



Terminology Discussion Paper

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The University of Melbourne



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Acknowledgments

The University of Melbourne acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the unceded land on which we work, learn and live: the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung and Bunurong peoples (Burnley, Fishermans Bend, Parkville, Southbank and Werribee campuses), the Yorta Yorta Nation (Dookie and Shepparton campuses), and the Dja Dja Wurrung people (Creswick campus).

The University also acknowledges and is grateful to the Traditional Owners, Elders and Knowledge Holders of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nations and clans who have been instrumental in our reconciliation journey.

We recognise the unique place held by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the original owners and custodians of the lands and waterways across the Australian continent, with histories of continuous connection dating back more than 60,000 years. We also acknowledge their enduring cultural practices of caring for Country.

We pay respect to Elders past, present and future, and acknowledge the importance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge in the Academy. As a community of researchers, teachers, professional staff and students we are privileged to work and learn every day with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander colleagues and partners.

This document has been developed by a University of Melbourne-led Consortium as part of an independent review of best practice in early childhood intervention in Australia.

Funded by the Department of Social Services, the consortium is led by Professor Christine Imms of the University of Melbourne in partnership with Murdoch Children's Research Institute (MCRI), Professionals and Researchers in Early Childhood Intervention (PRECI), SNAICC - National Voice for our Children and Children and Young People with Disability Australia (CYDA).



Terminology discussion paper

Please note: This is a discussion paper to support consultation and inform decisions taken about some of the words we will use in the new practice framework for early childhood intervention.

After you have read this discussion paper, you may wish to tell us what you think by [completing the short survey](#), indicating your preferences for terminology.

To correspond with the review team please email official-ecireview@unimelb.edu.au

1. Introduction

Throughout the Review of Best Practice in Early Childhood Intervention, there has been discussion about whether the term ‘intervention’ should be changed, and, if so, what should it be changed to. Whether the framework should be called a ‘best’ practice framework has also been canvassed.

What is clear is that all stakeholders want the following in relation to language used within the framework:

- To be strength-based
- To be easily understood, i.e. in plain language and targeted to the different audiences
- To be consistent with the aim of honouring the self-determination of families and children
- To enable professionals to be able to reflect on, understand and implement the elements of the Practice Framework
- To enable families to recognise ‘best practice’ but also be able to rely on receiving best practice from qualified, regulated professionals
- To ensure that all key elements of the framework and their included terms are understandable and defined.

This discussion paper has been developed to support further consultation and a decision about the terms ‘intervention’ and ‘best practice’. We’re interested in knowing what you think.

2. Intervention

The current guidelines are titled ‘*The National Guidelines for Best Practice in Early Childhood Intervention*’. Previously the field was called Early Intervention in Australia. To clarify the age group of the children involved and differentiate it from ‘intervening early’ no matter what the age of the person, ‘childhood’ was added in the late 90’s.

Throughout the Professionals and Early Childhood Intervention (PRECI) consultations, professionals were specifically asked for their thoughts on the term '*intervention*' and, if not felt suitable, alternatives that could be used to identify the sector. The consultations with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and organisations did not use the term intervention.

The majority of professionals indicated that the term 'intervention' needed to be changed, however, there was no consensus on the term to replace it with. There were also queries about changing the understanding of the term 'intervention' and the composite term 'early childhood intervention', rather than changing the word itself.

Reasons for maintaining the term:

- Early Childhood Intervention is used internationally to describe the sector, so it is easily recognised. In the USA, the term 'early intervention' is utilised. In Europe, the expanded early childhood intervention. New Zealand's framework focuses on learning and uses the term 'learning support'.
- To find research on working with children with disability, you would need to include the word '*intervention*' in your search strategy.
- There may be unintended consequences of changing a well-known term.

Reasons for not maintaining the term:

- Intervention is a term that is NOT used in Northern Territory (NT) due to the NT National Emergency Response, known as 'the Intervention' and its impact on the human rights of Aboriginal people.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and services consistently indicated that the term 'intervention' is strongly associated with the child protection system and the removal of children from their families, and should not be used in the context of supporting children experiencing developmental concerns, delay or disability
- Many professionals felt the term intervention was not appropriate due to the above.
- Many professionals also felt that 'intervention' gave the impression of 'fixing' the child, or intervening in the child's life, rather than working with the child and family.

