

What Is An IEP

Help in school – the Individualized Education Plan (IEP)

What is IDEA?

IDEA stands for the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. This is a national law which determines the accommodations and supports provided to students with disabilities, from ages 3 to 21. IDEA works to ensure that all students have a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE), which means all students should be taught in a public school for free while getting an education that is right for the person. This education should help the student achieve your goals of further education, employment, and/or independent living. IDEA requires that students with disabilities have an IEP, or an Individualized Education Program.

What is an IEP?

IEP stands for an Individualized Education Program. This is a written document which is developed by a team of individuals for a specific student. This team is usually made up of the student's teachers, family members, and most importantly, the student (a.k.a. you!). You are also allowed to invite whomever else you feel needs to be a part of your "team" (such as friends, a pastor, or a counselor.) Your IEP talks about your disability, what skills you need to learn, what you'll do in school this year, what services your school will provide, and where your learning will take place. In summary, the IEP helps you, the student, determine your goals and decides how your school will help you achieve them.

The school and teachers are responsible for making sure that the accommodations and supports described in the IEP are provided to the student. Each year, an IEP must be reviewed by the team. This is done at what is called an IEP meeting. An IEP meeting usually lasts about an hour, but can be shorter or longer, depending on your needs. Your IEP is reviewed once a year, and updated if needed. If you, your family, or your teachers feel it is necessary, you can have IEP meetings more often.

Sections of the IEP

By law, your IEP must include certain information about you. This information is usually organized into the sections listed below. Your new IEP will also have these sections or information.

- Present levels of educational performance: This section includes precise information about how you are doing in school and sometimes in other aspects of your life
- Goals for the year, broken down into short-term objectives or benchmarks
- What special education and related services the school will provide to you
- An explanation of how much of your school day (if any) you will spend not participating with children without disabilities in the regular class and other school activities
- The modifications you will need when state or district-wide tests are given, or an explanation of why taking these tests is not appropriate for you; if you won't be taking these tests, then your IEP must say how you will be tested instead
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- When and where the school will start providing services to you, how often the services will be provided, and how long the services are expected to last
 - How the school will measure your progress toward your goals and how the school will tell your parents about your progress
 - The transition services you need to get ready for life after finishing high school One final note about what's on your IEP:
 - If your state transfers rights to young people when they reach the age of majority, then at least one year before that time your IEP must state that you have been told about any rights that will transfer to you.

It's your IEP -- you need to be involved!

An IEP is a set of forms that summarizes what your disability is, and the needs you have. It also lists the accommodations you receive and what your goals are for high school and after high school. Since your IEP is all about you, you should play a key role in creating your IEP. *GOLDEN RULE: YOUR IEP IS ALL ABOUT YOU! SPEAK YOUR MIND SO YOU GET WHAT YOU REALLY WANT*



Guide of questions to help you take charge of your IEP and transition plan

Questions to ask your teacher about your IEP

- 1) What are my IEP goals?
- 2) How does my IEP affect my education?
- 3) How does my IEP prepare me to live independently?
- 4) What is my role in my IEP?
- 5) Who else is part of my IEP team?

Before Your IEP

This section will help you to understand how you can be ready for the meeting

What to Do Before the IEP Meeting

Tell your family and teachers that you are interested in participating in your next IEP meeting. It is important that you have the support of your parents and teachers, because they will play a major role in helping you

Ask your parents or teachers for a copy of your current IEP. Read your IEP carefully. Ask your parents or teachers to explain what is written in your IEP, section-by-section. Ask questions. Make sure you understand the sections and information in your IEP.

Getting Ready for the IEP Meeting

- Talk to your special education teacher or regular education teacher about setting a time, date, and place for the IEP meeting.
- Make a list of who should be there.
- Once the meeting is set, send everyone on your list an invitation like the example below.

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- To get ready for your IEP meeting, it's a good idea to think about what you want to say. At the meeting, you want to be able to:
 - describe your disability
 - talk about your strengths and needs
 - describe your learning style (how you learn best and what gets in the way of your learning)
 - tell team members the accommodations you need and why you need them
 - describe any medications you are taking or medical needs you have (if you wish to share this information)
 - list your goals
- Use the information that you wrote down in the "Getting to Know Yourself" section to personalize the PowerPoint form and speaking script
- It's also a good idea to practice what you want to say. Practice with your parents, a classmate, or a teacher. [Parents need to know what your goals are before the meeting, so they can support your decisions.]

During the Meeting

Provides information on how to run the meeting and how to advocate for what you want

Participating in Your IEP Meeting

Make sure everyone knows each other. You may want to introduce them or have them introduce themselves. Speak up and maintain good eye contact.

- Talk about the things you practiced, including:
 - Your disability
 - The strengths and needs you have in each of your classes
 - Your learning style
 - The accommodations you need and why you need them
 - Your goals and objectives for the next year
 - Your transition plans for the future.
- Ask for additional suggestions and comments on your IEP content.
- Be sure everyone has a chance to talk and share their ideas.
Listen to ideas and suggestions from the other IEP team members. If you don't understand something, ask for an explanation.
Share your feelings about the goals and objectives the other team member suggest.
Try to come to agreement about what goals and objectives are important to list in your IEP. (If you cannot finish in the time you have, set a time and date for another meeting.)
- Write down (or have someone else write down) everything that's been decided, so that a final IEP can be written.
 - When the meeting is over, thank everyone for attending.

