

Parents as an invaluable source of information

Parents can usually provide information not just about the child, but also about strategies, equipment and resources that they use to 'enable' the child to live happily in the home environment. This is worth remembering because often a child who appears to be 'disabled' in some way in a setting may well be 'abled' in their own home. It can therefore be a good idea to visit a child at home, especially if you are worried about managing a medical condition or making sure that your setting is accessible.

Some parents also become 'experts' on their child's impairment and can provide up-to-date information and also contacts with other professionals. Tapping into this information can therefore be helpful in finding effective ways of supporting and enabling the child.

CASE STUDY

We had a partially sighted girl coming to join us. At first I was really worried because I have never worked with a partially sighted child. I was scared that we would not know what to do or how to help. In the end I visited the child at home. It was amazing and I learnt so much simply by watching and talking to the mum. It also meant that we had all got to know each other.

What should I do if I notice that a child's behaviour or development is giving me cause for concern?

Early identification of children with additional needs is essential in order for children to gain any support that they might need. It is also important that children are not 'labelled' and so you should always start by carefully observing the child. Once you have carefully assessed a child and are sure that the child has some additional needs that will require further action, you will need to talk to the parents. Hopefully, you will already have developed a good working relationship with the parents as this forms the basis of good practice within all early years settings. Parents who feel the most dissatisfied with settings are often those whose first contact with staff is when they are called in to talk about a 'problem'. It is essential that early meetings work well for everyone involved as it is likely that further meetings will be required. The tone of the first meeting needs to be reassuring and supportive rather than accusatory. It is also worth pointing out to parents that children under five years old often show a wide range of development and that some apparent delay at this age does not necessarily signal difficulties in later schooling.

"I was made to feel from day one, that Stephen's difficulties were in some way my fault and that I was expected to sort them out."

Parent

Chapter 6

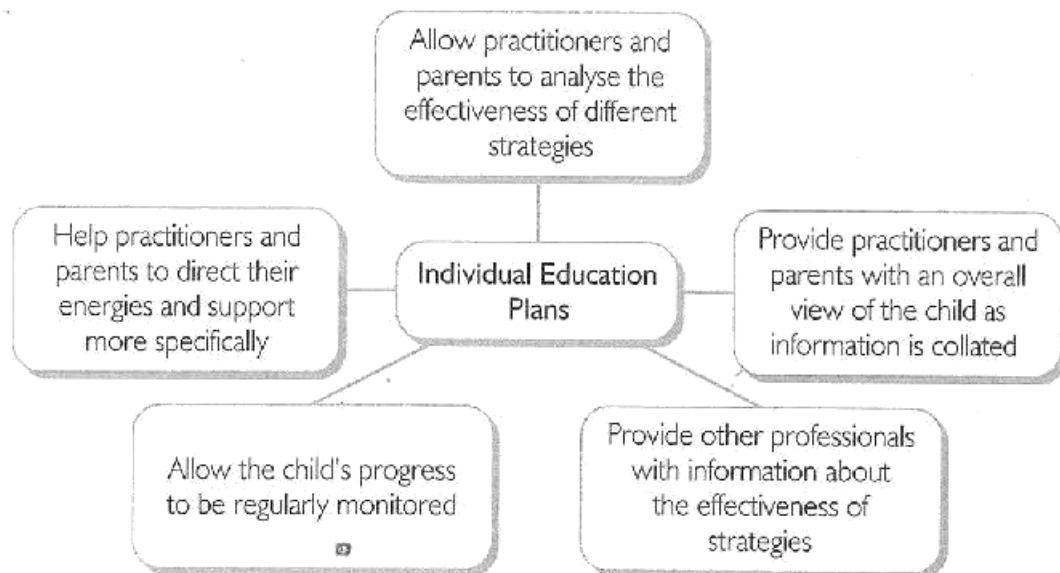
Individual Education Plans

Introduction

Individual Education Plans, often referred to as IEPs, are essentially action plans. They are useful because they help to provide a focus for future work with individual children. IEPs are not 'statements' and can be drawn up by the practitioner and/or the SENCO if it is realised that a child needs additional or different support in the setting. IEPs are used to support children on Early Years Action as well as Early Years Action Plus. This chapter looks at the process of writing, using and reviewing IEPs.

The purpose of IEPs

IEPs are designed to focus on small steps of a child's development, needs or behaviour. They act principally as an action plan, focusing on areas that will benefit the child. Breaking down and focusing on particular targets has been shown as an effective way of helping children. Practitioners and parents also benefit because they are able to see and measure the success of the strategies that have been put into place. As well as acting as an action plan, IEPs also have other purposes, as shown in the diagram below.



