



Being a parent is the most wonderful (and hardest!) job in the world. If you have a child with special needs your job is no less wonderful but it can be different; it can be challenging. For one thing, it may seem that you need to learn a whole new language! From diagnosis to therapy we have DSM, PDD, ASD, SPD, OT, ABA, SLP, DTT, NET, PROMPT, SI....the list goes on!

One of the terms you may come across things when dealing with your special education or therapy provider is the IEP – Individualized Education Plan. This guide aims to talk you through this important document

What is an IEP?

An Individualized Education Plan (IEP) is a document listing the educational goals for a child. In many countries, special education students are legally entitled to have an IEP. This is because it is such an important document – unlike mainstream education, children with additional needs do not progress at the same developmental rate. The IEP acts as a road map for therapy or education, when the mainstream map needs a detour.

Another benefit to the IEP is that it allows for a clear handover if the child changes services.

A good IEP should be a SMART document, in that it should:

Specifically state what we want the child to do,

Measure progress objectively,

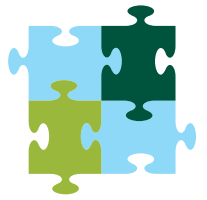
Assign responsibilities to key members of the team,

Be Realistic, taking into account the child's ability and rate of learning

Be Timed, with regularly scheduled reviews

Who writes the IEP?

Putting together an IEP is of great interest and importance to families and staff alike. Anyone that is working with your child on a regular basis should be involved in the writing of the IEP – this could include ABA therapists, speech and language pathologists, occupational therapists, physical therapists, special education teachers, psychologists. Most importantly, you as parents should be involved in the writing of the IEP.



How are goals selected?

Goals are usually grouped together under areas of skill, such as language skills, play skills and motor skills. Interdisciplinary staff may use standardized tests, developmental checklists and mainstream academic curricula to choose appropriate goals. The goals you select as parents are equally important in this document, as it represents what is important in your day-to-day life as a family.

The IEP Meeting

Once everyone has some goals in mind, the team have an IEP meeting to put all their ideas together. IEP meetings allow everybody to sit down together to communicate their priorities, and to come up with reasonable, consistent learning goals for the child. This good planning allows everybody to create a positive and productive learning environment.

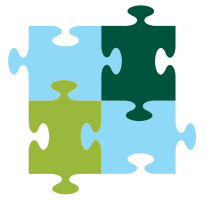
As a parent, you should be invited to contribute to your child's IEP. Here are several things to consider before attending an IEP meeting:

1) Observe in your child's current classroom/therapy setting

It may be a rewarding learning experience for both you and the support staff to see how your child is doing across different therapy settings, with and without your presence. Think about what your child's day is like overall, any specific differences you note between your practice at home versus the classroom environment, consider if your child is more successful with one-on-one versus group time...small things may make a big difference.

2) Talk to your Therapists 1:1

IEP meetings sometimes involve many different team members. Apart from the fact that it can be a full meeting, you may find therapists use acronyms and teacher-speak that is difficult to follow. Where possible, take time to meet your therapists 1:1 before the IEP meeting, to clarify any terms or programs that may not be clear to you. That way you go into the meeting ready to get the most from the team discussion. Remember, you may not be an expert about special education, but you are an expert about your child. Your inputs are just as important. The best thing about having a support team is that EVERYONE helps each other (that includes you, mom and dad!)



The IEP Meeting (continued)

3) Be prepared – Make a list

After observing and meeting the team, it's time to make a list of your specific concerns, and a list of accomplishments to bring as a reminder to the meeting. Don't forget to tell them the wonderful things you notice about your child!

- * What is working?
- * What needs to be re-assessed?
- * What do you need to make life easier at home?
- * How can you support the therapist?
- * How can the therapist support you?

These general questions can be a good jump-off to other, more specific concerns that you may have, and to show the team that you are taking an active role in your child's development. The more areas discussed, the better the therapy plan.

4) Recognize that your support in the home environment is invaluable

To make the most progress, emotionally and academically, goals need to be fluid between school and home. As a parent, you are an equal member of the IEP team, which means you are equally responsible for following through on goals in the home.

Talking about your child's IEP need not be confusing or rattling. An IEP meeting is a chance for school personnel and parents to communicate as a team, with the best interests of their child at heart. We hope that with these pointers, an IEP meeting can be a positive experience for you to sit down and communicate clearly with your team.

About Us

Established in 2013, CDC provides a network of internationally qualified and licensed professionals who offer child-centered and evidence-based early detection and intervention for children with developmental delays.