The challenge is to find a word or words that describe the sector and differentiates it from the health and education sectors, or the general period of early childhood. It also needs to define or highlight the distinctiveness of this field from general early childhood services i.e., these are services and supports for children with developmental concerns, delay or disability, and their families and carers and requires specific knowledge and skills. The framework is a national framework and needs to be applicable in all jurisdictions and populations.

Alternatives mentioned, along with some discussion points from consultations:

- Early Childhood Development: generally, this was felt to be too limited to development. The current field has a much broader focus, and developmental milestones may or may not be relevant to the individual child.

- Early Childhood Supports (with or without Development): there was a mixed response to the word ‘Supports’ with some feeling that it was a passive word or gave the impression of families needing support, and therefore not being strengths-based.
- Early Childhood Services: queries as to how this separated this field from the broader Early Childhood area.
- Early Childhood Inclusion: more targeted to the Inclusion or Education space.
- Early Childhood Specialist Services: highlighted the additional expertise of the field in working with children with developmental concerns, delay or disability. This would need clarification of what the services include. Are there other areas that have similar terminology use? Specialist was noted as being similar to ‘special’ and the connotation of special schools.
- Specialist early childhood and family development: highlighting family as well as child
- Early childhood intervention: used as a ‘whole’ phrase rather than as an individual word to differentiate it from ‘the Intervention’.

Examples of alternative terminology from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander contexts and consultations:

- Early childhood support
- Early childhood early support
- Early childhood developmental support

What are your thoughts? Should it be changed? If so, what’s an alternative to the term ‘intervention’?



3. Best Practice

The current guidelines are titled ‘The National Guidelines for Best Practice in Early Childhood Intervention’. As part of the Review of Best Practice in ECI, there is discussion about whether the new framework should be called the ‘best’ practice framework, an ‘evidence-informed’ framework, or simply the ‘practice framework’.

Parents consulted by the Association for Children with Disability (ACD) indicated varied perspectives on the term ‘best practice’ and used many descriptors to articulate their understanding of best practice such as ‘highest standard’, ‘evidence-based’, ‘most effective’ and ‘gold standard’, amongst others. Families also indicated that best practice combines the family’s knowledge of their child and family with evidence-based and research-backed intervention approaches. The term ‘best practice’ was met with some caveats, caution and even cynicism.

However, parents consulted by ACD sent a strong message that families want to know (and expect) that what they are being offered in ECI is best practice.

In the professionals’ consultations, many called for clarification of terminology because they viewed the term ‘best’ as vague, meaningless or overused. For

example, one professional stated that the term 'best practice' is "something that is used so broadly that it no longer means anything, and it is used by so many people to describe what they are doing when they really aren't".

In the USA, the Division of Early Childhood (DEC) committed to using the phrase 'recommended practices' instead of 'best practice' as they determined that what is best for one child may not be best for all children, and they recognised that practices should change over time as new strategies are found through research to be more effective (McLean, 2015). Further to this, the term 'research-based practices' is used to inform DEC Recommended Practice revisions and is defined as "Practices that have been demonstrated to be effective and are supported by evidence in the research literature" (Odom et al., 2005).

Decisions about which term is used need to be made in conjunction with a decision about the use of 'early childhood intervention'. This will allow clarification of the title of the Practice Framework amongst other matters.

For example:

- Early Childhood Developmental Support: National Practice Framework
- Early Years Specialist Supports: Evidence-Informed Practice Framework
- Australia's Evidence-Informed Practice Framework: Early Childhood Intervention
- Early Childhood Developmental Support: Evidence-Informed Practice Framework
- The National Practice Framework: Early Childhood Specialist Support
- Early Childhood Specialist Support: National Recommended Practice Framework
- The National Practice Framework for Early Years Inclusion Support
- Practice framework for supporting young children with developmental concerns, delay or disability

Any change to the terms 'early childhood intervention' and 'best practice' would require an awareness campaign to publicise and socialise the new terms.

Should the term 'best' practice be deleted, changed or replaced?

What are your thoughts?



Now you have read this discussion paper, please tell us what you think by [completing the short survey](#), indicating your preferences for terminology.

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Contact us

healthy-trajectories.com.au/eci-review/

official-ecireview@unimelb.edu.au