

# Individual Education Plans

## A Guide for Parents

By Catherine Abraham and Joyce Gram

in collaboration with the BC Confederation of Parent Advisory Councils



## **Individual Education Plans: A Guide for Parents**

Copyright © 2010 Catherine Abraham and Joyce Gram

Produced by the authors in collaboration with the BC Confederation of Parent Advisory Councils

This publication may be reproduced without permission provided that Catherine Abraham and Joyce Gram are acknowledged as the authors.

### **Acknowledgements**

We sincerely thank the following for their invaluable assistance and encouragement in the writing and reviewing of this guide: Diversity and Equity Branch, Ministry of Education; Linda Siegel; Julie Parker; John Wilson; Wendy Holtan; Barb Lund; Jennifer King; Diana Fournier; Kelly Dvorak; Deborah Garrity; Dawn Dixon. The authors take full responsibility for the contents of this guide. The opinions expressed are those of the authors and may not reflect the opinions of all reviewers.

### **About the Authors**

The authors have been involved in parent education in British Columbia for over twenty years. Catherine Abraham has written extensively for parents in the areas of special education, parent support and policy development. Joyce Gram has written for parents in all areas through newsletters and websites. Both have held numerous executive and advocate positions on school and district parent advisory councils and have worked at the provincial level.

The authors can be reached at [parenteducation@hotmail.com](mailto:parenteducation@hotmail.com).

### **Other guides for parents in this series are available electronically from the authors.**

*Student Assessment in B.C.'s Public Schools: A Guide for Parents*

*Building Student Success in B.C.'s Public Schools: A Guide for Parents*

*Aboriginal Education: A Discussion Guide*

*Reading: Breaking Through the Barriers. A Discussion Guide*

This guide is available electronically at <http://www.bccpac.bc.ca/index.aspx>.

# Contents

Introduction	2
Collaboration—What Does It Look Like?	3
Sample IEP Goal Showing Collaboration	4
Our Child’s Role in the IEP	5
Understanding Learning	6
Our Child’s Learning Style	7
Sample IEP Goal Using a Child’s Learning Style	8
Transitions	9
Sample IEP Goal on Making a Transition	10
Adaptations in an IEP	11
Modifications in an IEP	12
Sample IEP Goal on Adapting a Student’s Program	13
Reporting on Our Child’s Progress	14
Rights and Responsibilities	15
When Things Go Wrong	16
References and Resources	17

# Introduction

Many parents are not sure what to expect at an Individual Education Plan (IEP) meeting. When they meet school staff on behalf of their child, they may feel vulnerable or even frightened. Often, they don't know what to do and are not clear about their role in the process.

Some IEP guides focus on rights and responsibilities in legislation and policy. In this guide, we take a different approach. Our focus is to help you understand how an IEP meeting works and how you and your child, working together with the school, can get the most out of this process for the benefit of your child.

You know more about your child than anyone else. The school needs this information to tailor its teaching to your child's way of learning. A good IEP brings together your knowledge about your child with the school's knowledge about teaching. The IEP meeting will produce a plan of what the school will do to teach your child and help her succeed.

An IEP contains several elements:

- goals and strategies to help your child learn
- services and resources for your child
- ways to track your child's progress

It may also describe how the curriculum will be adapted or modified for your child. In this guide, you will find sample goals to illustrate all of these, showing the teamwork that goes into developing an IEP.

The IEP may list the roles and responsibilities of various staff members, but it will not list your role and responsibilities as a parent. While the plan will reflect your knowledge and input, it is a record of what *the school* will do for your child, not what you will do at home.

An IEP is, above all, a “living document,” meaning it can, and will, be changed as your child's circumstances change.

When schools and parents share their knowledge, children benefit. A good IEP, developed by the parents and the school working together for the child, affirms the uniqueness of every child and helps the child learn.

