

The I.E.P.

Writing the Individualized Education Plan

The Autism Society of Oregon receives numerous questions regarding the education of students with autism. One of the challenging tasks for both school personnel and parents of children with autism is to develop an appropriate educational plan. The intent of this package is to assist you in identifying areas of potential need for students with autism. It is not meant to explain how to determine an educational placement for a student with autism, or to suggest that one type of educational program would be appropriate for all students with autism.

BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE IEP

The Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) is the cornerstone for the education of a child with a disability. Definition of the IEP as well as specific language governing the IEP process appears in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) (CFR 300.346). IDEA is a federal law outlining the education of children with disabilities.

The IEP is a written statement of a child's educational program, which identifies the services a child needs so that he or she may grow and learn during the school year. The IEP outlines the child's special education plan by defining goals for the school year, services needed to help the child meet those goals, and a method of evaluating the student's progress. As its name suggests, the **Individualized** Educational Program should be written to reflect the child's *individual and unique* needs. Accordingly, no single IEP would be appropriate for all children with autism.

To develop an IEP, the local education agency officials and others involved in the child's educational program meet to discuss education related goals. By law, (CFR 300.344) the following people must be invited to attend the IEP meeting:

- One or both of the child's parents
- The child's teacher
- A representative of the public agency (local education agency) other than the child's teacher, who is qualified to provide, or supervise the provision of special education
- The child, if appropriate
- Other individuals at the discretion of the parent or agency (For example, a physician, advocate, neighbor, etc)

Under IDEA parents must be included in the IEP team Sec. 614(d)(1)(B). With the 1997 Reauthorization of IDEA (P.L. 105-17) parents must now be included as "members of any group that makes decisions on the educational placement of the child" Sec.614(f).

IEP meetings must be held at least annually, but may be held more often if needed. *Parents may request a review or revision of the IEP at any time.* While teachers and school personnel may come prepared for the meeting with an outline of goals and objectives, *the IEP is not complete until it has been thoroughly discussed and all parties agree to the written document.*

Parents are entitled to participate in the IEP meeting as equal participants with suggestions and opinions regarding their child's education. Parents may bring a list of suggested goals and objectives, as well as additional information that may be pertinent, to the IEP meeting.

The local education agency (LEA) must attempt to schedule the IEP meeting at a time and place agreeable to both school staff and parents. School districts must notify parents in a timely manner so that they will have an opportunity to attend. The notification must indicate the purpose of the meeting (i.e. to discuss transition services, behavior problems interfering with learning, academic growth, etc.).

Parents may encounter stipulations presented by school personnel which may not necessarily be supported by the provisions of the IDEA. Some statements have included: "IEP's must be a predetermined number of pages", "IEP's are to be completed without parental input and only a certain number of goals and objectives are allowed on the IEP", "If your objective doesn't fit into the field length on our computer program, it can't be included". Parents should not accept misinformation concerning the IEP. There is nothing in the federal law that states "The IEP cannot be more than two pages" or "The IEP can only have two goals a year" or "This IEP was appropriate for John Doe with autism, so therefore it's appropriate for your child as well." This does not mean the parent/school relationship must be approached in an adversarial manner. It is in everyone's best interest to remember that both parents and teachers share a common goal: to develop a program that will be appropriate for the child with autism. By sharing information and knowledge, parents and schools can collaborate to develop a truly effective IEP.

IEP Content

The IEP should list educational services to be provided, the setting in which they will be provided, and the professionals who will provide the service. Content of an IEP must include the following:

- A statement of the child's present level of educational performance. This should include both academic and non-academic aspects of this or her performance.
- A statement of annual goals that the student may reasonably accomplish in the next 12 months. This statement should also include a series of measurable, intermediate objectives for each goal. This will help both the parents and educators know whether the child is progressing and conferring benefit from

his/her education. The development of specific, well-defined goals and objective is crucial to your child receiving an appropriate education.

- Appropriate objective criteria, evaluation procedures and schedules for determining, on at least an annual basis, whether the child is achieving the short terms objectives outlined in the IEP.
- A description of all specific special education and related services*, including individualized instruction and related supports and services, to be provided. This includes the extent to which the child will participate in regular educational programs.
- The initiation date and duration of each of the services, as determined above, to be provided (this may include Extended School Year services).
- If the child is 16 years or older, the IEP must include a description of transitional services (coordinated set of activities designed to assist the student in movement from school to post-school activities).

*Related services as defined by IDEA may include, but are not limited to the following (CFR 300.16):

audiology
counseling services
early identification and assessment of disabilities in children
medical services (for diagnostic or evaluation purposes only)
occupational therapy
parent counseling and training
physical therapy
psychological services
recreation
rehabilitation counseling
school health services
social work services
speech pathology
transportation

*If the child needs any of the above "related services" to benefit from his/her education, they **must** be written into the IEP. Frequency and duration of services, as well as relevant objectives, should be included.*

GOALS, OBJECTIVES, EVALUATION

An IEP should include goals and objectives specific to each child's unique needs. Goals should be broad such as "John will increase his verbal communication and comprehension" or "This student will learn to interact more with her peers in non-

academic settings such as recess and lunch." Educational objectives are never general but specific, tailored to a child's individual needs and based on the long-term goal. They describe the process by which the child may reach the goal and how a child's progress will be monitored.

For example:

GOAL: "Krista will increase her verbal responses to questions during the course of the year."

