

Understanding Your Child's IEP

An Individualized Education Program (IEP) is a written plan for a child who receives special education services. It describes your child's strengths and needs, the goals they are working toward, and the services and supports the school will provide.

Your child's IEP is created by a team, and you are an important member of that team. Understanding the IEP can help you ask questions, share ideas, and work with the school to support your child.

What is included in an IEP?

- **Your child's current skills.** The IEP explains how your child is doing now. This includes strengths, needs, and how their disability affects learning and participation at school. This information helps the team decide what your child needs to make progress.
- **Annual goals.** IEP goals describe important skills your child will work on during the year. Goals are based on your child's individual needs and may focus on academics, communication, behavior, social skills, daily living skills, or other areas. Goals should be measurable, so the team can tell if your child is making progress.
- **Special education and related services.** The IEP explains the services your child will receive to help them work toward their goals and take part in school.
 - What service will be provided and when will they begin?
 - How often will it be provided?
 - How long will each service session last?
 - Where will the service be provided?
 - Related services may include speech-language therapy, occupational therapy, physical therapy, counseling, transportation, or other services your child needs to benefit from special education.
- **Accommodations and supports.** Accommodations help your child access learning and show what they know. Examples may include extra time, breaks, a quiet place to work, visual supports, assistive technology, or directions given in a different way. Supports should be based on your child's individual needs.
- **Learning with other students.** The IEP explains where your child will receive services and how they will participate with children who do not receive special education services. The team considers how your child can learn and participate in the least restrictive environment (LRE) while receiving the support they need.
- **Measuring progress.** The IEP explains how the school will measure your child's progress toward each annual goal and how often progress will be shared with you. Progress reports can help you and the school see what is working and whether changes may be needed.



Your Role on the IEP Team

You know your child in ways others do not. You can share information about your child's strengths, interests, challenges, routines, and what you see at home and in the community.

The school team also brings important information about your child's learning and progress at school. When families and schools share information and listen to one another, the team can make decisions based on a fuller picture of the child.

You do not need to understand every special education term. Ask questions when something is unclear and ask the team to explain information in a different way if needed.

Questions to Ask

- What are my child's strengths?
- What needs are most important right now?
- How were these goals chosen?
- How will we know if my child is making progress?
- What services and supports will help my child reach these goals?
- How will accommodations be used during the school day?
- Who will provide each service?
- How and when will progress be shared with me?
- What can we do at home to support what my child is learning?
- What should we do if my child is not making expected progress?

Parent Tips

- **Keep a copy.** Save your child's IEP where you can easily find it.
- **Before the meeting.** Review the current IEP and progress reports. Write down your questions and concerns. Think about what is going well and what you would like your child to work on next.
- **During the meeting.** Share your ideas and concerns. Ask questions. Take notes. If you do not understand something, ask the team to explain it. It is okay to ask for time to think about new information.
- **After the meeting.** Review the final IEP. Keep a copy with your other school records. Stay in contact with the school and review progress reports when you receive them.
- **Watch the companion session.** This brief is part of the IEP Journey learning series from South Dakota Parent Connection which can be found at <https://bit.ly/4kLhSg9>.
- **Learn more.** South Dakota Parent Connection has created a guide to help IEP teams better understand the special education process. Download it here: <https://bit.ly/3Ha2acf>.

South Dakota Parent Connection is Here to Help!

We offer free support, information, and resources to families across South Dakota.



www.sdparent.org
(605) 361-3171
sdpc@sdparent.org

Main Office
701 W. 49th St, Suite 102
Sioux Falls, SD 57106

Offices located in
Sioux Falls and Rapid City