When we brought Daniel home from the hospital I thought that his having significant challenges would make my life forever sad. It has not. I am happy in ways that I've never imagined before. My son is a major reason for that joy. He grows my heart bigger and helps me to see how capable I really am. He teaches me.

—Carolyn Murray, *Acceptance*

# Collaboration – What Does It Look Like?

The research is clear: students do better in school when parents are involved. In recent years, schools have made many changes to increase parental involvement and make themselves more “parent-friendly.”

However, the level of collaboration needed to support our children with special learning needs goes beyond traditional parental involvement. It takes us past the supportive role that most schools have become comfortable with to a role that gives parents an equal voice.

We, as parents, can look at the IEP meeting as the stage for our partnership with the school. For a partnership to work, there must be trust and commitment on both sides. We can do many things to help set that all-important tone of respect and caring.

## Tips to foster collaboration:

- Ask school staff to keep the meeting as small as possible. Small groups have a better chance of working together; larger groups tend merely to share information.
- Find out who is expected to attend the meeting and what each person’s purpose is for attending. If you have reports to share, pass them around a few days before the meeting and ask others to do the same.
- Request a whiteboard, laptop, flipchart or blackboard to write down goals and strategies clearly, to avoid misunderstandings.

- Verify the time limits for the meeting. Do your best to respect them and ask others to do the same—and stay focused.
- Talk about what kind of ongoing communication works for you—email, telephone or written correspondence. It helps when teachers and others know what you need in order to work with them.
- It’s OK to be nervous, and it’s even better if you can share your feelings. Telling others how you feel shows your openness and sets a good tone.
- Ask school staff to stick to a few goals, between three and five. Too many goals can produce an IEP without a clear focus. Include short- and long-term goals.
- Make failure OK. When others see that you understand that not everything may work, and that you want to learn from strategies that don’t work, they will be more inclined to take risks and try new things.
- Ask questions—don’t make accusations. An IEP meeting is not the place to resolve conflict.
- Give some feedback at the end of the meeting and request feedback from others. It helps when we understand each other’s perspective.

Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much.

—Helen Keller

# Sample IEP Goal Showing Collaboration

*Joe has just transferred from preschool into kindergarten at his neighbourhood school. He has been diagnosed with autism. Although his school offers all-day kindergarten, his mom feels that an all-day program would be too long for him. Joe has been gradually increasing the time he spends each day in kindergarten. He likes to play alongside other children but has some difficulty playing with them. Joe struggles with language and does much better when information is presented visually. He loves using the computer at school. He likes school, but at the same time he is becoming anxious, particularly in new situations. He feels most comfortable in a structured setting.*

**Goal: To increase Joe's social skills and ability to interact with his peers**

## Strategies

The teacher will

- use structured visual teaching techniques, including a visual schedule for the whole class
- use a high level of structured activities in those areas in which Joe is able to be most successful
- give him daily computer-activity learning time with a peer
- provide structured and supported recess activities

The teaching assistant will

- provide one-on-one support to Joe in paired and small-group instruction for social language development and literacy

- identify times and activities where his anxiety increases, and maintain a log to track these incidents
- provide daily computer-assisted learning time with a peer for math

## Goal assessment and evaluation

Every two weeks, using a logbook, the teacher will review with Joe's parents his increasing time in school and his progress in dealing with anxiety.

Within one month, Joe will

- form friendships with two other students

Within two months, Joe will

- reduce the number of incidents of anxiety, as noted in the logbook, to no more than one per day
- participate fully in the half-day program

This goal will be reviewed with his parents in three months.

## Notes

- The parents' knowledge of their child is woven into this goal: gradual entry, half-day kindergarten, making friends, using the computer.
- The resource teacher would likely be involved in Joe's IEP. Many school districts have resource teachers trained in developing strategies to help students with autism.

# Our Child's Role in the IEP

Many of us struggle with the idea of involving our child in an IEP meeting. We wonder if she will feel intimidated or overwhelmed by the discussion about her. Will she be too embarrassed to talk about herself? Will she understand what's going on?

