Special instruction is one of the support services offered to infants and toddlers by the Early Intervention Program (EIP) in the state of New York. Special instruction services consist of special educational sessions with a special instruction specialist, the child and the child’s parents. These sessions are conducted to help the child meet developmental progress and meet specified goals. Special instruction professionals use infant and toddler educational curriculums, activity sheets and developmentally appropriate toys during the sessions. For example, special education professionals may select a number of toys to help a child maximize involvement and engagement during play time.

Special instruction, while it might be considered a form of “special education” for children under age 3, is different than special education as defined by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, the federal law ensuring services to children with disabilities. The state provides special education services to children over the age of 3 in a separate program administered through the New York Department of Education. Special instruction, however, is one of the EIP services administered by the New York State Department of Health, and it’s usually referred to when discussing services for children ages under the age of 3. And unlike special education, which is often provided in a classroom setting, special instruction is provided in a natural setting such as the home environment or a child care facility.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act defines special instruction as:
- Designing 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 (IFSP)
- 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.

According to University of South Carolina Technical Support for Early Intervention Service Web page, special instruction is the service uniquely identified in federal law as being specifically relevant for both cognitive and social development. Special instruction uses early childhood development strategies for promoting typical development and function. This may include the use of assistive technology, such as wheelchairs or communication aids. Special instruction
professionals plan the effective use of anything available within the child's natural environment to assist families to enhance their child's development. It's important to note that special instruction is not a type of therapy, nor is it merely the coordination of services in a child's IFSP, although the service coordinator may also function as a special instructor. In fact, special instruction may be performed by different types of specialists, and in many states, providers of special instruction may have job titles other than “Special Instructor.”

For more information, see the following document, “What is Special Instruction,” on the University of South Carolina's Technical Support for Early Intervention Service in South Carolina Web site at: http://uscm.med.sc.edu/tecs/TECSmessages.htm.