Understanding when children need an IEP

The key test of whether a child needs an IEP is whether or not you will need to provide very different or extra support to help the child. A child with a medical condition such as diabetes or asthma is unlikely to need an IEP because these types of conditions do not usually affect children's learning and overall development. In the same way, a child who uses a wheelchair may not need an IEP as once adjustments are made to the environment to 'enable' the child, he or she will be able to enjoy the same play, activities and learning experiences as other children.

KEY ISSUE: WHEN AN IEP IS NECESSARY

Children are likely to need an IEP if any of the following apply:

- ◆ The child makes little or no progress even when teaching approaches are particularly targeted to improve the child's identified area of weakness.
- ◆ The child continues working at levels significantly below those expected for children of similar age.
- ◆ The child experiences persistent emotional and/or behavioural difficulties that are not ameliorated by the behaviour managements and techniques usually employed in the setting.
- ◆ The child has sensory or physical problems and continues to make little or no progress despite the provision of personal aids and equipment.
- ◆ The child has communication and/or interaction difficulties, and requires specific individual interventions in order to access learning.

Source: 4:21 SEN Code of Practice 2001

People involved in writing the IEP

Effective IEPs will draw upon expertise and information from a range of people. At the level of Early Years Action, it is likely that IEPs will be drawn up by SENCOs, the key worker or practitioner with responsibility for the child, the parents and also the child themselves. See also page 76 on the involvement of Early Years Action Plus.

The role of the SENCO

While it is the responsibility of the SENCO in the setting to ensure that IEPs are in place, the SENCO's role is not necessarily to produce them. The idea is that practitioners who work on a day-to-day basis with a child will have a greater understanding about the child and therefore will be in a better position to draw up an IEP. In many settings SENCOs support their colleagues and help them to check that the IEPs are likely to be effective and will also suggest strategies and teaching methods.

Involving parents

When it is recognised that a child will need additional and/or different support and will need an IEP, additional and/or different parents need to be involved. Parents will need information about how IEPs are used and should be encouraged to make comments or suggestions about the targets that are going to be set. It is essential to gain as much information about the child as possible as the parents may be able to suggest strategies that they find helpful at home.

Involving children

The Code of Practice has as one of its key features the involvement of children in their own education. While very young children will not necessarily understand the process of IEPs, they can still be involved, as working from children's interests is likely to make more impact. This means that before an IEP is drawn up, the child's parents or key workers can ask the child about what they enjoy doing most in the setting and who they like being with. It is also possible to use observations and videos of children to help build an IEP that reflects their interests.

CASE STUDY

Yannick does not interact with the other children. His keyworker and parents have decided as part of the IEP to encourage him to take part in one game involving another child each day. Yannick is very interested in playing with cars. The keyworker talks to Yannick about his favourite cars. She uses this information to devise simple games that involve the cars. Yannick and one other child are given boxes into which they put their favourite cars. They take in turns to choose a car.

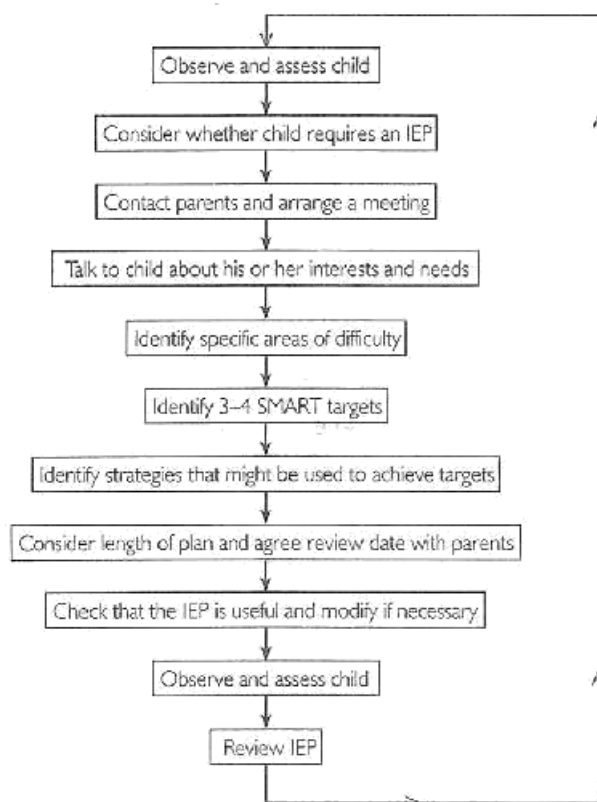
What information should an IEP contain?

