

EI/ECSE Initial Referral Contact

In a Nutshell...

Ever heard of the “one minute elevator speech”? It is a short, succinct yet adequate description of the services we provide. In our schools, a variety of people may be called upon to share information about EI/ECSE supports and services....the office manager, the intake coordinator, the director of special education, the elementary principal, our own team members and so on. Although these initial contacts with inquiring families are commonly short, they are critical because they lay the groundwork for the family’s expectation of the services we provide. Are supports and services directed to the child only, or are they about children AND families? What can families expect? It takes practice, but EVERYONE should know what to say and have had practice saying it. It is worth our time and effort to develop, practice and share scripts that describe the supports services we provide. A shared script will promote clarity and consistency.

Key Principles to consider...

1. **Simple and concise.** Focus on what you offer and how it benefits the family and the child.
2. **Shorter is better.** No longer than 5 minutes; preferably shorter!
3. **Positive messages are most effective.** Emphasize what your program can do for families (E.g. we can help families get answers to questions about their child’s development, provide information about parenting challenges, etc).
4. **“Messengers” matter.** Messengers need time to rehearse what and how the message will be said, how to answer possible questions, and how to graciously take necessary information. It takes practice.
5. **Written materials complement the verbal message.** Reinforce the verbal message with concise written materials—simple brochures or pamphlets that echo the verbal message.

Why is the initial referral contact so important?

Short, simple, concise descriptions of your EI/ECSE program set expectations for families, help them to know whether this is the program for them, and keep teams and families on the same page. Feel comfortable with what you do as a team, have everyone on your team be explicit about how you provide EI/ECSE assistance, and have everyone be able to easily explain program components and process. Scripts and practice will help everyone!

[Team Assessment Home-Based Item #2](#)

Reference Materials

- [Strategies to Increase Referrals](#)
- [Targeting Your “Message”](#)
- *Routines Based Early Intervention*, by Dr. McWilliam, page 18

Samples

- Papillion La Vista [B-3 Script](#) and [3-5 Script](#)
- [ESU 4 script](#)
- [ESU 7 script checklist](#)

Regulations

- [SC Manual](#), pg. 15-16