



Navigating the Special Education System

"The road block is you don't know what you don't know." Derek father of Moxie, age 3

A child who receives Special Education is entitled to the same rights as typically developing children: a free, appropriate, public education frequently referred to as FAPE (Free Appropriate Public Education). You will be going through the process of the Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) for children birth to three and/or Individualized Education Program (IEP) for children three to 21. Bring support (family members, good friends) with you to the IFSP/IEP meeting to help take notes and ask questions. If, for any reason you are unsure of the services being offered to your child think over the recommendations. Discuss the options then come back and sign for agreement or notify the IFSP/IEP team of areas of disagreement.

Transitioning from IFSP to IEP is a process. During the first three years, sharing your child's successes and concerns with your child's early interventionist may have become

a natural process as you worked together in your home. Once your child leaves a home based program and begins a center based program (or preschool), it will be helpful to continue to seek the same communication with your child's preschool teachers and education specialists, maintaining shared understanding of your child's progress and what to work on. This change in services can be challenging for every parent. Open communication with your child's teacher and/or visits to your child's classroom to discuss your child's progress may help reduce your concerns.

Keep in mind what kind of program/services you visualize for your child. Do these services reflect the way your child learns? Are the outcomes for the IEP realistic? Do they address your concerns? Are they developed by all team members?

What the IEP meeting includes:

- Document must be written within 30 days of the school's identification of the child's disability
- Participation of the child's parents



- Special education and regular teachers including a Teacher of the Blind and Visually Impaired (TBVI)
- School system representative
- Someone who can interpret the evaluation results
- Others with knowledge or expertise about the child (may include a physician for example)
- Documents in the family's native language
- Someone to translate to the family's native language

The IEP is reviewed on an annual basis but can be reviewed upon written request by the parent at any time. The child is re-evaluated every three years.

The physician's role in the IEP involves identifying the medical needs that require accommodation in an educational setting and writing a medical statement to describe the needed accommodations. This should include: 1) A diagnosis in medical and laypersons' terms and 2) A brief description of the medical/visual condition.

Federal law, IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act), defines "children with disabilities" as individuals between the ages of three and 22 who have one or more of the following conditions: visual impairment (including blindness), multiple disabilities, and many other conditions.

A scenario provided by Carlos, parent of Carlos: *"A parent once shared an idea with me and I'd like to share these thoughts with*

you. When your child has a disability, you may think of it as a journey, your child's journey is on a bus. As the parent you are the driver of the bus. As the driver of your child's bus (journey) you decide where to stop, who is entering and who must exit. You are in control and have the power to take your child where you'd like them to go. Your ability to acquire knowledge is the key to getting your child closer to where you would like them to be."

RESOURCES

Eclips extended CLIPP scenarios CLIPPCASES.org

- Child Advocacy Tool
- Medical Statement Resource
- Educational Services Resources

Handbook on Developing Individualized Family Service Plans and Individualized Education Programs in Early Childhood Special Education by California Department of Education, Sacramento California Early Start,
<http://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/se/fp/documents/eciifspiec.pdf>

2006 Central Directory of Early Intervention Resources

<http://www.dds.ca.gov/EarlyStart/doc/centraldirectory2006.pdf>

Nolo's IEP Guide To Learning Disabilities, 4th Edition, Advocate for Your Child, By Attorney Lawrence M. Siegel, Director of the National Deaf Education Project

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