



Tips for Educators: Individualized Family Service Plans (IFSPs)



Tips for Educators is a series of practical guides that education staff can use in early learning settings. Each guide is based on research evidence and professional knowledge.

The Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) is a written plan created to meet the individual needs, concerns, and priorities of individual children, from birth to age 3, and their families. The plan states the family's desired outcomes for their child and themselves, and lists the early intervention services and supports that will help meet those outcomes. It also describes when, where, and how the services will be delivered.

The IFSP is developed by a team of key members. This team includes the family, educators and caregivers, the disability services coordinator, and any specialists who offers supports and services identified in the plan. Working together, this team considers the child's strengths and needs, evaluation and assessment results, and the family's ideas, concerns, and priorities. All team members have access to the IFSP, and use it to plan learning experiences and environments that support the child in achieving the identified outcomes.

Every state has its own system of early intervention services, and a few have expanded age limits for IFSP eligibility. It is important for all team members to become familiar with the specifics of the state agency.

Tips for Educators

- Familiarize with your state's specific early intervention agency and services. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) [Infant and Toddler Coordinators Association](#) state guide is a helpful starting point.
- Conduct development screenings to determine if a child has developmental concerns that require a more complete evaluation.
- Include children with disabilities and other special needs in natural environments together with their peers, where experiences and environments that promote children's learning are offered.
- Collect ongoing assessment information to individualize teaching and learning.
- Provide children with disabilities or other special needs with the comprehensive services (e.g., nutrition, dental) that all children and families receive.
- Collaborate with specialists from other agencies to ensure that the child and family are receiving the services and supports outlined on the IFSP.
- Share support strategies between educators and specialists on the IFSP team to promote continuity.

Resources

- [PACER CENTER – Individualized Family Service Plan](#)
- [Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center \(ECTA\) – IFSP Process: Planning and Implementing Family-Centered Services in Natural Environments](#)
- [The Individualized Education Plan: Partnering for Success](#)
- [IDEA Infant Toddler Coordinators Association – State Guide](#)



Glossary	
Term	Definition
Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)	The federal law that guides the delivery of early intervention, special education, and related services in the United States. Early intervention (birth to age three) is described in Part C of the law.
Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP)	The written plan that guides services for a child, who is younger than 3 , and their family's stated outcomes. An IFSP is written after the child is evaluated and found eligible for early intervention services.
Individualized Education Program (IEP)	The written plan developed to ensure that a child who is older than 3 and has a disability identified under the law receives specialized instruction and related services in learning settings.
Outcomes	The changes and development the team wants for the child, identified in the IFSP. Family outcomes may also be included. Progress toward meeting the outcomes is reviewed by the team at least every six months, and the IFSP is reviewed annually.
Early Intervention Services	Services selected to address the child and family's stated outcomes, after the outcomes are written. Early intervention services may include: assistive technology, audiology, family training, counseling and home visits, medical services for diagnosis and evaluation, nursing services, nutrition services, occupational therapy, physical therapy, psychological services, service coordination, social work, special instruction, speech-language pathology, transportation, and vision services. Services may come from multiple agencies and require coordination.
Disabilities Services Coordinator	This individual acts on behalf of current IFSP regulations, and helps to organize both Head Start and Part C service providers to keep the process and intervention services flowing and organized for individual families. The service coordinator ensures that the child and family receive the rights, procedural safeguards, and services authorized under that state's early intervention program.
Natural Environments	Settings where services are provided in places that are natural or typical for same-age peers. These include the home, or wherever the child is during the day, such as child care, Early Head Start, play groups and so forth.
Transition	Early intervention services end at age 3. While IDEA requires that transition planning begins at least 90 days before a child's 3rd birthday, Head Start Program Performance Standards require that transition planning begins at least six months before a child's 3rd birthday. Eligibility for special education or related services must be determined. If the child qualifies, an Individualized Education Program (IEP) is written. The IEP must be written and signed by the child's 3rd birthday for services to continue without interruption.
Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)	IDEA mandates that children with disabilities are educated together with similarly aged, typically developing peers to the maximum extent possible. Removal from the regular educational environment may occur only when, due to the nature of a child's disability, education is not possible in the classroom context — even when provided with the appropriate aids and services.
Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)	Under IDEA, children and their families are entitled to receive any special education and related services identified in an IEP or IFSP, provided at no cost to the family, as part of their free and appropriate public education.
Occupational Therapist (OT)	A therapist who supports rehabilitation through the performance of necessary daily activities.
Speech and Language Pathologist (SLP)	A therapist who works to prevent, identify, and treat speech, language, and communication disorders.
Physical Therapist (PT)	A health care professional who diagnoses and treats physical and functional disorders.