

The Home-Field Advantage in Early Intervention

Have you noticed that “the home-field advantage” plays a significant role in who wins a sporting event? A football team from Minnesota has more practice making a touchdown in the snow than a team from Florida. Basketball games on the home court include loyal fans and familiar locker rooms. Baseball players have a favorite bat to use when they need a hit. These sports examples illustrate the importance of the “natural environment” for athletes striving to perform their best.

The concept of “natural environments” can be applied to early intervention for young children with special needs and their families. Children are most secure and learn best when they are with familiar adults, using typical toys and materials to complete their everyday activities and routines. When an early intervention provider comes to the child’s home or childcare center and joins the everyday routines, the child has the “home-field advantage.”

The concept of natural environments is more than the place that routines occur. “The home-field advantage”

includes the activities and routines and how the caregivers and children participate in them. Learning opportunities occur throughout the day as children play, eat, get dressed, chase the dog, wave good-bye, climb stairs, and help with chores. Adults can coach the child by repeating actions, naming objects, or providing more practice in any of these routines. The early intervention service providers help family members and caregivers learn the best coaching techniques to help the child. Learning new skills in daily routines, such as bathtime or mealtime, is an effective and time-saving way that EI providers can support caregivers to teach their child.

The family does not have to purchase specialized equipment either. The EI provider simply guides the caregiver to select pieces of furniture or toys that the child is already used to and incorporates them into the things the family does... watching football, cooking, or working in the yard so the child can “perform” like a professional!