While our children are not required to attend their IEP meeting, they are entitled to do so. It may be helpful to discuss your child's attendance with the teacher before the meeting.

(Interestingly, in the United States students with special needs are required to attend from the age of 14 onward so that they can learn to plan for after graduation.)

If your child wants to attend, take the opportunity to talk to her about the meeting. Tell her who will be there and what kinds of questions she may be asked. If she already has an IEP, review it with her, especially her strengths and how she learns best. Talking about the meeting in advance will give her time to think about her goals, strengths and areas in which she may need help.<sup>1</sup>

If you and your child decide that she will not attend the meeting, you can nevertheless involve her in setting goals in much the same way as if she were attending.<sup>2</sup> Once the IEP is completed, you and the teacher can review it with her.

Whether or not your child ends up attending an IEP meeting, helping her learn to advocate for herself is important. The more comfortable our children are with their abilities or disabilities, the more they will be able to act as their own advocate. This is particularly important when they reach middle and secondary school and have multiple teachers.

<sup>1</sup> See B.C. Ministry of Education, *Individual Education Planning for Students with Special Needs: A Resource Guide for Teachers*, Appendix 3, for a helpful interview outline.

<sup>2</sup> See Appendix 2 of the same resource for questions to ask your child in preparation for the meeting.

If you have an apple and I have an apple and we exchange these apples, then you and I will still each have one apple. But if you have an idea and I have an idea and we exchange these ideas, then each of us will have two ideas.

—George Bernard Shaw

# Understanding Learning

We know that children learn in many ways. We also know that as they grow, they develop a preference for learning in different and unique ways. To be successful, they must also learn to adapt.<sup>1</sup>

For years, educators have studied learning processes and have developed a number of ways to describe how learning occurs. However, because learning is such a complex process, there is little proof to support many of these models. As a result, there is considerable debate among educators as to the “right” and “wrong” way to describe learning.

In this guide, we have chosen to show you one straightforward model that is widely used in the field of learning disabilities. While this model may not ultimately be proven to be “right,” it can still be helpful as we begin to uncover our child’s unique way of learning. Keep in mind that any child may show characteristics in more than one of these categories.

## **Visual learners like to see information. They**

- remember visual details
- prefer to see what they are learning
- like to have paper and pens handy
- doodle while listening
- may have trouble following lectures
- like to write down instructions or telephone numbers

A visual learner may prefer a quiet location and may like to look at the person who is talking. He may do better if he sits at the front of the class.

## **Auditory learners like to hear information. They**

- enjoy oral discussion
- remember by talking out loud
- need to have things explained orally
- may have trouble with written instructions
- talk to themselves while learning something
- repeat a telephone number in order to remember it

An auditory learner may prefer to work with a partner and will benefit from talking about the topic.

## **Kinesthetic or tactile learners like to touch or manipulate things. They**

- prefer activities
- want to actually do whatever is being talked about or learned
- like to move around while listening or talking
- often “talk” with their hands
- like to touch things in order to learn about them
- remember things by recalling who *did* what rather than who *said* what
- need hands-on, active learning (touch and movement)
- don’t require instructions to assemble something

A kinesthetic or tactile learner may need frequent breaks while he works and may need to find a way to fidget while learning.

<sup>1</sup> The information on this page has been taken largely from *Understanding Learning Styles* by Child and Family Canada.



# Our Child's Learning Style

Parents can find it difficult to label their child's learning style. But that is only because we don't think about what we know in those terms. When the topic is presented differently, we reveal the true depth of our knowledge.

We have no trouble describing what we do when we want to tell our child something important. We may get down on one knee, make eye contact, talk simply or ask our child to repeat to us what we have just told her. As parents, we know what works for our child.

When we give our child a new game, puzzle or toy, we know how she will approach it. Intrinsically, we know our child's learning style. It is important that, with our help, the school and teacher also know. This information should be included in an IEP and be used in setting goals and strategies. School assessments can affirm our observations and shed light on our child's learning style.

