What is SST?
Specialized Skills Training (SST) is a unique Part C early intervention service.

- SST supports development across domains with an emphasis on strengthening cognitive skills, positive behaviors and social interactions.
- SST strategies adapt natural activities to promote child learning.
- SST focuses on promoting parent or caregiver and child interactions within the context of everyday activities and routines in the home and community.

Who Provides SST?
Early Intervention Specialists (EISs) provide SST and are credentialed specialists in:

- Infant and toddler development, both typical and atypical patterns
- Typical infant and toddler behavior and challenging behaviors (biting, tantrums, picky eating, sleep issues)
- Early childhood cognition, motivation and how infants and toddlers learn
- Infant and toddler social interactions
- How developmental areas are interconnected
- How infants and toddlers learn
- Typical infant and toddler behavior and challenging behaviors (biting, tantrums, picky eating, sleep issues)
Specialized Skills Training (SST) — An In-Depth Review

**Federal Definition**
As described in federal legislation (IDEA, 2004), Special instruction (Specialized Skills Training) includes:
- The design of learning environments and activities that promote the child’s acquisition of skills in a variety of developmental areas, including cognitive processes and social interaction;
- Curriculum planning including the planned interaction of personnel, materials, and time and space, that leads to achieving the outcomes in the child’s individualized family service plan;

**State Definition**
(a) Specialized skills training (developmental services) are rehabilitative services to promote age-appropriate development by providing skills training to correct deficits and teach compensatory skills for deficits that directly result from medical, developmental or other health-related conditions.

(b) Services must:
be designed to create learning environments and activities that promote the child’s acquisition of skills in one or more of the following developmental areas: physical/motor, communication, adaptive, cognitive, and social/emotional;

**Example**
The EIS teaches the parent to use verbal cues and hand over hand prompts to help the child learn how to operate a cause and effect toy. During the same activity, the EIS also demonstrates for the parent how to strengthen:
- fine motor skills by operating the buttons on the toy, and
- receptive communication skills by pairing verbal requests with hand over hand prompts.

As the child’s skills progress, the EIS works with the parent to reduce the cues and prompts in the activity and to transition the skills learned with this toy to other routines and activities that require the child to understand cause and effect.

**Example**
The EIS helps the family identify the child’s favorite toys. The EIS works with the parent to modify the child’s play room to encourage him to verbally request his favorite toys.

The EIS coaches other team members to modify routines and activities to address development across all domains. The EIS collaborates with other team members to identify strategies they can use to support the child’s cognitive and social-emotional development and positive behaviors and interactions.
Specialized Skills Training (SST) — An In-Depth Review

**Federal Definition**
As described in federal legislation (IDEA, 2004), Special instruction (Specialized Skills Training) includes:
- Providing families with information, skills, and support related to enhancing the skill development of the child
- Working with the child to enhance the child’s development (CFR 303.12 (13)(i-iv)).

**State Definition**
Services must:
- include skills training and anticipatory guidance for family members, or other significant caregivers to ensure effective treatment and to enhance the child’s development;

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**Example**
To help the child understand and anticipate transitions, the EIS suggests the family use a timer or song to cue the child when he needs to stop one activity and move to the next one.

At a home visit, the EIS demonstrates how to incorporate the preferred “tool” when the child needs to transition from playing to getting ready to leave the house. The EIS provides feedback and support to the family as they implement this strategy.

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**Example**
The EIS models for the parent how to use pictures of food to encourage the child to indicate choices during snack time.

Because infants and toddlers learn best in the context of their relationships with primary caregivers, EISs work with parents and caregivers to coach them on different strategies and activities they can use to meet the identified outcomes in their child’s IFSP.
What is the difference between Specialized Skills Training (SST) provided by an Early Intervention Specialist (EIS) and ECI Services provided by a Therapist or other Licensed Provider?

**Therapists and Other Licensed Service Providers**
Therapists and other licensed service providers deliver ongoing or consultative services when the child’s needs require specialized knowledge in a specific developmental area.

Therapists are specialists in:
- typical and atypical development for a specific domain
- the appropriate specialized intervention practices for a specific domain

The role of the therapist on the IFSP team includes recommending medically necessary services under their scope of practice based on the child’s evaluation and assessment.

**Overlap of Providers**
All ECI service providers are experts in:
- implementing strategies within the family’s daily routines and community
- infant and toddler development

All ECI service providers coach parents on how to help their child meet his/her IFSP outcomes.

All ECI service providers address needs in the context of the whole child’s development and support:
- Positive social-emotional skills
- Acquisition and use of knowledge and skills
- Use of appropriate behaviors to meet the child’s needs.

All documentation for ECI services clearly reflects which service was provided.

**Early Intervention Specialists (EISs)**
EISs provide SST as an ongoing or consultative service when the child would benefit from a comprehensive developmental service.

EISs are specialists in:
- early childhood cognition, motivation and how infants and toddlers learn
- typical infant and toddler behavior and challenging behaviors (biting, tantrums, picky eating, sleep issues)
- how developmental areas are interconnected

SST is always planned with an ongoing therapy service or assessment.