

The Home Field Advantage in Early Intervention

Have you noticed that “home field advantage” plays a major 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.



Above: Another win at the ballpark!

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 therapist or educator comes to the child’s home or childcare

center and joins the normal, 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 bath time or mealtime is an effective and time saving way that therapists help parents and caregivers teach their child.

The family does not have to purchase special equipment either. The therapist or educator 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!



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