The Ministry of Education determines what must be included in an IEP. School districts have the freedom to develop a format that meets their needs. Nothing prevents us from asking for additions or changes to suit our child. For example, we may want to create a list like the following:

## My child learns best when ...

- she can be seated at the front of the class
- she can watch others doing the task first
- instructions are kept simple or are broken down into steps
- she has an opportunity to discuss the task before beginning it
- she is in a calm, quiet space
- she feels she can work at her own pace and doesn't feel pressured
- she has a chance to move around, rather than sitting at her desk for long periods

We may also want to create a list showing when our child becomes frustrated—at what times and in what circumstances. Strategies that work at home often transfer well to school, providing consistency between the two settings.

Children learn best when material is presented in a way that matches their learning style and unique learning strengths. Part of the rationale for creating an IEP with you, the parent, is to tease out this kind of information that schools need to help your child succeed. It's part of the collaborative process.

Parents need professionals. Professionals need parents.  
The children need us both.

—Federation of Invisible Disabilities

# Sample IEP Goal Using a Child's Learning Style

*Mark is now in grade 4. In grade 3 he was assessed as having a learning disability, and he currently reads at a grade 1 level. He is a visual learner. His parents worry that his self-esteem is low and he does not see himself as a good student. Mark is good at sports and enjoys them. His parents are keenly interested in helping him.*

**Goal: To help Mark develop an interest and enjoyment in reading**

## Strategies

The teacher will

- adapt reading materials to Mark's reading level, with the assistance of the resource teacher
- help Mark select reading material at his reading level, including books on sports
- include material with a sports focus in language arts units
- extend time requirements for Mark to complete reading assignments, to improve his success rate
- provide oral tests and/or a quiet space for testing
- provide both oral and print directions, adapted to his reading level, on class assignments
- send school assignments home for preview with parents
- send vocabulary words home for preview with parents

The teaching assistant will

- provide one-on-one instruction in sounding and blending unfamiliar words
- maintain a daily journal, with Mark, to show his reading progress and accomplishments

## Goal assessment and evaluation

- Mark will select and read three books per week at progressive reading levels.
- Mark's grades will improve overall in the next reporting period.
- The teacher will meet with Mark and his parents monthly to review his daily journal.

This goal will be reviewed by the teacher, resource teacher and Mark's parents within three months.

## Notes

- Because Mark is a visual learner, information will be given to him in writing.
- To ensure that his low reading level does not interfere with test results, Mark will be assessed orally on his understanding of concepts taught to the class.
- Mark needs to experience success in order to be motivated to learn. Keeping a journal will help him see his progress.
- Using Mark's interests and strengths encourages him to learn.
- Other people, such as the resource teacher, will likely have roles in this goal.

# Transitions

Transition to a new environment—a new schedule, new teacher, new classroom, new school—can be difficult for any child, but children with special needs are more likely to have problems. Research clearly shows that long-term preparation is extremely important and that our involvement in the transition is key to its success.

An IEP meeting is the logical and practical place to plan with children and school staff to ease these transitions. Ideally, when the transition is between elementary and middle or secondary school, staff from both schools will be involved.

A number of factors can change with a transition:

- a new teacher or teachers, or from one teacher to many teachers, each with a different teaching style
- new resource teachers and other staff
- friends and classmates
- classrooms and other locations
- rules and expectations for student behaviour
- schedules and the organization of the school day

All of these factors and more must be considered in IEP planning. We know our children and have essential information to share with the school about their fears and the challenges they will face. The more we prepare our child, and the more we ensure that each of these factors is considered, the better the transition will be.

Transitional periods are also opportunities for growth if children have learned coping skills and are given an opportunity to understand and adapt to their new environment. Ideally, a transition team is composed of school counselors, teachers, administrators, parents and students. They collaborate, plan and support student transitions by acknowledging student concerns and by creating a sense of belonging in the new environment.

