



IEP basics: parents and guardians

The IEP (Individualized Education Program) is the written statement that describes the educational plan designed to meet the child's individual needs. It states the goals for the child for the upcoming year. It is required for every child (three years of age and older) who qualifies for special education. It is developed by a team that includes members of the school staff and the parents. A representative from your child's Head Start program should also participate.

The IEP is developed by the team and finalized at a meeting with the team. Parent input is very important. Parents are always invited to the meeting and they are strongly encouraged to attend. The IEP is a very important document. Here are some of the ways you can be involved in the development of your child's IEP.

Bring a photo of your child or an example of your child's work such as a drawing.

Why? The IEP meeting is about your child. Make sure that everyone knows a little something about your child – what your child likes to do, what your child is really good at. Share your child's photo or work sample at the beginning of the meeting.

Bring your ideas of the goals you want on your child's IEP.

Why? Most everyone at the meeting is just getting to know your child and will have papers or reports in front of them at the meeting. Since you know your child the best you can bring your own ideas regarding what you want your child to be working on (e.g. being able to tell you what they want, playing with friends, following directions). Your list can be as short or as detailed as you'd like and make sure your list includes your most important ideas for what your child should learn during the year. Make sure that you have a turn to share your ideas and goals for your child.

Ask for clarification if you don't understand some of the words that are used.

Why? The people from the school might use words or terms that aren't familiar to you. Some of these are special education words that they use every day. There's no reason that people who aren't in special education should know what they mean. Just ask what they mean – or maybe the Head Start representative can ask for you. Just say something like, "Can you tell me a little more about what that word means?"

Invite a friend or someone else who knows your child to come with you to the meeting.

Why? Some parents find it helpful to bring someone with them to the meeting. This person can serve as a support to you and help provide additional information about your child. Having a friend with you can help you be a better advocate for your child. This person can be a friend, a relative or anyone else who knows your child well.