

Center for Autism and Related Disabilities

University of Florida/Gainesville

IEP Series Part 2 Being Prepared Transcript

Hello and welcome to the second in a series of five trainings on the ins and outs of the IEP process. This training series was developed to introduce the concept of IEPs to families who are navigating IEPs for the first time, but it may also serve as a reference guide for those who need a reminder or a “brush up” on specific components of IEP planning. It has been divided into five parts so that viewers have the option of watching which ever parts are useful to them. We hope you find this series helpful. So let’s get started.

Before we begin, I think it’s important to share a short disclaimer about the intended audience for this series. The content presented here was written for families of children who are eligible for IEP services. However, we welcome and encourage anyone who has an interest in IEPs and their development to participate. Hopefully professionals will find that learning about IEPs from the family’s perspective is a useful way to help ensure family participation and satisfaction with the process.

Each of the five trainings in this series will cover a specific, and relatively succinct range of topics so that participants can choose the training or trainings that address the topics of their specific interest. This training, the second in the series, will cover topics that include:

Identifying your child’s strengths and needs: How are your child’s skills and challenges assessed and represented?

Having input into your child’s present levels of performance, also known as the PLOP: How can you ensure that your child’s skills and challenges are being accurately represented?

Goals and objectives: what are they and how do they drive the IEP team?

Identifying your top three priorities for the school year: how can you help ensure that your priorities are represented and addressed by the IEP team?

Accommodations and modifications: what are they and how do they provide supports so that your child can achieve his or her goals for the year?

In each training, there are a few take home messages that we hope you will understand by the end of the training. In this training, we hope you will be able to explain the difference between an IEP goal and an objective and that you will be able to define “accommodation” and “modification.”

A few important points as we get started.

You are the expert on your child. This means that you should be driving the IEP team, not just being present at the meetings. The professionals have valuable information about education and therapy, etc., but you have valuable information about your child, specifically, what works and what doesn’t. In other words, we all come to the proverbial table with important, and equally valuable information for the IEP process.

You know your child's strengths: You have the benefit of knowing your child's complete history with regard to learning. The team needs to understand this perspective to use what works and avoid what doesn't. Optimally, the team should be using your child's strengths to address his or her needs.

You are also in the position to best know what your child struggles with, not just in the classroom, but in life. Again, it is important that the team know what your child's main challenges are, as these should become the focus of the IEP.

Since you have the most history with your child, you are in the position to be able to say what strategies have worked before... and which ones haven't. This can save the team valuable time when planning interventions.

Only you know how to characterize your priorities for your child. It is important that the team knows what these are so that they are not only represented on the IEP but are addressed during the school year.

So again I will say, your input is essential. It is a required component; a "must have," not a "nice to have."

There are many ways to characterize your child's strengths. It is important to describe how your child typically does on a task but to also have a sense of areas where independence is emerging. In other words, can you rate your child's skills on a scale from "does independently" to "does with a great deal of help?" Optimally, IEP goals are drawn from the skills that are starting to emerge, as these are the ones that your child will most likely be able to master given some additional effort on the part of the IEP team. So here are some questions to ask yourself:

What does your child do independently? Versus "with some help?" In other words, what skills are starting to emerge?

What does your child enjoy doing? I often ask families what types of activities their child would gravitate toward if given the choice. Like most of us, kids tend to gravitate toward activities that they enjoy and feel confident in. We can use these to judge what skills the child feels strong in.

What sorts of things does your child enjoy learning about? Again, what does he or she gravitate towards? And

How does your child communicate when calm versus upset? This helps us understand his or her level of communication on a "good day" versus a stressful day.

The next step is to identify needs, which will later become the goals and objectives on the IEP.

These days IEPs are computer-generated with lots of drop down boxes. This is for the ease of the IEP developers, but it can be easy to slide into the habit of moving away from an individualized document and creating a cookie-cutter IEP. To avoid this, you can help the team steer itself back towards YOUR child's specific needs.

Again, you will want to ask yourself some of the same questions. I particularly like the question about what activities your child shows interest in but still needs help doing, as it points to some potential for new skills or topics to teach. I also like to ask families what would make the child, and their life, easier.

This speaks to quality of life, which is so important. And finally, as the goals and objectives are developed, they are meant to represent stepping stones to longer-term skills. So, it is important to look at how each “need” area is associated with a longer-term skill. This is helpful, too, when you are trying to pare down a long list of priorities. You can ask yourself, what does my child need to know now to move on to the next step in building this skill?

The present level of performance, or PLOP, is intended to describe what your child can currently do. It should be an accurate and thorough description of current skill level without the presence of judgment. Typically this is created by compiling both formal and informal assessments. It is important that several people, including the parent or guardian, weigh in on the present levels, as they will later serve as a guide for developing the goals and objectives. Remember, too, that the present levels must also include a description of how your child’s disability affects his or her performance in the general education setting. Examples of areas to be described in the present levels include academic, speech and language, social/emotional, physical or motor, sensory, and independent functioning.

Present levels should clearly describe what your child can currently do. This helps the team identify the “next steps” in his/her learning. These next steps become the goals and objectives on the IEP.

Many people are unclear about the difference between an IEP goal and an objective, so let’s take a minute to explain the difference. The goal is intended to be a general target for instruction. It should be measurable and set for mastery in one year, or one IEP rotation. This is important because it helps the IEP team clearly identify what is doable in one year’s time. All goals, and objectives for that matter, must be written to describe with your CHILD will do, not what the school team will do to teach or support the learning of the skill. And, as I have mentioned, each goal should address where the present levels left off.

