

GUIDELINES FOR EARLY INTERVENTION – SHORT VERSION

INTRODUCTION:

During the first phase of the project, *Desktop study* was a starting point for creation of the quantitative and qualitative research. It brought to all participants valuable insights about early intervention, best practices and in the same time deepened the knowledge about area which were necessary to investigate. *Quantitative and qualitative research* through questionnaires for parents and professional provided data about parents experience with concerns for child's development, context in which concerns have been proven to be delays or developmental difficulties and what support they needed in those situations and gave direction for questions for more in-depth qualitative study through the focus-group for professionals.

The two main research questions within the first phase of the project were:

1. What are the indicators of quality during early observation and early intervention from the position of parents and professionals?
2. What kind of support do parents and professionals need during the early detection and early intervention process?

Results reinforced our goal to provide platform and mobile application available to both parents and professionals, as a support to objectively assess current developmental profile of a child and provide suggestions and activities to support development in all areas. Even if was not planed in the beginning of the project, questionnaire for professionals provide opportunity to target the differences and similarities between perspective of the parents and the professionals in the topic of the early intervention.

EARLY INTERVENTION:

The field of ECI (Early Childhood Intervention) has been evolving, following the research developed in the last 20 years. A definition of ECI that incorporates these developments has been proposed by Dunst, Trivette and Hamby (2007): "Experiences and opportunities provided to children with disabilities by their parents and other primary care providers with the aim of promoting the child's acquisition and use of behavioural skills to establish and develop their prosocial actions with people and objects."

Other authors define it as a form of encouragement aimed at children and counselling aimed at parents, which are applied as direct and immediate consequences of some established developmental condition. It includes the child, his parents, family, and wider

network, and defines and strengthens the child's abilities and is the prevention of possible deviations in functioning that may arise over time (Pejić, 2016). Early intervention can be provided in a variety of settings, but emphasis is placed on the **child's natural environment**. The essence of early intervention is to **include the child in the process as early as possible**. (Košiček, Kobetić, Stančić and Joković Oreb, 2009).

Authors Boháček, Ivšac Pavliša and Ljubešić (2018) state that numerous studies confirm that early intervention **programs that involve parents and encourage parent-child interaction are more effective than those that are oriented towards the child's difficulties and their correction**. Emphasis should be placed on the daily routines of the family. Natural everyday learning environments, normalizing experiences and opportunities, as well as the active involvement and co-responsibility of the family, are key ingredients in the current thinking on how to achieve such benefits (Dunst, Raab, Trivette, Swanson, 2010). From this perspective, family routines have become fundamentally important, following the paradigmatic changes from a child-centered intervention to an intervention focused, whenever possible, on the activities and daily routines of the natural environments where children spend most of their learning time. **Routines are effective when they have a moderate level of novelty**, so that children do not find the activities either uninteresting enough to cause them to give them up or too exciting enough to expend too much energy exploring them. The moderate level of novelty of the routine, achieved by adding a new element or different aspect to a predictable and familiar routine, is ideal for learning new skills (Warren, Horn, 1996).

GENERAL GUIDELINES FOR EARLY INTERVENTION

- Start with intervention as early as possible for better outcome.
- Interdisciplinary team should work closely with parents and determine the goals of intervention.
- Best practice is providing routine-based activities in child's natural environment (home and preschool).
- Routines are effective when they have a moderate level of novelty.
- New element or different aspect to a predictable and familiar routine is ideal for learning new skills.

- Parental assessments and concerns should be considered reliable indicators of developmental deviations because parents know the child best, therefore their assessments are more accurate. (Glascoe and Macias, 2011 according to Romstein, 2017)
- **Protocols for anamnestic data** could gather more information about child before start of the preschool.
- **context** in which conversation with parents about important an often-unpleasant topic must be taken in consideration.
- Parents need more time, more clarifications, more explanations during conversation about child's developmental concern.
- High levels of stress parents of children with disabilities are the result of an insufficient support system (Paster, Brandwein, Walsh, 2009 according to Rašan et al., 2017).
- Continuous professional training is needed, which is based on the lifelong education of educators and teachers (Kudek Mirošević, Jurčević Lozančić, 2014).

INDICATORS OF QUALITY

1. Indicators of quality from the position of parents are:

- Having enough time and privacy when there's conversation about concern about child development, as well as during process of receiving information about established developmental delay.
- In both settings they need precise, clear information, more suggestions for home treatments and additional assessment.

