions:

1. If the child's medical or newborn condition is specifically listed in the Missouri First Steps eligibility criteria, the SPOE should proceed with processing the referral. OR
2. If the medical or newborn condition is *not* listed in the Missouri First Steps eligibility criteria, the SPOE should determine if the condition has a high probability of resulting in developmental delay or disability. Resources the SPOE can utilize to investigate the medical condition include, but are not limited to, internet websites such as webmd.com, medical dictionaries, other medical references, etc. Although the information gathered from these resources is not appropriate to use for eligibility determination, it is acceptable to use in order to determine whether or not to proceed with processing the referral.

If, after reviewing information on the medical condition, the SPOE:

- a) Determines that the condition may be associated with developmental delays or disabilities, the SPOE should proceed with the referral. OR
- b) Determines that the medical condition is not associated with developmental delays or disabilities, the SPOE should refuse the referral and inactivate child's record using the reason: "Part C referral refused by the SPOE" [See section III: Refusing a referral]. OR

c) Is not certain if the medical condition may be associated with developmental delays or disabilities, the SPOE should proceed with the referral.

Developmental Concerns:

When a primary referral source contacts the SPOE office with concerns about a child's development, the SPOE should conduct a discussion of development. This discussion about the child's current functioning is to determine if developmental delays are present and whether or not to proceed with the referral. The discussion can consist of informal checklists, questionnaires, etc. If, after the discussion of development, the SPOE:

1. Suspects a developmental delay, the SPOE should proceed with the referral. OR
2. Does not suspect a developmental delay, the SPOE should refuse the referral and inactivate child's record using the reason: "Part C referral refused by the SPOE" [See section III: Refusing a referral]. OR
3. Is not certain about the level of delay and suspects that a delay may exist, the SPOE should proceed with the referral.

Referrals from Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA):

A provision of the Reauthorized Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Part C requires that beginning July 1, 2005 staff of the Department of Social Services, Children's Division must refer to First Steps any child under age three who has been involved in a substantiated case of child abuse or neglect. SPOE staff will need to address CAPTA referrals in the same way as all other referrals received by First Steps.

Referrals for Prenatal Drug Exposure:

IDEA requires children under the age of three identified as affected by illegal substance abuse, or withdrawal symptoms resulting from prenatal drug exposure, be referred to First Steps. These referrals should be addressed in the same way as all other referrals received by First Steps.

Late Referrals (children referred 45 days or less prior to the third birthday):

Sometimes children will be referred to First Steps shortly before their third birthday. In these situations, the SPOE will talk with the family about the timelines associated with the First Steps evaluation process. In general, if the child is referred more than 45 days prior to their 3rd birthday, then the SPOE **must** proceed with the referral. However, if the child is referred 45 days or less from their 3rd birthday, the SPOE is not required to proceed with the referral. The following are options for processing the late referral that is received 45 days or less from the child's 3rd birthday.

1. If the family and SPOE *mutually* agree there **is not** sufficient time to pursue First Steps eligibility, the SPOE should send the parent a letter confirming the initial contact. The letter would indicate a referral to First Steps will not be made because it was mutually agreed there is not sufficient time for an evaluation to be conducted to determine if the child would be eligible for early intervention services. Furthermore, if found eligible, the child would likely not benefit from early intervention services in the limited time available. The SPOE should:
 - Enter the referral in WebSPOE,
 - Inactivate the child's record using the reason: "Withdrawn," AND
 - Send the parent information about Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) and other community programs for children ages 3-5.

2. If the family insists on pursuing a referral to First Steps and there is sufficient information to suspect that the child may have a qualifying medical condition or a significant developmental delay that warrants further evaluation, the SPOE should:
 - Enter the referral in WebSPOE,
 - Proceed with Intake, AND
 - With parental permission, contact the local school district *immediately* to assist with the referral to ECSE to determine eligibility.

3. If there is no reason to suspect that the child has a qualifying medical condition or s/he does **not** appear to have a significant developmental delay that warrants further evaluation, the SPOE should explain to the parent that a referral is **not** warranted at this time and the SPOE should:
 - Enter the referral in WebSPOE,
 - Refuse the referral and inactivate child's record using the reason: "Part C referral refused by the SPOE" [See section III: Refusing a referral], AND
 - Send the parent information about ECSE and other community programs for children ages 3-5.

A NOTE ABOUT SUMMER BIRTHDAYS:

If a child with an April, May or summer birthday is eligible for First Steps they may continue to receive First Steps services throughout the summer **if the child has also been determined eligible for ECSE**. The SPOE should take this into consideration when reviewing late referral options with the family.

Refusing a Referral:

After a review of the referral information (which should include a discussion of development), if the SPOE refuses the referral, the SPOE would conduct the following steps:

- Send a letter of explanation to the parent,
- Enclose a completed copy of the Notice of Action (NOA) – Initial Evaluation Refused, AND
- Enclose a copy of the Parental Rights Statement.

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