

Supporting Parent Participation in the Individual Family Service Plan or Individualized Education Program Process

It is essential that families of young children age birth to five with developmental delays or disabilities actively participate in the Individual Family Service Plan (IFSP) or Individualized Education Program (IEP) process. Family participation is important to the child making meaningful progress on IFSP outcomes and IEP goals and objectives. As a parent, you have valuable information to share about what you see your child doing or not able to do at home and in the community. You are the expert on your child. When you are involved in writing outcomes or goals, you can voice your concerns for your child's development and gain information about what your child should be able to do at various stages of development. Many parents say that their participation in the IFSP or IEP process has gone well. Use the ideas discussed below to make your participation in the IFSP or IEP process even stronger.

The Council for Exceptional Children's Division of Early Childhood (DEC) has revised a set of recommended practices that focus on effective ways to improve learning outcomes for young children. According to the Council for Exceptional Children's Division of Early Childhood's Recommended Practices¹, active family participation requires that several things take place. Your family and the practitioners working with you need to develop a partnership in which each of you feels trusted, valued, understood and respected. For this to happen, practitioners should be conscious of their role in this relationship. To develop a positive relationship, you can expect that your service provider will:

- Always treat you with dignity and respect and in ways that are sensitive to your cultural values
- Hear and respect your views
- Share information with you and ask for your input
- Share information in a clear and unbiased manner so that it is understandable and useful to you
- Recognize and build upon your parenting knowledge and skills
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Once this relationship is developed, involvement in the IFSP or IEP process will be easier for you. Your active participation will lead to IFSPs or IEPs that meet the needs of your child and family. The early intervention practitioners who come to your home to work with your child and family should provide ongoing teaching and coaching of strategies necessary to implement your IFSP outcomes. You will then continue to use those strategies with your child during your everyday activities and routines. Your IFSP or IEP team will provide you with information about how they will work on your child's IEP goals in the preschool classroom setting, and will give ideas you can use to support those goals at home.

Here are some things you can do as a parent to be an active participant in your child's IFSP or IEP:

- Share as much information as you feel comfortable disclosing to give a complete picture of your child and your family's priorities
- Ask questions and check for understanding when practitioners give information



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- Attend all IFSP or IEP team meetings
- Learn more about your child's disability to best advocate for your child's needs
- Learn and understand your rights and responsibilities as members of an IFSP or IEP team. One of these rights is that you can disagree with proposals made by the other members of your child's IFSP or IEP team if you feel that what they are proposing would not be right for your child and family

As you become an active participant in the IFSP or IEP process, it is likely that your child will make more progress in his or her IFSP outcomes or IEP goals and objectives. This happens because you are learning how to interact with your child during daily routines and activities in a way that builds on your existing skills and your desire to help your child develop and learn. Being a partner in the development of outcomes and goals means that you will see value in carrying out the strategies that you are learning to do at home. Research shows that when you and your practitioner work together, you will be able to support your child in new ways. This will lead to improved learning outcomes for your child and an increase in your confidence and ability to help your child develop and grow. This will result in positive experiences for you, your child, and your family.