

Center for Autism and Related Disabilities

University of Florida/Gainesville

IEP Series Part 1 – Getting Started Transcript

Hello and welcome to the first 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 first in the series, will serve as an introduction to IEPs and will cover topics that include:

What is an IEP: what does it stand for and what does that mean?

Who qualifies for an IEP: how do you know if your child is eligible?

The evaluation process: how are your child’s needs assessed to determine how an IEP can best be structured to meet those needs?

Parent participation: how can you, as the parent or guardian, actively participate in the IEP process so that your child’s skills and needs are accurately represented and so that your family’s priorities are honored?

Procedural safeguards: what are your legal rights, and the school’s legal responsibilities, in the IEP process?

Who attends the meeting: who must be there and who can be there

The purpose of the IEP: what does the document represent for your child?

And finally,

The purpose of the IEP meeting: what is supposed to be accomplished at the “official” meeting?
Ideally we hope that you walk away from this training feeling well versed in the basics of the IEP.
Specifically, we hope that at the end of this training, you will be able to define IEP as well as explain several purposes of the IEP.

IEP stands for Individual Education Program, sometimes referred to as Individual Education Plan
The IEP document itself is intended to document the skills that your child’s education team will address.
It should span a range of skill areas, and will likely include the following domains or focus areas:
Curriculum and Learning, Independent functioning, Social/Emotional Behavior, Communication, &
Health Care

The IEP also indicates what supports, or help, your child requires in order to meet his or her potential.
By documenting these supports on the IEP it indicates that the team members have agreed to make these supports available for your child whenever needed and throughout the school day if appropriate.
Supports usually fall into two primary categories, accommodations and modifications, and encompass a wide variety of options. We will discuss accommodations and modifications in greater detail in a later training within this series, but these supports typically include how information is provided to your child (for example, fewer math problems per page) and how your child demonstrates his or her response (for example, typing an answer instead of writing it).

“Services” is another category of support on the IEP. Services may include therapies that your child will receive, including speech, occupational therapy, and so forth.

An IEP should be used not only to document what your child will learn during the school year; it should also serve as a place to document progress and mastery. On a minimum of a quarterly basis, a member of the IEP team must document whether each goal and objective has been addressed, is “in progress,” or has been mastered. More on this later.

An IEP is intended to last for a period of up to one full year. Therefore, the team should work to create a list of goals that seem to be reasonably “accomplishable” within that period of time. The trick is to not write goals that your child will master too quickly but to create goals that will be achieved by the end of the year. That way, when the new IEP is in development for the next year, you can design it based on the progress made the current year. Otherwise, you run the risk of poorly written or unachievable goals hopping from one IEP to the next.

The IEP should serve as a roadmap that directs your child's team toward his or her goals. In essence, it is a best guess as to what can be reasonably taught, and learned, during that one year time frame. We don't always hit the mark on this one, but the IEP helps everyone stay accountable and remain focused on the goals that were outlined when it was developed.

Remember, though, that the IEP is not a group of lesson plans. It is supposed to document what your child will learn. It is also supposed to document some of the strategies or tools that should be implemented to help your child learn. What it does NOT do is delineate how each skill must be taught or give specific details about the lessons that will be provided.

Similarly, the IEP is not a promise of what your child will learn. Everyone on the team should have input to ensure that the goals and objectives are both important for the child and reasonable for his or her current skill level; however as I have said, it's really just a best guess. So although school teams are accountable for ensuring that they address what is listed on the IEP, there is no way to guarantee that each goal or objective is mastered by the end of the year.

So, what is an IEP used for? There are three stakeholders who must be involved in the IEP planning process as well as its implementation. They are the school district, the teachers and therapists, and the family itself.

The school district uses the IEP as documentation of what was agreed upon by the IEP team. It serves as a contract of sorts that indicates what the school district has agreed to provide. This is especially important when special "extras" are recommended, including, for example, (I would leave this out: "a one-on-one aide or) paraprofessional support, testing accommodations, or special learning materials. Teachers and therapists use the IEP as a way to plan how and what they will teach. They draw from the goals and objectives to direct to focus of their lessons and to choose appropriate learning materials. They also use the IEP to document progress on a quarterly basis.

Families use the IEP as a record of what has been agreed upon as a team. It's nice to be able to reference throughout the year. It is also helpful to use the IEP as a document that drives questions, concerns, and recommendations.

If it's written on the IEP, the school team is responsible for addressing each goal and objective by the end of the school year.

The idea is for each goal and objective to be mastered by that time; however, the school team is only

responsible for documenting that each objective has been addressed (efforts were made to teach the objective to mastery).

On this slide you can see a list of qualifying conditions. In order to be eligible for an IEP, your child must be identified as having at least one of the following conditions, diagnoses, or disabilities.

Autism Spectrum Disorder

Deaf or Hard-of-hearing

Developmentally Delay (ages 0-5 years)

Emotional/Behavioral Disability

Homebound or Hospitalized

Intellectual Disability

Orthopedic Impairment

Other Health Impairment

Specific Learning Disability

Speech and/or Language Impairment

Traumatic Brain Injury

Visually Impairment or Blindness

Dual Sensory Impairment

You'll notice, for instance, that ADHD is not listed here. A child with an ADHD diagnosis may or may not qualify for an IEP. He or she may qualify for an IEP under the OHI or "other health impairment" qualification. If your child has ADHD and does not qualify for an IEP, he or she may qualify for a 504 plan. A 504 plan is part of the Rehabilitation Act of the Civil Rights law which prohibits discrimination of individuals on the basis of disability. A 504 plan is generally less detailed than an IEP but does provide documentation of supports, including accommodations that must be provided for learning.