There is no standard form on which IEPs are recorded. Settings are free therefore to design their own, although it can be useful to look at others. It is essential that the following information is recorded:

- ✓ Child's name and date of birth.
- ✓ Date of the IEP.
- ✓ Number of IEP (where there has been more than one).
- ✓ Date and level of support, e.g. Early Years Action/Early Years Action Plus.
- ✓ A brief summary of the child's difficulties and needs.
- ✓ Child's strengths, interests and views.
- ✓ Targets that the plan is to cover.
- ✓ Criteria for success.
- ✓ Teaching methods and strategies.
- ✓ Staff to be involved.
- ✓ Date to be reviewed.
- ✓ Signatures of parent and staff.

Writing IEPs

The actual IEP should not be a lengthy document. Most settings use brief bullet points and simple sentences as lengthy documents tend to go unread and create unwieldy demands on staff.



The stages of writing an IEP.

Areas of difficulty

This section should be quite short and simply record the reasons why the child needs additional or different support. Try and be specific as the targets should reflect the area of difficulty. For example 'Dora does not interact with other children' or 'Damien has difficulties with fine motor skills'.

Using SMART targets

Setting targets allows us to focus on developing or improving children's particular skills. The acronym SMART is often used when target setting to help practitioners think carefully about the targets that they are setting:

- S specific
- M measurable
- A achievable
- R relevant
- T time bound

The SEN Code of Practice suggests that an IEP should have three or four targets. However, for children attending a setting for only two sessions, the number of targets should reflect the shorter time available to work on targets and use strategies. Once these targets are met, new ones can be developed. In this way, you can build a step-by-step approach to your support.

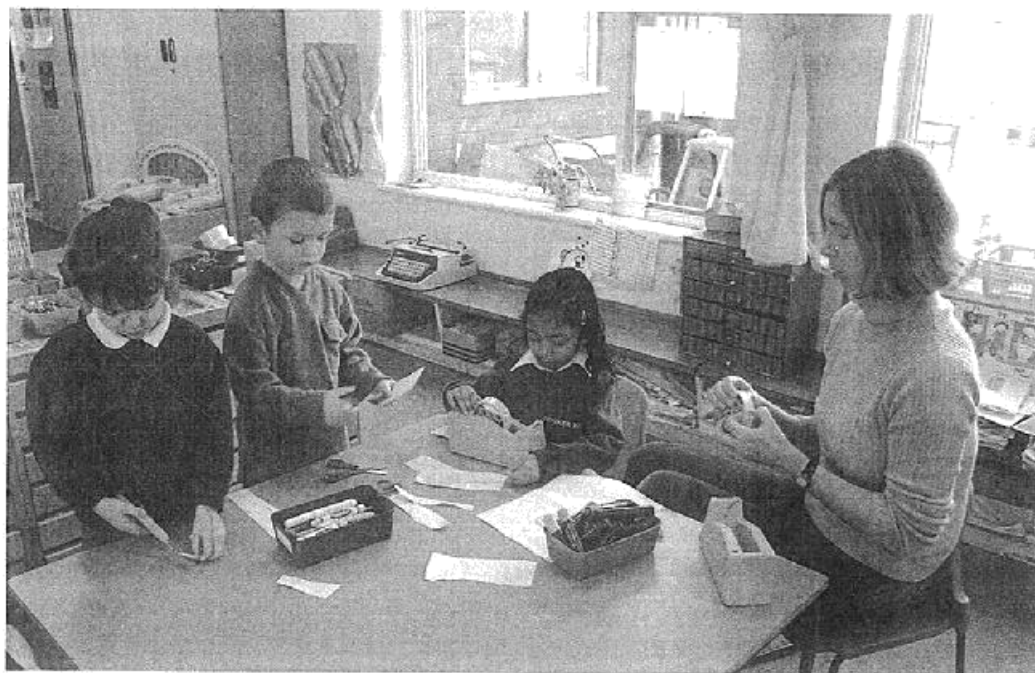
KEY ISSUE: TARGET SETTING

The key to setting targets is that they are focused and small enough to make them achievable. By continually meeting targets, children learn about success. It also helps parents and others in the setting to feel positive and to notice children's strengths rather than weaknesses.

Setting unrealistic goals can cause enormous difficulties as staff, parents and children may feel that no progress is being made. This can quickly erode the 'can do' feeling in a setting and actually create further problems. It is important to remember that although targets are being set, we should see them mainly as targets for us and our work. There is otherwise a danger of creating a system where the child is seen as failing if he or she is not meeting targets.

