

Understanding Your Child's IEP Goals and Objectives

Your child's Individualized Education Program (IEP) includes specific goals that guide learning during the coming year. Understanding these goals helps you and the school work together to plan, support, and determine how your child is progressing.

What are IEP goals and objectives?

Annual goals describe what your child is expected to learn in one year, based on their current skills and disability-related needs. Goals focus on skills your child needs to learn, take part in school, and become more independent. These may include reading, math, communication, social skills, behavior, movement, self-care, or other areas that are important for your child.

A clear goal explains the skill your child will learn, the support provided, how success will be measured, and when it should be reached. Goals should challenge your child, be realistic, and build skills for the future.

Some goals may include objectives. They are smaller steps toward an annual goal. For example, a reading goal might include steps for finding the main idea and answering questions about a story. While objectives are not required for all goals, under Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) short-term objectives or benchmarks are required for students who take alternate assessments aligned with alternate academic achievement standards.

Why are goals important?

Goals connect your child's needs to instruction and support. They help build skills for learning, daily life, and independence.

The IEP must explain how progress will be measured on each goal and when you will receive reports. Progress reports should show how your child is doing on each goal. These progress reports should include data collection, achievements, or challenges.



If the report shows that progress is slower than expected, ask the team to review the goals, instructions, and supports. If you have concerns, you have the right to request an IEP meeting anytime—you do not need to wait for the annual meeting.

What is my role?

You are an important member of your child's IEP team. Share your child's strengths, interests, and the skills you hope they will learn. Describe what you see at home and in the community, including what helps and what is difficult. Your child's thoughts and priorities can also help the team, when appropriate.

Listen to what teachers and service providers see at school. Together, discuss which needs should be addressed through goals and which supports will help. Ask how each goal connects to your child's current skills, classroom learning, and daily activities. If a goal is unclear or does not seem meaningful, explain your concern and ask the team to review it with you.

Your role continues after the meeting. Read progress reports, celebrate gains, and stay in touch with staff. Ask about differences between what you see at home and what the school reports. Sharing information helps the team understand whether your child can use new skills in different settings.

Questions to Ask

- What can my child do now, and how was this goal chosen?
- What will success look like by the end of the IEP year?
- Does the goal address a skill my child needs for learning or daily life?
- What instruction and supports will help my child reach the goal?
- How will progress be measured, and when will I receive reports?
- If my child is not making expected progress, what will the team review?

Parent tips

- **Prepare a few priorities.** Before the meeting, write down your child's strengths and the skills you most want to discuss.
- **Ask for everyday words.** You should be able to explain what your child is working toward. Ask staff to explain unfamiliar terms and give examples.
- **Look for a clear starting point.** Ask what your child can do now so you can understand the amount of progress the goal calls for.
- **Keep reports together.** Save your child's IEP and progress reports. Compare updates over time and bring questions to the team.
- **Stay connected.** Agree on whom to contact and how to share updates. Ask for simple ways to support learning at home and celebrate your child's effort.
- **Watch the companion learning 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>.

South Dakota Parent Connection is Here to Help!

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