



WVCEL

Whatcom Center for Early Learning

**EARLY  
SUPPORT  
PARENT  
HANDBOOK**

FORMERLY  
EARLY  
INTERVENTION



# WELCOME

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Whatcom Center for Early Learning's mission is to partner with families to provide high-quality, equitable, and comprehensive therapy and support services to children experiencing developmental delays and disabilities.

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# OUR PROGRAM

Whatcom Center for Early Learning (WCEL) provides comprehensive, family-centered early support services to children ages birth to three with developmental delays. We work with children and their families throughout Whatcom County in a variety of settings.

*Our goal is to help you find and utilize the best opportunities for promoting your child's growth and development. We believe that children learn best during activities they find fun and interesting, and that daily routines and activities are a great opportunity to develop foundational and functional skills.*

## **The Individualized Family Services Plan (IFSP)**

WCEL staff, in partnership with families, develop an Individualized Family Services Plan (IFSP) for every child in our program which follows the requirements of Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) (Part C) Early Support Services in Washington State.

## **What is the purpose of the IDEA Part C Early Support?**

*"To enable young children to be active and successful participants during the early childhood years and in the future in a variety of settings—in their homes with their families, in child care, in preschool, and in the community."  
-Early Childhood Outcomes Center*

Part C Early Support builds upon and offers resources to assist family members and caregivers in enhancing their children's learning and development through everyday learning opportunities in natural environments.

The Family Resources Coordinator (FRC) who is assigned to your child is responsible for the development and ongoing management of the IFSP, as well as providing service and resource coordination for your child and your family.

Your FRC will help you choose team members who will be participating in the IFSP, and your team will meet and develop your child's IFSP. They will document your family's strengths and resources, concerns and priorities, and goals (or outcomes) for your child.

Each member of the IFSP team plays an important role in supporting your child's ongoing development and this plan is shared with your resident school district and others who are involved in caring for your child.

## **What are the expected child outcomes of IDEA**

### **Part C?**

Infants and toddlers receiving Early Support services will:

- Demonstrate positive social-emotional skills, including social relationships
- Acquire and use knowledge and skills including early language, communication, and early literacy
- Use appropriate behaviors to meet their needs

### **What are the expected family outcomes?**

Families will:

- Know their rights
- Effectively communicate their child's needs
- Help their child develop and learn

*Please reference the IDEA Part C's "A Family Guide to Early Support Services in Washington State" brochure to learn more about IDEA Part C guidelines for Early Support (formerly Early Intervention), and your rights and procedural safeguards under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Part C Early Support Services.*



# CULTURAL NAVIGATION & LANGUAGE ACCESS SERVICES

## What is Cultural Navigation?

Cultural navigation services offer another layer of support for staff and families. This role is embedded in the service delivery of our culturally and linguistically diverse families. One of the goals of cultural navigation is to empower families and help develop self-advocacy skills.

Cultural Navigation also supports other marginalized communities, aiding families in understanding and helping navigate the services available at WCEL and helping families in equitably accessing all services.



The Cultural Navigator ensures our agency follows language access laws and that language justice is enacted, by securing ASL and spoken language interpreting services, and ensuring vital information is translated in the family's primary language.

The Cultural Navigator is a neutral party that will also serve as a resource/ point of contact in the event a family feels they have not been treated in an equitable, respectful, and culturally sensitive manner.

All information shared will remain confidential and will only be shared with the Executive Director so these concerns can be addressed.

# DIVERSITY, EQUITY & INCLUSION

WCEL updated its vision and mission in 2022 to “ensure that the kids and families within the group we exist to serve, who are most vulnerable to harm, are centered in our work.”

*Whatcom Center for Early Learning’s vision is an equitable society where children with disabilities and their families thrive, experience meaningful connections, and have a deep understanding of their strengths and needs.*

At the moment we can predict a child’s outcomes, based on their race, gender, disability status, or other social identities that experience marginalization. WCEL takes an equity approach in our work by serving children and families based on needs. We provide specific services for kids with delays and/or disabilities so they can grow and thrive, instead of offering equal services for every child. Through our Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) work we will ensure that the kids and families, within the group we exist to serve, who are most vulnerable to harm are centered. This will help us move closer to a world where there are fewer disparities in long-term outcomes.

We honor every family’s culture and language. We celebrate and embrace our differences and want every family and every staff member feels supported, celebrated, and feels like they belong. These are our goals.

If you feel that your experience while receiving services does not align with these values, we want to know about it.