It is important to note that your child may have a medical diagnosis, typically given by a psychiatrist, psychologist or a pediatrician. He or she may also have an educational diagnosis, determined after an evaluation process is conducted by your child school. Or, your child may

have both. It is the educational evaluation that will determine whether your child is eligible for ESE services. This evaluation will also serve as a starting point for the development of the IEP. You, as the parent, and/or the school district can initiate the request for an evaluation. The evaluation itself involves assessing your child's present levels of performance across domains, including communication, social, academic, motor, and adaptive skills. An interview is often conducted as well; its purpose is to assess the presence of any developmental delays in early and current development. This process must be completed within 60 days of initiation and should result in an eligibility determination.

This list represents what should be involved in a comprehensive evaluation. The assessment team should include a variety of professionals who are qualified to assess in their designated area. These professionals may include behavior analysts, psychologists, special educators, speech/language pathologists, occupational therapists, physical therapists, and assistive technology experts. Medical information such as history of seizures and use of medications is also considered.

Regardless of who initiates the evaluation process, formal parental consent must be obtained from the school before the process can begin. And of course, all evaluations must be conducted in a nondiscriminatory and unbiased fashion. You are always welcome to be part of the evaluation, and you should always be able to ask questions during the process.

So here is what the process boils down to. First, a referral is made for the evaluation. This means that the school obtains your permission to start testing. Next, a variety of professionals conduct the evaluation. Afterwards, a determination of eligibility is made. This means that the evaluation team decides if your child is in need of special services, and if so, which ones? Next, the team meets to develop the IEP, a process that we will go into much more detail about in the remaining parts of this training series. And lastly, you will be asked to agree to the recommended placement for your child. You are, of course, free to refuse consent if you do not agree with the recommended placement.

Parent participation is very important. In fact, schools are legally required to engage in you all conversations related to your child's IEP. They must also document that participation. In cases where the parent does not choose to participate, the school is also required to document their

frequent attempts to involve the family.

Procedural safeguards are another critical element, and required component, of the IEP process. Their purpose is to ensure that you are aware of and understand your rights as the parent or guardian of a child in need of special education services. The safeguards are well delineated in the law, IDEA, or Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, but the school is also required to provide you with a copy of these safeguards before the IEP process begins. You must also sign that you have received them. It is important that if, at any time, you are unclear about your rights or have questions about them, that you speak to someone on your IEP team, typically the case manager. As you can see on this slide, your rights include...

- The right to examine all educational records
- The right to have an impartial hearing
- The right to mediation
- The right to be accompanied by an attorney
- The right to due process

This slide provides a list of the individuals who should be present at the IEP meeting. A parent or caregiver representative should be there. If not, the school must provide documentation that they made a concerted effort to invite you and accommodate your schedule. The classroom teacher to whom your child will be assigned, as well as a special education and general education representative should also be there. Often your child's classroom teacher also serves the role of special or general educator. A school administrator, such as the principal or vice principal and a representative from the local education agency must also be present. You are also welcome to bring an advocate, friend, family member, or outside therapist. Really anyone who knows your child well can participate. It is customary to inform the IEP team that you will be bringing additional support to the meeting. The school is also required to have you sign a form indicating that they did not discourage or disallow you from bringing someone to the meeting. Participants who are not available in person may participate by phone.

There are three primary purposes of the IEP. First, the IEP will be a place to document what will take place during the school year. It includes the skills that your child will learn, teaching accommodations and modifications that will support your child's learning, and additional supports, like level of prompting, the use of visuals or assistive technology, and so forth. We will

be going into much greater detail about the components of the IEP in additional trainings in this series.

As for accountability, the IEP is a place to document all key players, or stakeholders, who will be responsible for implementing the components of the IEP. For example, the IEP will document who will be responsible for collecting data on progress and how often related service professionals will work with your child.

Progress monitoring involves the form and frequency of data collection for the purpose of determining how much progress your child is making toward his or her goals. Typically goals and objectives are assessed and progress is documented on at least a quarterly basis, but the team may decide to do more informal assessment on a much more regular basis. The team uses the data collected during progress monitoring to help shape future IEP goals.

Although the agenda for an IEP meeting can vary, the meeting generally involves introductions of team members followed by team members describing their perceptions of your child's areas of strength and need. The goals and objectives, then, should grow from this conversation. In other words, the team should create an IEP that documents how your child's strengths will be used to address his or her needs. Goals, objectives, instructional supports, time spent in therapies (if appropriate), and accommodations and modifications are all specified at this time. Additionally, the amount of time your child will spend in the general education versus special education settings will also be documented.

According to the law, your child is entitled to spend his or her school years in the least restrictive environment, meaning that he or she should be with typically developing peers to the maximum extent that is appropriate for your child's needs. If your child is going to spend part of his day in a more restrictive environment, such as a self-contained special education class, the IEP must document what percentage of his day he or will spend there and why the less restrictive environment is not appropriate at that time.

Lastly the team will determine the type and frequency of monitoring and set a follow up date for a team meeting.

We hope you have enjoyed this first in the series of 5 trainings on the IEP process. Hopefully it has informed you about the purpose and steps of the IEP and has prepared you to know how to be

involved in this very important step in your child's education. Please join us for the additional trainings in this series for more specific information about IEPs.