—Leah Davies, M.Ed., *Helping Children Cope with School Transitions*

# Sample IEP Goal on Making a Transition

*Sarah is a Grade 7 student with a developmental disability, who attends her neighbourhood school. She enjoys music and art and learns well when information is presented orally. She has lots of friends at school. Her speech can be difficult to understand, but her classmates are able to understand her. In math and language arts, Sarah is working at a Grade 3 level. She is excited about going to secondary school but is concerned about keeping her friends there.*

**Goal: To assist Sarah in making the transition to secondary school**

## Strategies

The Grade 7 teacher will

- arrange additional transition visits with the secondary school resource teacher
- give Sarah's parents a list of after-school sports activities at the secondary school that they may wish to attend
- identify two students to help Sarah with the transition. They may wish to accompany her for lunch at the secondary school on a weekly basis.
- help Sarah prepare a five-minute presentation about herself. Sarah will give this presentation to secondary school staff.

The teaching assistant will

- accompany Sarah on secondary school visits
- liaise with secondary school aides on appropriate strategies to use with Sarah
- show Sarah the art room and music room, and introduce her to those teachers

## Goal assessment and evaluation

Sarah will

- report every two weeks to the Grade 7 teacher and her parents on her positive experiences
- be able to find her way around the secondary school
- give a presentation to secondary staff within two months
- with her parents, meet with the secondary school resource teacher within one month and arrange for further meetings

This goal will be reviewed in three months.

## Notes

- The more familiar Sarah becomes with the various aspects of secondary school, the more comfortable she will be.
- Visiting the art and music rooms is a way to use Sarah's interests to help in the transition.
- Sharing her anxieties ahead of time in regularly scheduled meetings will help guide her parents and teachers in the ways they can help Sarah make a smooth transition.
- It is important that Sarah's relationships with her peers continue into secondary school. Including other students in her visits will help make that transition easier.
- Having Sarah prepare a presentation about herself will help develop her self-advocacy skills and will use her auditory learning style.

# Adaptations in an IEP

IEPs may include adaptations or modifications to accommodate a student's particular learning needs. The Ministry of Education says that formal decisions on whether a program, or part of a program, includes adaptations or modifications do not need to be made until grade 10.<sup>1</sup>

**Adaptations** are changes to

- the strategies used to teach a student
- the materials available to the student
- the assessment tools used to evaluate his learning

Adaptations are made to ensure that the student is able to achieve the learning outcomes of the curriculum.

For example, a student who is blind or partially sighted may have a better chance at success if he can have someone read subject materials out loud to him or he can use a Braille reader. Other common adaptations include

- taking tests orally rather than in writing
- having extra time to complete assignments
- using a computer with word prediction or a spell checker
- working on learning outcomes from a lower grade level

Adaptations such as these can be made for specific courses; the student may not need them or continue to need them for all courses. Or he may need to have reading materials at a lower level for all courses and still be able to meet the learning outcomes for a subject.

In all these cases, the student will receive report cards at the same time as other students. His report card will reflect whether he is meeting the learning outcomes in the curriculum. (For more on this, please see “Reporting on Our Child’s Progress” on page 14.)

For information on adaptations to provincial exams, see the Ministry of Education’s website on “Provincial Examinations—Adjudication” at <http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/exams/adjudication/>, and speak to your child’s teacher.

Students whose program includes adaptations will usually be eligible to receive a Dogwood Diploma on graduation.

<sup>1</sup> See *A Guide to Adaptations and Modifications* by the Ministry of Education.

Every single person has capabilities, abilities and gifts. Living a good life depends on whether those capabilities can be used, abilities expressed and gifts given. If they are, the person will be valued, feel powerful and well connected to the people around them. And the community around the person will be more powerful because of the contribution the person is making.

—John P. Kretzmann and John L. McKnight

# Modifications in an IEP

The number of students needing **modifications** to their learning outcomes is much smaller than the number needing adaptations. A student whose program is modified will be working on goals different than the provincial curriculum.

