



## Individualized Family Service Plan For Children with Disabilities Under Age Three

**IMPORTANT:** ELC's publications are intended to give you a general idea of the law. However, each situation is different. If, after reading our publications, you have questions about how the law applies to your particular situation, contact us for a referral, or contact an attorney of your choice.

### WHAT IS AN INDIVIDUALIZED FAMILY SERVICE PLAN (IFSP)?

An IFSP is a written plan that describes the specific early intervention services needed by a child under age three, who has a delay in one or more of five key developmental areas, to develop and grow. The IFSP lists who will provide the services and where they will be provided. It also says how often, for how long and how much of a service must be provided to the child (for example, direct physical therapy, 2 thirty-minute sessions per week), and where the service will be delivered. The County and the Early Intervention provider **must** provide the children with all of the Early Intervention services listed in the IFSP.

To view a copy of the IFSP form used in Pennsylvania go to: <http://www.pattan.k12.pa.us/files/EI/MDE.pdf>, or you can get a copy from your Service Coordinator.

### HOW IS THE IFSP DEVELOPED?

The first step is to find out if the child is eligible for services, and, if so, the areas in which the child is having problems. This is done through a formal evaluation. Evaluations are free, and should determine whether the child is having problems in mental development, physical development (including vision and

hearing), communication development, social and emotional development, and self-help skills. A child is also eligible if she has a diagnosed physical or mental condition that is highly likely to result in a developmental delay, such as fetal alcohol syndrome. An evaluation must also include a review of the child's records to determine the health status and medical history of the child.

For each area in which the child is found to have a significant problem, the evaluation must identify the types of services the child needs. Services can include such things as physical, speech or occupational therapy, psychological services, special instructional programs, and training for parents and other family members.

### **ARE THE FAMILY'S NEEDS PART OF THE EVALUATION AND CAN PARENTS GET HELP IN PROMOTING THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE CHILD?**

Yes, the family's needs can be part of the assessment process, and services and outcomes the family needs to enhance the development of the child can be part of the IFSP, *but only if the family wants them included*. If the family does want its needs assessed, the evaluators must also ask about any family member's concerns and what resources or supports they may need to help the child's development.

### **WHAT IS AN IFSP MEETING?**

If the child is eligible for services, a meeting is held to write the IFSP. The evaluation must be completed, and the IFSP meeting held, *within 45 calendar days* of the date the parents contact the County Mental Health/Mental Retardation (MH/MR) Office. The services in the IFSP must be provided to the child *no later than 14 calendar days* after the IFSP is completed unless the family agrees to a delay for reasons related to the well-being of the child. There must be annual IFSP meetings, as well as the more frequent IFSP "reviews" described below. The following people must be part of initial and annual IFSP meetings:

1. The parent or parents of the child;
2. Other persons the parents want to have attend, such as another family member, an advocate or a friend;

3. The service coordinator, who is the person responsible for making sure that all services are provided and coordinated;
4. Someone who was directly involved in the evaluation of the child. If this person can't attend, arrangements must be made for the person to be involved through other means;
5. One or more of the people who will be providing services to the child or family.

### **WHEN AND WHERE IS THE IFSP MEETING HELD?**

The meeting must be held in a place and at a time that are convenient for the parents. If parents are unable to attend the meeting in person, they can still participate by telephone. Parents must be invited to the meeting in writing *at least 5 calendar days* prior to the IFSP meeting.

### **WHAT IS INCLUDED IN THE IFSP?**

Every IFSP must include a statement of the child's current levels, based on professionally accepted objective criteria, in each of the five developmental areas, and, with the family's consent, the results of the family assessment. In addition, the IFSP for every child must include:

- Measurable Outcomes and Progress Tools: What the child is expected to achieve, how progress will be determined, the extent to which progress is being made, and whether modifications are needed.
- Specific Early Intervention Services: What services the child and family are entitled to receive and how those services are linked to the outcomes the child is expected to achieve.
- Location: Whether the services will be provided in the "*natural environment*." The natural environment is the setting where the child would be if she did not have a disability, including home and community settings. Natural settings include programs for children without disabilities, including early child care and

education programs. If one or more of the services is not being provided in the natural environment, the IFSP must explain why.

- Place and Time: How *often* each service will be, and *where* each will be given and how long each service (duration) will be provided.
- Type of Service: Whether the service will be given *directly* to the child, or will be given as *consultation* to someone working with the child.
- Dates: When the services will *begin or end*, and the date of review (at least every 180 days). If it is particularly urgent, and with the parents consent, services can begin, under an interim IFSP, even before the evaluation is completed. The evaluation must still be completed *within the 45 calendar day* period.
- Name of the *service coordinator* who will be responsible for the implementation of the child's IFSP.
- Steps Towards Transition: A statement of the steps to be taken to support the child *transition* to preschool services under Part B of the IDEA (school-aged children with disabilities) or other appropriate services when she turns three, including, with the parents' consent, the transmission of information about the child to the agency responsible for providing preschool services.

For more details about transition and to view the IFSP form that includes the pages for transition steps go to:

<http://www.pattan.k12.pa.us/files/EI/IFSP-TrPlan.pdf>

- Parents' Signature: When you sign the IFSP you are agreeing to the details of the services presented in the IFSP, including the time, location, and steps towards transition. Remember, you can agree to some services and disagree with others. The services to which you have given your consent can start while you discuss with the Infants and Toddlers agency, or go to a hearing, regarding the contested services.

## **WHAT IF I DON'T AGREE WITH THE IFSP OFFERED TO MY CHILD?**

Parents have the right to disagree with all or part of the IFSP being offered. For example, the family may believe that more or different services are needed, or that the services should be given more frequently or in a different location. At the end of the conference, the parents will be asked to sign the IFSP indicating that they were part of the Team. Parents will also be given a Parents' Rights Agreement, which gives them a number of choices, including rejecting all or only some of the offered services. The family should list the services they agree with, if any. Those services should start right away. To work out any remaining disagreements over other services, the parents can then use the conference, mediation, or the hearing process. For more details about these options call, ELC's offices at the numbers listed below, or visit our web page at [www.elc-pa.org](http://www.elc-pa.org) to get a copy of our publication, *Resolving Disputes in the Early Intervention System (for Children under Three)*.

## **HOW OFTEN IS THE IFSP REVIEWED?**

The IFSP must be reviewed every six months or more often if needed or if requested by the family. It is not necessary to convene a formal IFSP meeting to conduct a review if the needs of the family and the other participants can be met through some other means, such as a conference call. The purpose of the review is to find out if the child is making progress and whether any changes are needed in the services being provided. If changes are needed, the IFSP must be revised at a meeting that includes the parents.

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