

Frühe Hilfen: Guideline for Network Building

Haas, Sabine; Sagerschnig, Sophie; Weigl, Marion (2017): Frühe Hilfen. Leitfaden zum Aufbau von Frühe-Hilfen-Netzwerken. Gesundheit Österreich GmbH, Wien

Summary

Early childhood interventions aim to enable health for all children and parents. The broad implementation of early childhood interventions in Austria is anchored in the government programme, the Austrian Health Targets, the child and youth health strategy and the health promotion strategy of the health reform. The then Federal Ministry of Health commissioned the Austrian National Public Health Institute (Gesundheit Österreich GmbH, GÖG) to conduct a basic research project on early childhood interventions funded by the prevention fund and thus laid an important foundation for the further implementation. By establishing a National Centre for Early Intervention at GÖG in January 2015, the ministry aims to ensure a well-coordinated and quality-assured implementation of early childhood interventions in Austria.

The present guideline results from the basic research project and is intended to support the establishment of regional early childhood intervention networks and the necessary structures in accordance with the "ideal model" for early childhood interventions in Austria, developed by GÖG. The guideline deals exclusively with how to establish the "indicated" offer of early childhood interventions for families in burdened situations and not with the basic offer for all families, which is also described in the "ideal model".

Early childhood intervention networks are multi-professional networks established at regional level with a variety of coordinated services for parents and children in early childhood. They provide needs-based support to families in burdened situations. The core elements of the regional networks are network management, which is responsible for establishing and maintaining cooperation, and family support, which includes direct work with the families and which guides families to offers they need to improve their situation.

The central target groups of the guideline are those responsible at provincial level who commission and plan the establishment of regional early childhood intervention networks, and the professionals who are entrusted with the implementation. The guideline offers a step-by-step guide through the essential tasks of setting up a regional early childhood intervention network. The described obstacles and success factors for the implementation are based on practical experiences from German and Austrian model projects.

The guide distinguishes between four central phases in the establishment of an early childhood intervention network:

- » Planning phase: At the provincial (steering level), all essential strategic questions and cornerstones of the regional implementation of early childhood intervention networks are clarified.
- » Preparation phase: At the regional level (= network level), the situation is analysed and preparations are made for setting up the network and supporting the families.
- » Structure-building phase: A sustainable network including cooperation agreements is established at regional level in intensive cooperation with the regional partners.
- » Ongoing maintenance of the network ensures functionality and sustainability.

The **planning phase** aims at a common understanding of early childhood interventions and the commitment of the responsible persons at the supra-regional level to obtain their support for the implementation at the regional level. The main tasks of this phase include

- » clarification of all structural issues,
- » preparations at the supra-regional level to be able to start the detailed planning phase at the regional level, and
- » clarifying the long-term financial security of early childhood interventions networks in the federal state.

The **preparatory phase** serves to prepare the practical implementation of regional network management and family support involving all target groups. The main tasks of this phase include

- » the selection of suitable persons,
- » the organisation and implementation of trainings,
- » providing the infrastructure,
- » developing quality assurance processes,
- » conceptualising communication and public relations work and producing information material,
- » developing information material and
- » an initial analysis of the services available in the region.

The **structure-building phase** focuses on the establishment of the necessary structures with the involvement of the network partners. The main tasks of this phase include

- » the organisation of a kick-off event with all network partners,
- » deepening the network analysis with the involvement of network partners and
- » the conclusion of cooperation agreements.

The **ongoing maintenance** of the network serves to maintain and optimise the regional network in the long term. The main tasks of this phase include the regular reflection of experiences and the continuous exchange with the network partners.