Please reach out to our Cultural Navigator, Elizabeth Gonzalez Soto at [elizabethgs@wcel.net](mailto:elizabethgs@wcel.net) or our Executive Director, Sierra James at [sierra@wcel.net](mailto:sierra@wcel.net)



# PRIMARY SERVICE PROVIDER MODEL



Early Support services at WCEL offer a research-based service delivery model that we refer to as the Primary Service Provider (PSP) approach (formerly Primary Coaching).

*PSP's approach to teaming is a family-centered process for supporting families of young children with disabilities and/or developmental delays in which one member of an identified multidisciplinary team is selected as the primary service provider, receives ongoing support from other team members, and uses coaching as an interaction style to build the capacity of parents and other care providers to use everyday learning opportunities to promote child development in natural environments.*

**You will be working with a Primary Service Provider chosen by the WCEL team to provide ongoing support, education, and coaching.** Your PSP belongs to the multi-disciplinary team of therapists, teachers, and Family Resources Coordinators at WCEL.

They share your information with the entire team, as needed, for consultation, or to schedule joint visits if there is a concern, a question, or a need that may require specific areas of expertise.

**Your time together will be spent discovering learning opportunities within your daily routines that interest and motivate your child.** We will meet you when and where these learning opportunities take place. Meeting times are arranged to best fit each family's needs.

If you need to request a change in your PSP or FRC to better meet your family's needs, please contact our Early Support Program Managers directly (Blue House: Julia Renner & Amelia Bacon, Brick House: Jennifer Kurtz). A staff directory can be found on our website: [wcel.net](http://wcel.net)

These visits can include others who provide ongoing care to your child, including staff in childcare settings. At the end of each visit, the family and coach will develop a plan and schedule a follow-up visit accordingly.

*We ask families to be mindful of schedules and time commitments. If you are unable to attend a scheduled visit, please call or text WCEL staff as soon as possible. We ask that you cancel or reschedule a visit within 24 hours. You may also leave a message with our administrative team at 360.671.3660.*



# EARLY LEARNING PROGRAM

Whatcom Center for Early Learning provides interactive programs which allow our children to learn and play in group environments with other children and their parents/caregivers. These programs are for children to develop skills and experience peer group socialization.

## **SENSATIONAL TODDLERS:**

Our parent-child program is for children 18 months to 3 years, with and without developmental delays or disabilities, keep an eye out on our social media channels for when registration opens.

## **WCEL FRIENDS PLAYGROUP:**

Our WCEL Friends Playgroup is a parent-child program for children 18 months to 3 years who are receiving Early Support Services at Whatcom Center for Early Learning. These playgroups provide socialization and play opportunities for children and their caregivers.

## **TODDLER TIME:**

WCEL also hosts drop-in community playgroups called "Toddler Time." Donations by participants help cover the costs of drop-in playgroups. Check out our website for current dates and locations: [www.wcel.net](http://www.wcel.net)

You can learn more about our Early Learning Program from your Primary Service Provider, FRC, or by calling WCEL's main number: 360.671.3660



# OUR HEALTH POLICY

## **When Should Children Not Participate in Home Visits or Playgroups?**

We know that you are devoted to getting your children the services that they need, and we know you don't want them to miss any playgroups or home visits unless absolutely necessary. However, if your child (or you) are ill, they may spread germs to others. WCEL serves children who are medically fragile, and exposure to these germs can negatively impact their personal health.

Our Center may be utilized by families with service animals; if you have allergies or other health and safety concerns, please contact a staff member or call our main line at 360-671-3660.

Here are our guidelines to help you decide whether or not to participate in home visits or playgroups (this also applies to other family members who may be present). If you have questions regarding our health guidelines, please talk with your Family Resources Coordinator (FRC) or Primary Service Provider (PSP).

## **Please call us to cancel a home visit or playgroup if you or your child suffers from any of the following:**

- Has a fever over 100 degrees (even if they have taken Tylenol to lower it)
- Has vomited twice within the last 24 hours
- Has thick yellow or green nasal discharge that requires wiping
- Has head lice
- Has had 3 or more watery stools in a 24-hour period
- Has body rashes, not obviously a diapering or allergic reaction to medications or foods
- Has pinkeye (conjunctivitis) or an eye infection
- Has a persistent or severe cough
- Has any communicable disease

# OUR HISTORY

WCEL has consistently provided Early Support services to infants and toddlers with developmental delays and disabilities and their families throughout Whatcom County for **50 years!**

*The first program was established by Public Health Nurse Anne Brown in the early 1970s as the Whatcom Infant Stimulation Program (under the direction of Whatcom Community College).*

The program moved to Western Washington University in 1985 through a collaborative effort between the Department of Speech Language Pathology and Audiology and the Woodring College of Education. The name was changed to Western Center for Early Learning.