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After the IEP Meeting

Ask for a copy of the final IEP document. Go over it to be sure you understand what it says. Keep this copy, so you can look over it whenever you need to. Work to accomplish the goals and objectives in your IEP. Review your IEP throughout the year. If anything needs to be changed—for example, you've met goals in a class and want to write new goals, or you need more help with a subject—ask your special education teacher, your regular education teacher, or your parents to schedule another IEP meeting.

How do you make sure your IEP is happening?

Throughout the year you should ask yourself the following questions to make sure you are getting the right supports? Answer these questions:

- 1) Are you getting the services you have discussed? If not, what services are you not getting?
- 2) What are your goals?
- 3) Are your goals being met?
- 4) Are these goals something you feel are important?
- 5) Are the people who are responsible for helping you doing a good job? How could they help you more?
- 6) What supports are you not receiving? What goals are not met?
- 7) Do you feel you are being prepared for transition?
- 8) Are you learning better and growing?

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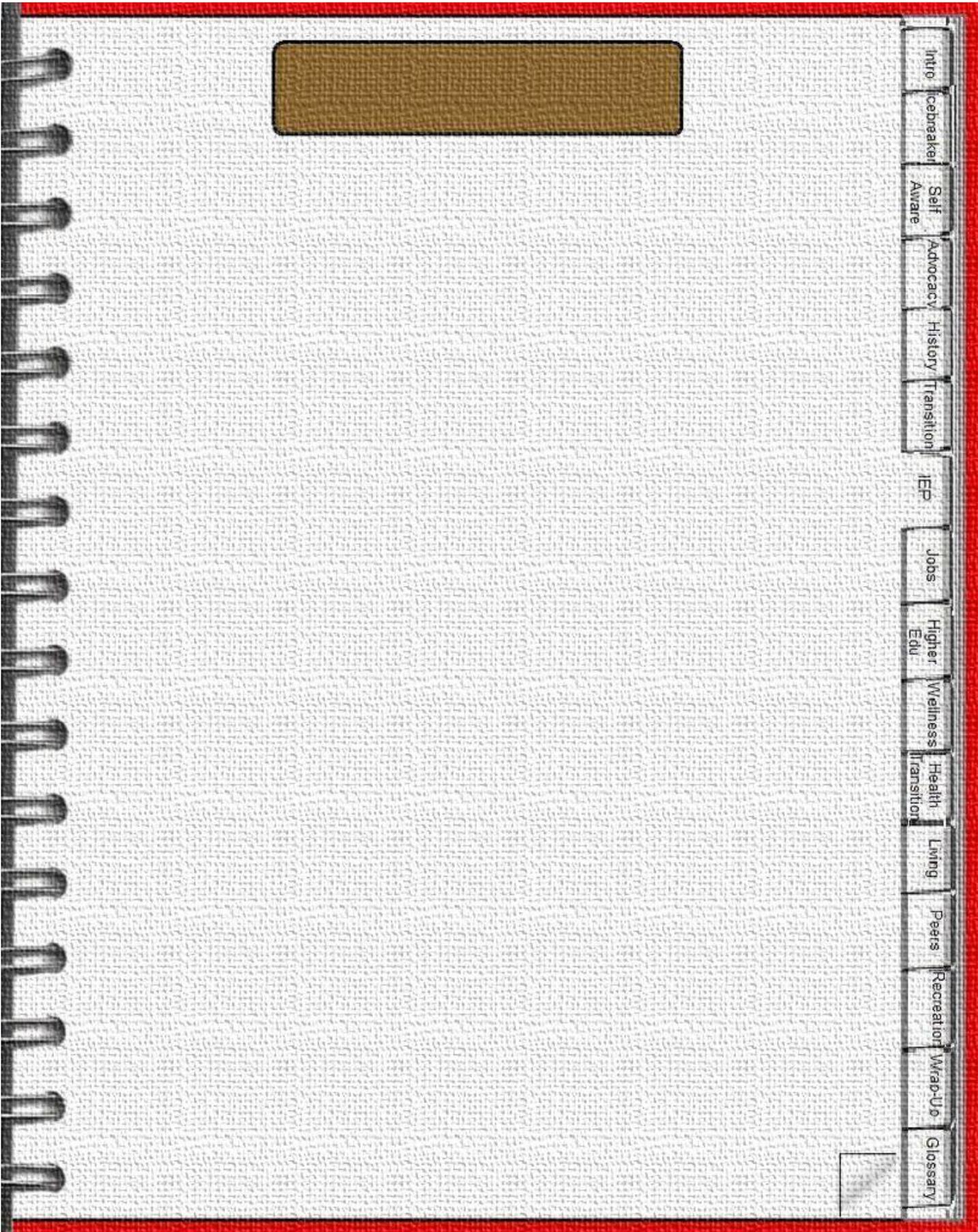
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Excerpts taken from PYLN Transition Toolkit and NICHCY a Students Guide to the IEP