The objective is meant to break down the goal into smaller pieces. They are stepping stones, also known as benchmarks, and they lead to the mastery of the corresponding goal. Again, all objectives should be measurable, meaning that they can be observed, and masterable, which isn’t actually a word but means that it is achievable within one year.

We will be spending a great deal of time talking about how goals and objectives should, and shouldn’t, be written in the upcoming trainings associated with this series.

Here is a list of common domain areas. Academics, as you know, covers a wide range of categories including reading, writing, spelling, and math. But if it’s appropriate for your child, the IEP should go beyond academic areas to include communication and social skills, behavior, and independence.

So, for example, if your child has a need in the area of writing, there might be a goal that he or she learns to write his or her first and last name without help. The objectives, then, would break down that task into writing individual letters, building up to writing the whole name. The objectives may also specify the level of help or prompting your child needs at each benchmark. For example, it might move to tracing over thick black letters to tracing over yellow highlighter to “connecting the dots” for the letters of his name to copying a model to writing without a model. That would be an example of how a broader IEP goal is broken down into its component parts.

For some parents, it's easy to come up with priorities for their child because certain things come to mind. Other parents struggle because when asked what they want their child to learn, they want to reply, "Everything, of course!" If this is you, perhaps the questions on this slide will help you narrow down your list, or put in a better way, help you put them in an order that makes sense right now. For example, if you are considering adding a certain skill to the list of goals and objectives, ask yourself: will it make my child more independent? Happier? More social? What could the school team work on that would roll over to the home environment?

Incidentally, this is important. You want to make sure you have enough IEP goals to keep your child adequately busy but not sooo many that the team never gets to address all of them.

One way to determine if a skill should "make the cut" is to ask whether it is something that your child needs to be able to do across settings. If it's only something your child needs to do in one place, or perhaps only rarely, it might not be important enough to target right now. As mentioned earlier, it is also important to consider whether the skill is a pre-requisite to other important skills. Again, if it's not, it might not be important enough to target right now. Keep in mind that quality of life is key here. If it's truly important for your child and your family, it should be represented on the IEP.

Here's another way to think about it. I often use this form when I begin collaborating with a family so that I can be sure that I am addressing their most important needs. You can use this tool to first rate, on a scale of zero to six, how important something is for your child right now. Next, you rank your top three priorities. Keep in mind that this is going to change as your child and family's circumstances change, so this is something you may want to do regularly to "check in" with yourself. As for the IEP, you want to make sure that at least your top three priorities are represented on the IEP.

So far we have introduced the concepts of present levels and goals and objectives. Another important component of the IEP is the accommodations and modifications section. Again, we will talk about this in more detail in an upcoming training in this series, but for now, let's just make a distinction between the two. An accommodation is a change in the way your child is taught or tested. In other words, it is a change in HOW your child will learn. It includes providing different tools to aid learning as well as the use of different assessment measures to assess progress and mastery. In other words, your child is learning the same content as his or her peers, but the way he is accessing the material or being tested on his knowledge is changed to accommodate his needs.

Here is a list of some of the many accommodations that are available to your child. This is a very short list, as compared to all of the choices available. READ LIST

- Additional time to complete tests
- Use of a number line
- Use of a calculator
- Use of a note taker
- Use of visual supports
- Responds orally instead of in written form

- Opportunity to retake tests
- Using counting chips to complete a math activity

- Written instructions provided (in addition to oral)
- Frequent breaks
- Adapted equipment
- Augmentative or alternative communication systems (AAC)
- Preferential seating
- Writing single-word responses instead of sentences

You may notice on this list that many of these things are additions to the classroom curriculum, such as using a calculator, using visual supports, or providing written instructions

A modification, on the other hand, is a change to what your child is learning in class. This refers to content, not testing.

Here is a list of some examples of what modifications might look like.

- Completing 5 math problems instead of 10
- Being responsible for learning only the “core” spelling words,” others considered bonus words
- Learning the capital of Florida instead of all of the state capitals
- Completing single-digit addition while peers are working on double-digit addition
- Identifying the main character of the story while peers are identifying main ideas and themes

As we wrap up this second in the series of 5 IEP trainings, let’s test your knowledge. See if you can determine whether each of the following is a modification or an accommodation.

WAIT

OK, time to review.

The student highlights the answer instead of writing it. This is an accommodation because it changes how your child is being tested.

The student learns to write his first name but not his whole name. This is a modification because it is a change to what your child is learning, or the content.

The student uses a number line for math. This is an accommodation because it doesn’t change the content of the learning. It just provides an additional support for learning.

The teacher provides printed notes for lectures. This is also an accommodation because it is also an additional tool for learning.

A third grade student learns to identify numbers. This would be a modification because this is not typical third grade curriculum; therefore, the content has been modified.

Student identifies the parts of the body but not its functions. Another example of a modification, since the content required for learning has been changed.

Student sits in the front row next to the teacher. This is an accommodation since there is no change to the material being taught.

And lastly,

Peers read story, student identifies front, back, and spine. This is a modification, since the peers are learning different content than the child.

How did you do? Hopefully this training was a good starting place so that you can now delve more deeply into the components of the IEP. We hope to see you at trainings three, four, and five!

Thanks for joining us!