Specific

Every area of development and every skill needs to be seen as a journey. The key to setting targets is to break down the journey into tiny steps. It is these steps that can be used as targets. To work out the 'steps' of the journey, you need to think about what is involved in the task or skill, for example in order to use a pair of scissors, a child has to develop strength in the hand as well as being able to hold them correctly.



Using SMART targets can help when monitoring the development of children's skills

Steps can be worked out by referring to charts showing normative development and looking at the sequence that most children follow in the different areas of development. For example in terms of language development children often learn to point to draw an adult's attention to an object before using a word. Ideas for targets can also be gained from referring to the Nuffield Portage programme, the P scales and also from talking to others such as the SEN advisory team in your area.

In some cases, it might be hard to decide which area of need to concentrate on. In such cases, it is often a good idea to begin by choosing the area that will have the greatest impact on the child, but also one that will be easy for the child to achieve.

Measurable

As part of the thinking process, it will be important to decide how targets can be measured. How will you be able to check that the child has made progress and is ready for a new target? For each target, you will need to record how you intend to check or monitor that the child can achieve it. The advantage of recording the 'criteria for success' or 'outcomes' is that everyone will have a clear idea of exactly what they are aiming for. It is at this point in writing the IEP that practitioners often realise that their targets are too big and too 'wide'. A target such as 'to concentrate more' is very hard to measure. How long for? On what type of activity? By thinking about the measurability of an outcome, the target often becomes smaller and more focused.

To help you think about how to measure the outcomes consider these type of questions:

- ◆ How many times will I need to see the child demonstrating that they can achieve the target?
- ◆ How confidently/easily must the child be able to achieve the target?
- ◆ In what type of situations, does the child need to achieve the target, e.g. during adult-directed activities, with support of another adult, at home as well as in the setting?

Achievable and relevant

By thinking about how your targets are going to be measured, it is more likely that you will choose achievable targets for the child. Choosing targets that are relevant is also important. Ideally, the targets should concentrate on helping the child rather than just helping the setting. What targets will best help the child to access the curriculum and meet his or her needs? It is also worth checking that efforts are being focused appropriately, for example, choosing a target of sitting for a group story may not be appropriate for a child who finds it hard to sit on an adult's knee and share a picture book.

Time bound

The idea behind 'time bound' is that it creates a sense of priority and urgency. Having time limits helps everyone to focus on helping the child and so progress is likely to be made. Most settings draw up their IEPs with a time frame of six to ten weeks although this depends on the amount of time the child spends in the setting. This should provide enough time for the programme to take effect but not so long that inertia sets in.

Teaching methods and strategies

After deciding on the targets and ways of checking the targets, the next step is to consider the role of the adult and the strategies that need to be provided. This is in some ways the most important part of the IEP as targets alone will not help the child. This section of the IEP is the 'how' part. You will need to consider how best to support the child. In some cases, you may decide that the child needs more one-to-one adult support, but it may also be worth considering if a child can be given this support as part of a small group.

Again, it can be helpful to talk to parents and gain their input. In some cases, parents will be able to suggest strategies that have worked in other settings or at home. Some parents are also very knowledgeable about their child's impairment and are often in contact with support organisations. Part 2 of this book provides examples of strategies and activities that are often used in relation to four areas of need.

SEEING THEORY IN PRACTICE



Daniel was born ten weeks early. He is small for his age and he has poor motor skills, both fine and gross. He has poor concentration. He changes activity frequently even when supported with an adult. He is a sociable child and enjoys watching and being with other children. He particularly enjoys painting and playing games. Staff have noticed that he responds well to sensory activities such as sand and water. His parents report that at home he enjoys having friends round and playing in the tent in the garden. They have noticed that he finds it hard to follow instructions.

Louise, his key worker, has decided, in consultation with Daniel's parents, to focus on his fine motor skill development and concentration. It was also felt that his overall poor co-ordination might be affecting his concentration. It was felt that as Daniel was just four years old and that he was unaware of his difficulties, it would not be appropriate to address them directly with him. He was however asked by both his parents and his key worker about the things that he enjoyed most at nursery. He mentioned the sandpit, playing with water and being with one child in particular. To get a feel of what Daniel wanted to achieve, his key worker asked him what he would most like to be able to do. Daniel said that he wanted to be able to build a sand castle.

This information was used to help the key worker link the teaching strategies to Daniel's interests. As it was the first IEP that Daniel had had, the review date was set quite early on as both the setting and Daniel's parents wanted to look at his progress.