

INTERVENTION PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT

The Individualized Family Services Plan (IFSP) for Children Under the Age of Three

Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) provides a framework for a family-centered approach to intervention planning and implementation. The Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) is designed to enhance the capacity of the family to meet the special needs of their infant or toddler with disabilities. A family-centered approach to intervention planning and implementation recognizes that very young children exist within a family structure and are dependent on their caregivers to meet their needs. Services are designed around and delivered within this family context. Family resources, priorities, and concerns direct the outcomes for the child and the strategies and activities selected to achieve each outcome. The IFSP process evolves around the collaborative exchange of information between family members, caregivers, and professionals. It is flexible, interactive and ongoing and ensures that the continually changing needs of the young child are met.

The IFSP development process begins at the first contact with the child and family. Information gathered throughout the intake, evaluation, and assessment sessions, as well as a review of records from outside agencies, are used by family members and service providers to design an individualized plan of services for the child and family. The IFSP summarizes this information into a working document.

Children grow and develop within a dynamic family context. Research has shown that children with disabilities often take longer to learn new skills and have more difficulty generalizing what they have learned to new situations than children without disabilities. They benefit from learning in everyday situations and settings where skills are used and reinforced. IFSP outcomes address the skills that the family would like for the child to work on to become more successful within the everyday activities and routines in which the child and family participate. Outcomes center around family priorities for the child with input from professionals.

Information may be gathered through a routines-based family interview. This interview provides the framework for developing family-centered IFSP outcomes, strategies, and activities. Through the interview process, family resources, priorities, and concerns are identified.

The family and the intervention team design the strategies and activities to achieve each outcome. Family members are asked to share strategies and activities that they have already tried and found to be successful. Professionals assist the family to expand and enhance these strategies. These are recorded in each IFSP outcome. The IFSP activities are the short-term objectives or steps that the child and family will do to meet the outcome. They should fit in with existing or newly established activities and routines and consider the interests and abilities of the child and family member. Strategies are the methods, techniques, or courses of action used to achieve the objectives that lead to the outcome. The primary service provider and other consulting professionals “coach” the family member or caregiver on new activities and strategies. This enabling approach promotes mutual respect and partnerships.

Additional information about specific services and programs may be found in the Continuum of Service section of this document. For children on the autism spectrum, families may request information on Maryland Autism Waiver services and support groups in the area.

Individual Educational Program (IEP) Development for Children of Preschool Age

IEP goals and objectives are developed using the information on the child's strengths, needs and present levels of performance, as well as parent input. The HCPSS Early Childhood Curriculum provides the framework for selecting goal areas, annual goals and objectives. Parents may request a copy of the curriculum from their service coordinator. The parents also complete the input form, Information to Help Plan for my Child's IEP. Once the parents provide input, the team develops a draft of goals and objectives. Priority areas are identified. For children on the autism spectrum, communication, behavior self-management and personal social development are often considered priority areas.

The draft IEP goals are sent home to the parents prior to the IEP team meeting for final input. The IEP team meeting is held to approve the goals and objectives, recommend services and determine placement. Additional information about specific services and programs may be found in the Continuum of Service section of this document. For children on the autism spectrum, families may request information on Maryland Autism Waiver services and support groups in the area.

IFSPs and IEPs are dynamic documents that are reviewed frequently and may be modified at any time as the child's needs change.