OBJECTIVE: "Krista will increase her verbal responses by receiving speech therapy from a licensed speech pathologist at least four times a week, in a one-on-one situation, in the resource room. The sessions will last at least 30 minutes. Krista will verbally answer questions with 85% accuracy, after receiving both verbal and visual cues. The speech pathologist will send weekly reports, based on record keeping, to Krista's parents as well as her homeroom teacher. This therapy shall begin September 1st and continue till June 3rd, excluding pre-determined school holidays."

The above objective specifically states the service to be provided (speech therapy), the professional who will be providing that service (a licensed speech pathologist), the setting in the which the service will be provided (resource room), how often the service will be provided (four times a week), and length of the service (30 minutes a session from September 1st through June 3rd).

The evaluation component of the objective addresses the question "How will we know whether Krista is making progress?" In this case the speech pathologist will determine whether Krista is meeting the goal of 85% accuracy, and send reports to her homeroom teacher and family each week. Other evaluation methods include: test taking, videotaping, peer reports, daily logs, checklists, computer printouts and worksheets.

The above information is only one example of an objective to set the goal of increasing verbal responses. Goals can have more than one objective. This hypothetical IEP could have more than one communication goal. It could list goals for increasing Krista's non-verbal communication by using a picture board, computer, sign language, etc.

POSSIBLE CONTENT AREAS IN THE IEP

The IEP should address all areas in which a child needs educational assistance. This can include academic goals and non-academic goals, if the services to be provided will result in educational benefit for the child. All areas of projected need such as social skills, functional skills (dressing, crossing the street to walk to the school bus safely, etc), related services (occupational therapy, speech therapy, physical therapy, etc) can be included on the IEP.

Although each IEP is unique, individuals with autism do share common areas in which they need assistance. Areas addressed in IEPs for students with autism often include:

communication; social/emotional skills; behaviors which inhibit the ability to learn: daily living skills; and academic skills. The following outline, including the sample goals and objectives, is meant to serve as a catalyst for development of specific, measurable objectives for your child. *It is not intended to suggest course or length of treatment for individuals with autism.*

Communication:

Goal: Frank will increase use of communications skills, via a communication board, in social interactions with his peers.

Objective: Frank will have his picture board with him at all times. Frank will respond to his peers by pointing to an appropriate picture on his board 90% of the time when asked simple questions by his peers. Frank's aide will visually prompt him once, if needed.

Evaluation: Peer observation, teacher and aide observation, reports to staff & IEP meetings.

Behavior:

Goal: Michelle will decrease her hand flapping.

Objective: In the classroom, Michelle will be directed to engage in alternative behavior when she hand-flaps. She may use a squeeze ball, a "fuzzy pencil", sill putty, etc.

Evaluation: A daily log kept by Michelle's aide will be given to Michelle's teacher and parents each week.

Academic:

Goal: Susan will increase skills in reading comprehension.

Objective: Susan will use the fifth grade language arts textbook and complete assignments given to her with 80% accuracy. Susan will receive one-to-one instruction in thirty-minute sessions, 3 times a week, by a special education teacher in the regular classroom.

Evaluation: Monthly review of daily data by the special education teacher and regular education teacher.

Transition:

Goal: Rick will improve his job skills (primarily, data entry on a PC) to increase his chances for competitive employment after high school.

Objective: Rick will participate in a daily vocational program at the ABC Company entering data into their computer system. The program will last two hours a day for three months. Rick will be supervised by his vocational trainer while at the job site.

Evaluation: Daily observation by the vocational trainer and ABC staff. Short written evaluation from ABC at the end of the program outlining Rick's strengths and weaknesses. The vocational trainer will also provide a written evaluation.

Extended School Year:

Goal: William will maintain the progress he has made in the areas of speech development over the summer.

Objective: William will receive one-to-one speech therapy, three days a week for a period of six weeks. This period will begin June 6 at the children's regional center.

Evaluation: Weekly telephone calls from the speech pathologist to William's parents.

Although the IEP goals and objectives should be child-centered, the IEP may also contain information regarding teacher/staff training. If the IEP team decides that additional training is required for a student's teacher, this information must be included in the text of the IEP. The IEP team may decide it will be beneficial for a teacher to take an autism course at a local university. Or the IEP team may want the school support staff to attend a two-hour seminar on autism. Personnel standards and teacher certification requirements are established by each state. For more information on the state certification requirements in your area, please contact the appropriate state education agency.

The above examples are intended only to assist you in developing specific goals and objectives for your own child or student with autism. Parents may wish to review with school staff the curriculum and methods used for their child's education. We encourage you to use this information as a springboard for discussion among IEP team members.

Remember every child is different and no one IEP would be appropriate for all children with autism.

IF YOU DISAGREE WITH THE IEP

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), the federal law that governs the education of children with disabilities, includes procedural safeguards to insure parent participation in the IEP process. If you disagree with your child's IEP, you must follow IDEA's procedures for appeals. The local or state education agency must distribute appeal procedures and information. Each state also maintains Parent Training Information Centers (PTI). PTI's are federally funded programs with provide assistance and advocacy training to parents. The staff can explain both state and federal law, as well as assist parent in communicating more effectively with professionals. For the Oregon

Parent Training Information Center (Oregon PTI) call 1-888-891-6784 or, in Salem, (503)581-8156.

AFTER THE IEP IS COMPLETED

Once the IEP is completed, on-going communication between school and parents is essential to a child's success. The family and the school need to work together for the child to receive maximum benefit. The IEP is a working document that can change. It should represent a program, which is flexible enough to respond to the changing needs and skills of the person with autism. The IEP team can meet to discuss changes or additions to a child's plan at any time. The child's parents or school representatives may request a meeting when either party feels the IEP needs to be adjusted to a child's current needs.