The Ministry of Education says that modifications should be considered for those students whose special needs are such that they are unable to access the curriculum, for example, students

- with limited awareness of their surroundings
- with fragile mental or physical health
- medically and cognitively or multiply challenged<sup>1</sup>

Examples of students who might have modifications in their IEP are

- a student who is learning to count money while her peers are learning algebra
- a student who is learning to name the planets while her peers are studying the solar system
- a grade 5 student who is learning how to listen to stories at a pre-primary level and to turn pages at the appropriate time

Sometimes it is clear that a student's IEP includes modifications rather than adaptations. At other times the distinction is blurred. It is a good idea to talk about this in the IEP meeting and to read the Ministry's guide.

A student whose IEP contains modifications will receive report cards with comments or letter grades in relation to the particular goals in the IEP rather than to the learning outcomes for the subject or course.

The student might earn a School Completion Certificate, now known as an Evergreen, upon graduation.

<sup>1</sup> See *A Guide to Adaptations and Modifications* by the Ministry of Education.

The decision to use modifications should be based on the same principle as adaptations—that all students must have equitable access to learning, opportunities for achievement, and the pursuit of excellence in all aspects of their educational programs.

—B.C. Ministry of Education, *A Guide to Adaptations and Modifications*

# Sample IEP Goal on Adapting a Student's Program

*John lives with his father. He dislikes school and is frequently absent. He prefers to play video games and enjoys playing soccer. John learns best through hands-on activities. He has a reported history of drug use and has few known friends. He attended a number of different schools before coming to this secondary school. He has been seeing a counsellor at the school.*

**Goal: To increase John's attendance at school**

## Strategies

The counsellor will

- identify the times at school that John enjoys and the times he avoids
- arrange for him to attend the Learning Assistance Centre and drop his French course
- arrange for four weekly sessions of Academy of Reading and Math computer-assisted learning
- introduce John to the soccer club and the physical education teachers
- review John's self-recording system in his planner for monitoring his attendance
- inform all subject staff of John's IEP and his strength as a hands-on learner
- act as a resource for staff for questions or concerns, as well as strategies that use his learning style

The youth worker/outreach worker will

- involve John in sports activities in school and the community twice weekly
- liaise with John's father to monitor John's attendance and his possible drug use

## Goal assessment and evaluation

John will

- meet with the counsellor and his father in one month to review his attendance and revise his program based on information the counsellor has gathered on classes that John enjoys and doesn't enjoy
- improve his attendance so that he misses less than three days per month
- participate in school sports as part of his program
- participate in community sports twice weekly

The counsellor, learning assistance teacher and youth worker will meet with John and his father in two months to assess the effect of these strategies and plan for the next two months.

## Notes

- John's program is being adapted to meet his needs; he will not have a full program this year. Helping him develop a sense of belonging and make friends in the school may be an important first step to increasing his attendance.
- By identifying what John enjoys and what is difficult for him, and by reducing the difficult things, the counsellor may help John acquire a more positive outlook on school.
- John has to feel that he is achieving success in order to be motivated to learn. Dropping those courses that are more difficult for him may be necessary for a while for him to feel successful.



# Reporting on Our Child's Progress

The Ministry of Education requires that three formal progress reports be given to parents.<sup>1</sup> These are the report cards we are familiar with. For kindergarten to grade 3, report cards use written comments to tell us what our child can do and where he is having difficulty. For grades 4 to 12, they must use letter grades. For grades 4 to 7, they must also include written comments. For grades 8 to 12, they can include written comments where appropriate.

If our child's IEP includes adaptations to accommodate his special learning needs (as described for the blind or partially sighted student), then

- if he is meeting the learning outcomes in the curriculum, the report card he receives for his course or grade will be as outlined above
- if he is *not* meeting the learning outcomes in the curriculum, his report card will reflect his progress in relation to the goals in his IEP

If our child's IEP includes modifications (as described for the student who is learning to count money while her peers are studying algebra), then her report card will reflect her progress in relation to the goals in her IEP.