The advisory board (staffed by parents and community members) applied to Washington State for a private, non-profit status when Western Washington University chose not to renew its contract. Non-profit status was granted in 1991, and the name was changed to Whatcom Center for Early Learning (WCEL).



In 1991, the “Big Blue House” was purchased. In 2015, we finished a remodel of the upstairs administrative offices at the “Big Blue House” to further accommodate our growth.

By 2019, we saw an increased need for services in the community, and to meet this demand we doubled our staff and purchased our second facility in Ferndale. Affectionately known as the “Little Brick House,” the property includes a separate 1,500 sq. ft. Children’s Center.

In 2021, WCEL acquired a location in North Bellingham in the Cordata neighborhood. This location offers a large and small gym as well as individual therapy rooms. WCEL serves all of Whatcom County.

# OUR BOARD OF DIRECTORS

The WCEL Board of Directors is a volunteer group of up to 15 community members who are legally and fiscally responsible for WCEL operations. A minimum time commitment of four hours per month is requested to attend Board meetings and to serve on at least one committee. The membership term is three years.



*The Board of Directors is strongest and most effective when it is representative of our programs and community. Parent representation is an important component of the WCEL Board of Directors. Parents who are interested in Board participation may contact WCEL's Executive Director for further information.*

# OUR FUNDING

Whatcom Center for Early Learning is a designated 501(c)(3) non-profit agency contracted with the state of Washington to provide early support in all seven Whatcom County school districts. We also contract with the State of Washington through the Whatcom County Health Department. WCEL is a United Way Partner Agency and receives financial support through its Community Impact Fund.

These revenue sources are not enough to fully fund WCEL programs and services. In addition to funding, WCEL hosts many annual events, including an annual gala in June, that are supported by event sponsorships and donations.

Foundation and community agency grants as well as business and individual contributions round out our revenue stream. Donations of any size from individuals and institutions allow us to offer our families additional classes, resources, and supplies.

Contact WCEL's Development and Communications Director to learn more about these opportunities.

# INSURANCE BILLING

*Insurance reimbursement helps to cover some of the costs of Early Support services at WCEL. If your child is covered by private and/or public (Medicaid or "Apple Health") insurance, we will ask for permission to bill your insurance.*

Please allow staff to photocopy your insurance card. If your child is covered by insurance (private and/or Medicaid), we will ask for permission to bill your insurance for evaluations and therapy visits, including joint consultations. **Please remember to update us whenever changes are made to your insurance or when you receive a new card.**

The State of Washington mandated a Family Cost Participation (FCP) plan and revised insurance requirements for families receiving Early Support for Infants and Toddlers (ESIT) services, effective July 1, 2013.

*If you choose not to allow WCEL to bill your insurance, you will be assessed a monthly fee for services that are subject to FCP based on your family's size and income. Please reference the insurance information your FRC has provided to you during your home visits, and please contact your FRC with further questions. **No family will be turned away because of an inability to pay.***

## POLICIES & PROCEDURES

If a child needs to be absent from playgroup or miss a home visit due to illness (see the Health Policy), family situation, transportation problems, vacation, or other reasons, **please notify staff or call WCEL at least 24 hours in advance to cancel.**

If you miss an appointment without cancelling (referred to as a no-show), a FRC or Primary Coach will contact you to check in and ask about rescheduling the appointment. If several visits are cancelled or missed, your FRC and Primary Coach will request to meet with you to learn more about how to proceed with services for your child.

Staff and parents work together to formulate a plan of service for children, and WCEL requires that enrolled families participate in services at least once a month. While the staff may have suggestions, we depend upon parents to share information regarding their preference for the frequency of visits.

# YEARLY SCHEDULE & CLOSURES

WCEL's Early Support and Early Learning Programs are provided year-round.

## **WCEL is closed on the following holidays:**

Martin Luther King Jr. Day, Presidents Day, Memorial Day, Juneteenth, Independence Day, Labor Day, Veterans Day, Thanksgiving Day, the day after Thanksgiving, Christmas Day, and New Years Day.

## **Inclement Weather**

In the event of inclement weather, such as snow or icy road conditions, scheduled home visits, playgroups and meetings may be cancelled. WCEL staff, including your FRC, PSP, or classroom teacher will contact you to reschedule if that is a possibility.

*If the Bellingham School District (for our Lettered Streets and Cordata locations) or Ferndale School District (for our Ferndale location) closes schools, our center-based Early Learning Programs (including drop-in programs such as Ferndale Toddler Time) will also be closed. Home visits may be available, depending on the availability of your PSP, who will contact you directly.*

If you are uncertain as to whether WCEL is open, please check our Facebook page, Instagram, or our website ([wcel.net](http://wcel.net)) for updated information

## **Transportation**

WCEL does not provide transportation to families. If you need assistance with transportation, your FRC will recommend available community resources. Parents are responsible for making their own transportation arrangements.