2. Indicators of quality from the position of professionals are:

- Having necessary skills for delivering unpleasant information,
- Providing opportunities for communication with parents without interruptions but also without presence of the child.
- Using check-lists and additional support from other professionals could provide clear and precise information about current child's developments as well as necessary future steps for both parents and professionals.

- Key for quality of early intervention is in clear communication about needs of the parent and child and establishing opportunities to provide them, without presuming about other's needs.
- Findings from the self-assessment suggests that even professionals mark themselves with high grades, and they did have additional educations, they still need more support in the area of communication with parents.

SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVING COMPETENCIES FOR PROVIDING EARLY INTERVENTION ACTIVITIES AMONG PROFESSIONALS:

Professionals are aware of:

- necessity of continuous communication with parents,
- influence of surrounding
- importance of good preparation.

Suggestions to other colleagues who works with children with developmental delays emphasize:

- importance of empathy while keeping professional distance,
- team-work and lifelong education. Gaining more knowledge about specific developmental delays,
- peer support and professional support,
- observation of intervention and collaboration for designing and implementing individualised program.

GUIDELINES FOR IMPROVING COMPETENCIES FOR EARLY INTERVENION IN INCLUSION SETTINGS

Improving competencies for providing early intervention activities requires a range of support and additional education through:

- specialized training programs or workshops that focus on early intervention strategies and techniques.

- Access to research-based resources, such as books, articles, and online courses. also be invaluable for deepening knowledge.
- Hands-on experience and observation in real-life early intervention settings would provide practical skills and insights, face-to-face and experiential training, working closely with the team and under the guidance of experts in this field
- Organizing mentorship programs or peer support groups would create opportunities to discuss challenges, share best practices, and receive guidance from experienced professionals through the case studies,
- Collaboration with other experts, such as speech therapists, occupational therapists, and behavioral specialists, would enhance interdisciplinary approaches in early intervention, and would be helpful to design and implement an effective intervention with mutual goals.

Improving communication skills especially for unpleasant topics:

- Do it in pairs, in a presence of expert associate when it necessary.
- Choosing and preparing the environment (calm and secure with privacy)
- Be aware that parents need time to process and accept situation.
- Providing routine-base interviews with parents
- Training in effective verbal and nonverbal communication techniques, including active listening, empathy, and clarity of expression, would be highly beneficial. Role-playing exercises or simulations that simulate different communication scenarios would help professionals practice and refine their skills. Workshops focusing on cultural sensitivity and diversity would foster understanding and communication with families from various backgrounds.
- Continuous professional development opportunities would ensure professionals stay updated on new research and best practices in communication.
- Receiving supervision or mentorship from experienced professionals would provide valuable feedback and guidance for improving communication skills.

RECOMENDATIONS FOR SETTINGS AND ENVIRONMENT PREPARATION FOR THE MEETING

WITH PARENTS:

- Both parents / guardians should be present
- Both preschool teachers should be present
- If necessary additional expert associate or professional should be present
- The child should not be present at the meeting
- Privacy should be secured
- There should be the less interruption as possible (egg. by entering other people, ringing the phone ...)
- There should be enough time provided for conversation (more than 30 minutes)
- Seating chairs should be available
- Handkerchiefs should be available
- Water should be provided.
- Enough time for preparation for the meeting should be considered.
- There should be at least 15 minutes of defining roles and structure of the meeting between professionals, prior the meeting with the parents.

Continuous professional and life-long education as well as importance of team work and collaboration with parents and professionals is necessary for providing quality of the early intervention.

Preschool teachers' competencies for inclusive practice (D. Bouillet, 2011)

- Understanding the social and emotional development of children.
- Understanding individual differences in children's learning processes.
- Knowledge of quality management techniques of the educational group.
- Communication skills (in relation to children, parents, other professionals and Colleagues);
- Knowledge of effective teaching techniques (including individual instruction and experiential learning);
- Knowledge of the specifics of certain developmental difficulties and other difficulties of children's social integration.
- Ability to identify developmental difficulties and other special needs.

- Knowledge of the didactic-methodological approach and planning of the adapted curriculum.
- Knowledge of available didactic methods, tools, and aids (including information Technology and knowledge of advisory work techniques.
- Practical experience in the upbringing and education of children with particular disabilities.
- Readiness for teamwork, cooperation, and lifelong learning.

Considering all above, member of PLATONIC international ERASMUS+ project team created descriptions, suggestions, checklists and activities for each developmental area which are going to be available in the platform and mobile app. Through desktop and field study we find answers to our questions, but also discovered areas that should be investigated more with the goal of improvement of evident base practice in the preschool institutions, especially in the area of cooperation and partnership with the parents in general.

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