

Fact Sheet

Individualized Education Program (IEP): Communication Skills for Parents

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), enacted by Congress in 1975 and amended most recently in December 2004, is a federal law that guarantees all children with disabilities receive a free, appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment. The law states that your child has a right to receive an assessment which is fair and non-discriminatory. The law further guarantees that you have a right to be involved in the decisions which are made about your child's education.

Parents often need guidelines for communicating effectively with professionals to insure the best programs for their children. Parents and school personnel have been learning how to work together for a number of years now. The process has not always been an easy one. But one thing seems to be clear for everyone - it is through true, collaborative relationships between parents and professionals, based on mutual respect and concern, that the most can be accomplished for children. The following are some "cue questions" and suggestions for parents to aid them in becoming more effective advocates for their child.

Before attending any review, IEP meeting or consultation, parents can telephone significant team members to help prepare themselves for the meeting. Questions to ask might include:

- How much time are we going to have to develop my child's program?
- Who is going to be at the meetings and what will be their role?
- How is the meeting going to be run? Who will chair it? What will we cover at the meeting?
- I would like _____ to be at the meeting because he/she has been so involved with my child. Will you call him/her or shall I?
- What are your perceptions of my child's progress and what goals are you thinking about for next year?

At an annual review, parents usually need to know about the child's current school performance, the school's goals and objectives for the future, the extent of the child's participation in a regular classroom, and the child's specific placement in the system. Questions to ask might include:

Regarding Current School Performance

- When looking back on last year's goals and objectives, how much progress has my child made? Could you give us specifics please?
- What goals and objectives does he/she still need to work on from last year?
- What can we do to help my child make more progress in his/her weak areas? Could you give us specifics please?

Regarding Goals and Objectives

- Should we include in the objectives that my child be able to generalize these skills to the classroom and other school and home settings?

- How often do the people who are implementers of the goals meet to discuss progress and program planning?
- How do the goals established for my child relate to the reasons he/she was referred to special education?
- When shall we meet again to review the goals and objectives?

Regarding Participation in Regular Education

- What opportunities will my child have to interact with normally developing peers? Language models? Social/behavioral models? Will that be at unstructured or structured times?
- How are my child's interactions in the mainstream going to be monitored and progress documented?
- Will my child be able to take advantage of regular education extra-curricular activities, such as band and after school sports? What, specifically?
- Given that my child is in a small special class, will he/she have opportunities to experience a larger group? Do you feel that would be important for my child now?
- When do you think my child will be ready to be mainstreamed?
- What are the exit criteria from special education?

Placement

- I would like to observe several of the classes which might be possibilities for my child next year. How do I arrange these visits?
- I would like my child's new program to be closer to home. How might this be arranged?
- My child has changed programs many times. I would like my child to stay in the same program for continuity. How do we accomplish this?
- How many years do most children stay in primary, intermediate, junior high and high school special classes?

General Suggestions

- I would like your suggestions as to what I can do at home to help my child. If we do not have time now to discuss this, can we talk at another time soon?
- Is there anything else I can do to help you help my child?

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