

## **USA School Age (3-21 years old)**

At age three, your child begins to receive services through the school system. The school system is responsible for educating your child according to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Refer to You as an advocate for more details.

### Transition

You and your child will participate in two transition periods in the school system. The first transition happens at age three and the second transition happens when your child graduates from high school. These transitions are directed under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Part H and Part B.

Part H provides therapy and other services to the child from birth to 36 months and the family in the “natural setting”. Typically, the program is called Early Intervention, or EI, or EIP, or Birth to Three. The goals and the objectives to achieve these goals for your child are covered under the Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP). A few months before your child turns three, a transition meeting with your school district should be arranged. This arrangement is usually done in cooperation between you and your Early Intervention Program. However, it is always a good idea to remind your child’s Early Intervention Program that your child will be turning three in the next 4-6 months. You will want your child’s services arranged before they turn three, because on the day they turn three, they are no longer eligible for early intervention. Do not forget the school districts are often on vacation during the summer months, and will not always make arrangements for transition meetings or services, so plan ahead.

When your child turns three years of age a transition takes place from early intervention to the school system. If your child was not receiving therapy through early intervention, then you should arrange for an evaluation by the school district. Your child is now covered under the law IDEA Part B. Your school system is now responsible for delivering educational services. The goals and the objectives to achieve your child’s educational goals are found in the Individualized Education Plan (IEP). The services are based on the educational needs, that is, what services are needed to help your child learn and participate in the school setting?

The second transition happens when your child graduates from high school between the ages of 16 and 21. At this point, the school district is no longer responsible for delivering services and they should assist you in finding the next step for your adult-child. The transition planning should begin when your child is fourteen.

## **Individualized Education Plan (IEP)**

The Individualized Education Plan (IEP) is an extremely important document. This is the document that states the services your child will receive through the school system. This is a legal document. Your child will first receive an evaluation by a team

of professionals, which can be any combination of an educator, psychologist, physical therapist, occupational therapist, speech therapist, or other professionals. The next step is a meeting is scheduled to review the results of the evaluation and set educational goals. You and your child will be invited to this meeting. I strongly advise you to attend the meeting. If your child is participating in making decisions about his services and needs, then he should attend also. The professionals that administered the evaluation may or may not be present; however, they do have to provide written documentation. The first topic to be discussed should be the results of the evaluation. The next objective is to set goals for the school year, along with short-term goals leading to the annual goal. You should give your opinion as to what you think the goals should be. It is a good idea, to think about the goals you would like your child to achieve in the school year and write them down before the meeting and then bring them to the meeting. It is important that you are realistic in setting goals for your child; think about your child's abilities and what can truly be achieved in one year. Don't forget you want your child to be happy. You do not want to set goals that are too high that will set your child up for failure and yourself for disappointment. And you also do not want to set goals that do not allow your child to reach his true potential. You of course will be working with the team to set the appropriate goals, but it is always helpful to think ahead. This is a good time to work together as a team in making sure your child will receive what he needs. It is also a good time to develop a positive rapport with the members of the team and let them know you are concerned and want to be a part of the educational process. Make it clear that you want to work as a team, that you love your child and want what is best for him. This is not the time to make it look like you are a troublemaker. Try to stay calm and work with everyone. Sometimes bringing donuts or cookies helps everyone work better together. The third step of the meeting is to decide who will provide the special education and the related services needed and where they will be provided; along with to what extent your child will participate in regular school programs. The fourth criteria stated in the IEP is when the services will begin and possibly end and the frequency of the services. And the last criteria is to determine how often your child will be re-evaluated to determine if the goals are being achieved, which cannot be longer than a year. By law, these five criteria must be written in the IEP. If at the end of the meeting, you do not agree with the statements in the IEP, then do not sign the document. This document is the agreement between you and the school district and must be followed. If you sign it, then you are agreeing to what is stated in the document. You can request to take a copy of the document home and think it over. You can have someone else read it, such as an outside therapist or a previous educator or a physician or us, and one or all of them can give you their opinion before you sign it.

### **Re-cap of the IEP objectives:**

1. Discuss the results of the evaluation.
2. Set goals.
3. Decide who will provide the special education and where.
4. Determine when the services will start and possibly end and the frequency of the services.
5. Decide how often your child will be re-evaluated.

Under "Ed 1107.04 Costs Associated with Evaluations, a parent may request an independent educational evaluation at public expense if the parent disagrees with an evaluation obtained by the local education agency. However, the local education agency may initiate a hearing, as outlined in Ed 1128 to show that its evaluation is appropriate. If the final decision is that the evaluation is appropriate, then the parent may still have an independent evaluation but not at public expense." Occupational and Physical Therapy in Educational Environments edited by Irene R. Mewed. The Haworth Press, Inc. Binghamton, New York. 1995.

## **IEP Goals**

It is important for parents and children to give their input as to what the IEP goals should be. It is extremely helpful to think about your child's goals for the year, before the IEP meeting. The goals need to be educationally based, that is they have to address learning and meaningful participation by your child in the educational setting.

To help you think about goals, first think about what your child is having difficulty performing within the educational setting? What do you want your child to be able to do? How can your child achieve these goals? Of course, the professionals your child is working with will help you make these decisions, but it is a good idea to be thinking of them in advance.

Write out goals that you think are appropriate for your child by following the advice of Peter Wright, [www.wrightslaw.com](http://www.wrightslaw.com). Write SMART IEP goals:

**S: Specific**

**M: Measurable**

**A: Action words**

**R: Realistic**

**T: Time specific**