(Further information can be found in the *Student Progress Report Order*.)

Report card conferences can be a natural trigger for an IEP review. The Ministry of Education requires that IEPs be reviewed at least once a year.<sup>2</sup> Good practice tells us that more frequent reviews will help ensure that the IEP is indeed the "living document" it is supposed to be, a document that changes and adapts as our child progresses in his learning.

During an IEP review, we can identify with school staff what has worked and what has not. We can replace short-term goals that have been met with new goals. We can ensure that the IEP is on track with our child's learning style.

<sup>1</sup> B.C. Ministry of Education, *Student Progress Report Order*

<sup>2</sup> B.C. Ministry of Education, *Individual Education Plan Order*

## Key components of an IEP review include

- involvement of the parent and (where appropriate) the student
- examination of assessments and discussion of observations by team members
- consideration of problems and concerns of IEP team members
- revision of goals, objectives, strategies, services and materials
- identification of priorities for the next instructional period
- referrals for new assessments and services
- recording of the next IEP review date

—Ministry of Education, *Individual Education Planning for Students with Special Needs: A Resource Guide for Teachers*



# Rights and Responsibilities

All parents have certain basic rights with respect to their children in our public school system. One of those rights is to be informed of their child’s “attendance, behaviour and progress in school, and to receive, on request, annual reports respecting general effectiveness of educational programs in the school district.” Parents are also entitled to examine all records kept by their school board pertaining to their child.

Parents of students with special needs have the *additional* right to be consulted on their child’s placement in school and on the preparation of their child’s IEP. They do not, however, have a veto over the content of the IEP, nor the right to approve the IEP in order for it to be put in place.

The Ministry of Education requires that an IEP be reviewed at least once a year.

School principals carry the overall responsibility for making sure that, for every student in the school who requires an IEP, the IEP is developed, put into action and reviewed annually.

Teachers who carry the responsibility for a student with special needs must also design, supervise and assess that child’s educational program. Other school and district staff may also have responsibilities to ensure that strategies contained in an IEP are met.

Asking for a copy of the draft IEP can help clear up misunderstandings early. See page 16, “When Things Go Wrong,” for steps to take when our views on the IEP differ from those of the school.

For the Ministry of Education’s extensive legislation and policy on special education services, see *Special Education Services: A Manual of Policies, Procedures and Guidelines*.

See also *Parent’s Guide to Individual Education Planning* by the British Columbia School Superintendents’ Association.

The Ministry’s *Individual Education Plan Order* lists circumstances in which an IEP is not required for a student with special needs.

A student with special needs: A student who has a disability of an intellectual, physical, sensory, emotional or behavioural nature, has a learning disability or has special gifts or talents.

—*Manual of Policies, Procedures, and Guidelines*, Section E

# When Things Go Wrong

When something bad happens to us, we usually take the time to think before we act. When something bad happens to our children—especially our most vulnerable children—our emotions often run much higher. Instinctively, we want to protect our children, even more than we would protect ourselves.

How do we reconcile our emotional turmoil when an IEP is involved? What do we do when the IEP is not being followed or we are not being consulted? What happens when our views of our child's needs differ from those of the school?

These are legitimate questions. They deserve to be answered.

Most of the problems parents encounter can be tracked to a failure of process or an absence of process, for example:

- the process was set up and then ignored
- the process was not properly understood
- the process was never set up in the first place

When the relationship between parents and the school becomes adversarial, the focus often switches to blame. Who is at fault? Why won't they admit it? Immediately, emphasis shifts from the child to the adults.

The answer to this dilemma is to request a meeting as soon as possible, for two purposes:

- to revisit the process that was, or should have been, set up at the IEP meeting
- to address the conflict and find a resolution

BCCPAC's *Speaking Up: A parent guide to advocating for students in public schools* is an invaluable resource when problems of this nature arise.

