IDEAS TO INCLUDE IN YOUR CHILD’S IFSP

Just as each child on the autism spectrum is different, so is every Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) for a child on the spectrum – hence why the word “individualized” is included in the name of the document. The contents of your child’s IFSP will be driven in large part by the Early Intervention (EI) evaluation of your child and by the priorities you, the parent, communicate to the IFSP team.

Prior to attending an IFSP meeting, it is a good idea to take time to think about your child and to list ideas for goals to work on. There will usually be goals in the areas of cognition, communication, fine motor and gross motor skills, social skills, and self-help skills. Behavior goals may be incorporated into one of these five categories or may stand alone. (For example, your desire to reduce tantruming may relate to a communication issue and thus the goal may be to have your child get your attention by taking your hand and pointing to a desired object, rather than tantruming to communicate an unmet desire.)

Once you have ideas for goals, you should consider the steps necessary to achieve them. For example, if you have a goal of teaching your child to say his or her name, the team may decide to break that goal into smaller steps (for example, understanding the concept of names, associating the name with the child, producing the sounds in the name, knowing to answer by saying the name when the child is asked “What is your name?”).

Below are just a few questions to consider when developing priorities for goals to include in your child’s IFSP. What is most important for one family may not matter at all for another. Think about your family’s situation and decide with your team where to begin. Don’t feel locked into your initial decisions. The team will review the IFSP every six months, but you can request a review sooner if you feel something needs to be reconsidered.

- How does your child communicate? Does he use words? Does she point at
what she wants? Does she cry or pull on you when she wants something?

- Is it difficult to take your child to the grocery store, the park, a restaurant, or to pick up your older child from school?
- Does your child hit siblings or other children?
- Do you as a parent feel isolated, like you have nowhere to turn for help?
- Does your child seem overwhelmed by lights or loud noises?
- Can your child go up and down stairs easily?
- Can your child name colors? Count to 10? Name animals?
- Does your child have difficulty understanding the order of things or following short directions?
- Is your child a picky eater? Can your child use utensils to eat? Can your child sit still in a high chair or booster?
- Does your child respond to his/her name when called?
- Is it difficult to give your child a bath?
- Can your child throw and catch a ball?

Your child’s IFSP can address the above concerns and many more. For example, your Service Coordinator can connect you with a parent organization in your area and can give you educational materials to learn about autism. A behavior therapist can help you develop a picture schedule to help your child learn the family’s routine. A speech therapist can work to improve your child’s communication skills – perhaps by using a Picture Exchange Communication System™ (PECS) or by learning to speak or use sign language.

Once the IFSP team decides what goals to pursue, they will be incorporated into the IFSP document. Each goal should include information on the strategies needed to reach the goal, including the services which will be offered, the person who will be providing the services, where services will occur, and how often services will be delivered. Also, it is very important that the IFSP describes how the team will measure progress and collect data related to the goal.

Related Articles:

- Your Child’s Service Plan: IFSP Basics
- The Role of the Service Coordinator
- Speech, Language and Communication
- American Sign Language
- Picture Exchange Communication System
- **Behavior Intervention Plan**
- **Examples of Home and Community-Based Physical Therapy for Young Children**
- **Occupational Therapy for Children with ASD**
- **The Importance of Data Collection in Measuring Progress**
- **IFSPs in Pennsylvania**

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