



Navigating the IEP: A Guide for Parents

An IEP is the individualized education plan, a document written for a child with a disability that identifies needs, sets goals and lists services to insure optimal educational and vocational outcomes. Often the IEP process can be intimidating and overwhelming to parents. The following guidelines will help parents become engaged participants in the development and implementation of an effective IEP.

Before the first or annual IEP meeting:

- Gather information about your child: medical information, work samples, report cards, progress reports, past IEP's, classroom observations, independent evaluations, therapists' reports, state assessments, and most importantly, assessments based on your own first-hand knowledge.
- Dream big! Draft a vision statement, with your child's input if appropriate, describing future goals for academics, independence, behavior, post secondary education and employment.
- Assess your child's present level of ability in reading, writing, math, language, attention, social skills, fine & gross motor skills, self care, and technology. Even if you're not a trained educator, your assessment is invaluable; you know your child better than anyone else.
- Consider inviting a trusted friend to attend the IEP meeting with you as an advocate and/or notetaker.

During the IEP meeting:

- Be an informed, strong voice, advocating for the best interests of your child. Listen respectfully to all.
- Expect goals that address a specific need, are measurable and appropriately challenging.
- Find out how progress will be measured and when you will be provided with progress reports.
- Consider related services that may be needed, such as therapy (speech and language, physical, occupational) counseling, transportation, nursing, special teacher training.
- Note which program modifications and accommodations are proposed; for example, extended time for tests, fewer concepts presented, etc.
- Come to consensus about where the IEP will be carried out: within the general education classroom, within a special education classroom, or in a combination of the two.
- Start discussing what will happen after high school early. Consider now what will pave the way for successful postsecondary education, employment and independent living.

After the IEP meeting:

- Explain any changes to your child and the reasons for them so they are not surprised or upset by unexpected changes in their routine.
- Monitor your child's progress. If there are significant gains, a substantial lack of improvement or a new issue needs to be addressed, request an IEP team meeting before the annual review.

Resources:

- *IEP Basics for Parents of Students with Learning Disabilities*, www.ld.org
- *The IEP Toolkit*, by Gretchen H. Carroll, <http://www.kcdsg.org/files/content/iep-toolkit1.pdf>
- *The Short and Sweet IEP Overview*, <http://nichcy.org/schoolage/iep/overview>
- *Wrightslaw: All About IEPs* (ISBN: 978-1-892320-20-9) by Pete Wright, Pam Wright, and Sue O'Connor

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