In this guide, we have intentionally emphasized collaboration as fundamental to developing an IEP. When people collaborate, issues get resolved through respectful dialogue. A good IEP meeting is, by its nature, non-adversarial. It involves taking the time to create a process to deal with issues. It allows for failure, by acknowledging that not everything will work and that failure can be a tool for getting things right.

Sometimes we, as parents, need to be strong advocates for our children. We have the right and responsibility to make our voices heard on their behalf. Advocacy at an IEP meeting uses a collaborative voice—and that is a powerful tool to help our children.

Many of the things we need can wait. The child cannot. Right now is the time his bones are being formed, his blood is being made, and his senses are being developed. To him we cannot answer 'Tomorrow'; his name is 'Today.'

—Gabriela Mistral, *Su Nombre es Hoy (His Name is Today)*

# References and Resources

B.C. Confederation of Parent Advisory Councils, *Speaking Up! A parent guide to advocating for students in public schools*, 2008. Explains how to advocate for your child, parent rights and responsibilities, fairness in decision making, and tips on resolving issues. Available at: [http://www.bccpac.bc.ca/UserFiles/File/Advocacy%20Resources/SpeakingUp\\_2008\\_May%20Final%20\(2\).pdf](http://www.bccpac.bc.ca/UserFiles/File/Advocacy%20Resources/SpeakingUp_2008_May%20Final%20(2).pdf)

B.C. Ministry of Education, *A Guide to Adaptations and Modifications*. Available at: [http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/specialed/docs/adaptations\\_and\\_modifications\\_guide.pdf](http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/specialed/docs/adaptations_and_modifications_guide.pdf)

B.C. Ministry of Education, *Individual Education Plan Order*. Available at: <http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/legislation/schoollaw/e/m638-95.pdf>

B.C. Ministry of Education, *Individual Education Planning for Students with Special Needs: A Resource Guide for Teachers*, November 2009. Contains comprehensive information on IEPs. Includes tips for parents (Appendix 2) and for students (Appendix 3) on participating in the IEP. Available at: <http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/specialed/docs/iepsn.pdf>

B.C. Ministry of Education, “Provincial Examinations—Adjudication.” Available at: <http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/exams/adjudication/>

B.C. Ministry of Education, *Special Education Services: A Manual of Policies, Procedures and Guidelines*, April 2010. Outlines services for students with special needs. Contains links to legislation and Ministerial Orders and a special section on IEPs. Available at: [http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/specialed/special\\_ed\\_policy\\_manual.pdf](http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/specialed/special_ed_policy_manual.pdf)

B.C. Ministry of Education, *Student Progress Report Order*. Available at: <http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/legislation/schoollaw/e/m191-94.pdf>

B.C. School Superintendents’ Association, *Parent’s Guide to Individual Education Planning*, 2002. Contains information on rights and responsibilities of parents and educators, parents’ role in developing the IEP and helpful definitions. Available at: <http://bcssa.org/PDFs/Resources/IEP.pdf>

British Columbia Council of Administrators of Special Education, *Supporting Meaningful Consultation with Parents*, 2008. Looks at key elements in building meaningful consultation with parents, benefits and barriers, questions and answers, and case studies and examples. Available at: [http://www.bc-case.org/downloads/WVSD\\_brochure.pdf](http://www.bc-case.org/downloads/WVSD_brochure.pdf)

Child and Family Canada, *Understanding Learning Styles*. Available at: [http://www.cccf-fcsge.ca/docs/cccf/rs045\\_en.htm](http://www.cccf-fcsge.ca/docs/cccf/rs045_en.htm)

EduGuide, *Types of Learning Styles*. Available at: <http://www.eduguide.org/Parents-Library/Types-of-Learning-Styles-2305.aspx>

Murray, Carolyn, *Acceptance*. Available at: <http://www.childrensdisabilities.info/parenting/acceptance.html>