# CONFIDENTIALITY & PRIVACY PRACTICES

All WCEL staff, Board members, and volunteers will respect and maintain the confidentiality of our families and children.

*WCEL follows State HIPAA laws. WCEL staff will obtain your written permission to exchange information with community providers and other agencies as needed. Information will be shared with WCEL therapy staff, as needed, to provide the best services to you and your family.*

Throughout your participation in our program, periodic progress reports, 6-month and annual reviews, Individual Family Service Plans (IFSP's), and progress summaries are written. This information will be shared with enrolled school districts, your child's primary care physician, and other providers as requested. General information about enrolled children is required by some funders to reimburse WCEL for our services. **This information is strictly confidential and is never made public.**

# CHILD ABUSE & NEGLECT REPORTING POLICY

WCEL staff is mandated by the Department of Social and Health Services to report any suspected child abuse or neglect. The reporting statute RCW 26.44.030 reads as follows:

*"When any practitioner has reasonable cause to believe that a child or adult dependent or developmentally disabled person has suffered abuse or neglect, he or she shall report such incident, or cause a report to be made, to the proper law enforcement agency or Child Protective Services Division, Department of Social and Health Services as provided in RCW 26.44.040. The report shall be made at the first opportunity but in no case longer than 48 hours after there is reasonable cause to believe that the child or adult has suffered abuse or neglect."*

# NON-DISCRIMINATION POLICY

It is WCEL policy that no child, family, employee, or any other person will be subjected to discrimination by WCEL due to race, color, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, age, religion, creed, marital status, disabled veteran status, veteran status, or a disability, as consistent with Title VI of the Civil Rights Acts and Washington Administrative Code 162. This policy applies to all aspects of the agency's programs, practices, policies and activities.



# DISCRIMINATION COMPLAINT POLICY



**Any person who feels that they have been discriminated against is entitled to have that complaint investigated.**

The coordinator of such complaints is Sierra James, Executive Director of WCEL. She can be reached at 360-966-1007. Each complaint will receive a prompt and fair hearing according to the Grievance Procedure outlined below.

Any person may contact or file a complaint directly with the Human Rights Commission at the following address:

*The Human Rights Commission - 1-800-233-3247 (Para Espanol, marque dos.)  
Technical Assistance - 1-800-300-7525 (TTY)  
711 S. Capitol Way, Suite #402  
PO Box 42490  
Olympia, WA 98504-2409*

The time frame for filing complaints is usually within 180 days, but this may vary by statute and agency. The complaint must be written, signed, and include the facts about the complaint. Send the complaint to:

*Early Support for Infants and Toddlers Department of Children, Youth, and Families  
PO Box 40970  
Olympia, WA 98504-0970*

The complaint will be reviewed by the State offices and a written response sent within 60 days.

# GRIEVANCE PROCEDURE

If you have a concern about our services or programs, please contact your Family Resources Coordinator (FRC) or any staff member.

If you need to request a change in your PSP or FRC to better meet your family's needs, please contact our Early Support Program Managers directly. A staff directory can be found on our website.

*You may also choose to request a review of your child's IFSP at any time. All grievance procedures will be treated in confidence. No family who raises a concern or files a grievance needs to fear retaliation for bringing this information to the attention of the agency or outside resources.*

If that process doesn't work or you are not comfortable following it, you may choose to use any or all of the following options:

**Mediation:** Mediation will be provided to you at no cost to help resolve a dispute. Mediation is offered as an alternative to a formal administrative hearing and is voluntary.

**Advocacy services:** These are programs that will give you information and help you plan how to address the problem. One advocacy organization is The Arc of Whatcom County (360-715-0170).

**Due Process Hearing (proceeding):** This is a formal hearing or proceeding conducted by an administrative hearings officer. A request for an administrative hearing must be in writing and include the complaint. Address the request to WCEL's Executive Director.

*Any parent, another person, or organization may file an administrative complaint if they think an agency or early intervention services provider is violating a requirement of the law.*

# OUR STAFF



Whatcom Center for Early Learning's dedicated, mission-driven team of professionals believes every child should have access to early support services and the opportunity to live their healthiest life. Our staff are passionate about our work with children and families with developmental delays and disabilities and aim to actively contribute to a culture of appreciation.

Our work and culture are guided by our commitment to our WCEL values. As a staff, we are dedicated to partnerships, quality, understanding, and accountability. We seek to always assume the best intent and be gracious to one another.

**For a full staff directory, please visit [wcel.net](http://wcel.net)**