

Navigating Your JEP



*Are you on the right track
towards your future?*





The Florida Youth Council is a group of youth (age 15-17) and emerging leaders (age 18-30) with disabilities or special health care needs that live in Florida. We are a program of The Family Cafe.



The FYC is all about getting youth and emerging leaders involved in self-advocacy, peer mentoring and other activities that will improve the quality of life for youth and emerging leaders with disabilities in Florida. The program provides a means for youth and emerging leaders to decide what issues are important to their generation, to express those issues in their state and local communities, and to develop strategies to solve them.

You can visit our website, www.floridayouthcouncil.com, or call us at (850) 224-4670 for additional information about the Florida Youth Council or the IEP guide.



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WELCOME TO “NAVIGATING YOUR IEP!”

The Florida Youth Council has worked hard to put together this guide, which has been created by youth, for youth. It will help you on your way to independence, by telling you about the steps involved in the IEP (Individual Education Plan) process, why the IEP is important, and how the choices you make in your IEP planning will affect your life.

The purpose of this guide is to help you help yourself, by giving you the tools you need to take command of your own life. No one knows you better than yourself, so you are the person that should be making decisions about your future! The FYC has created this guide to help you make your own decisions and be as independent as possible.

“Navigating Your IEP” will explain why your IEP matters, describe the steps involved in the IEP process, tell you about your legal rights and help you to be ready to take charge of your IEP meeting. After reading this guide, you will be well-informed as to how to guide your own education planning process, you will know what the IEP is and you will be ready to make the decisions that will affect your future.

As youth and emerging leaders with disabilities, the members of the FYC know how challenging it can be to take a leadership role in the IEP process. At the same time, we believe

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in the power of youth with disabilities to speak for themselves and shape their vision for tomorrow. We hope this guide gives you the tools you need to be confident in setting the course for your future!

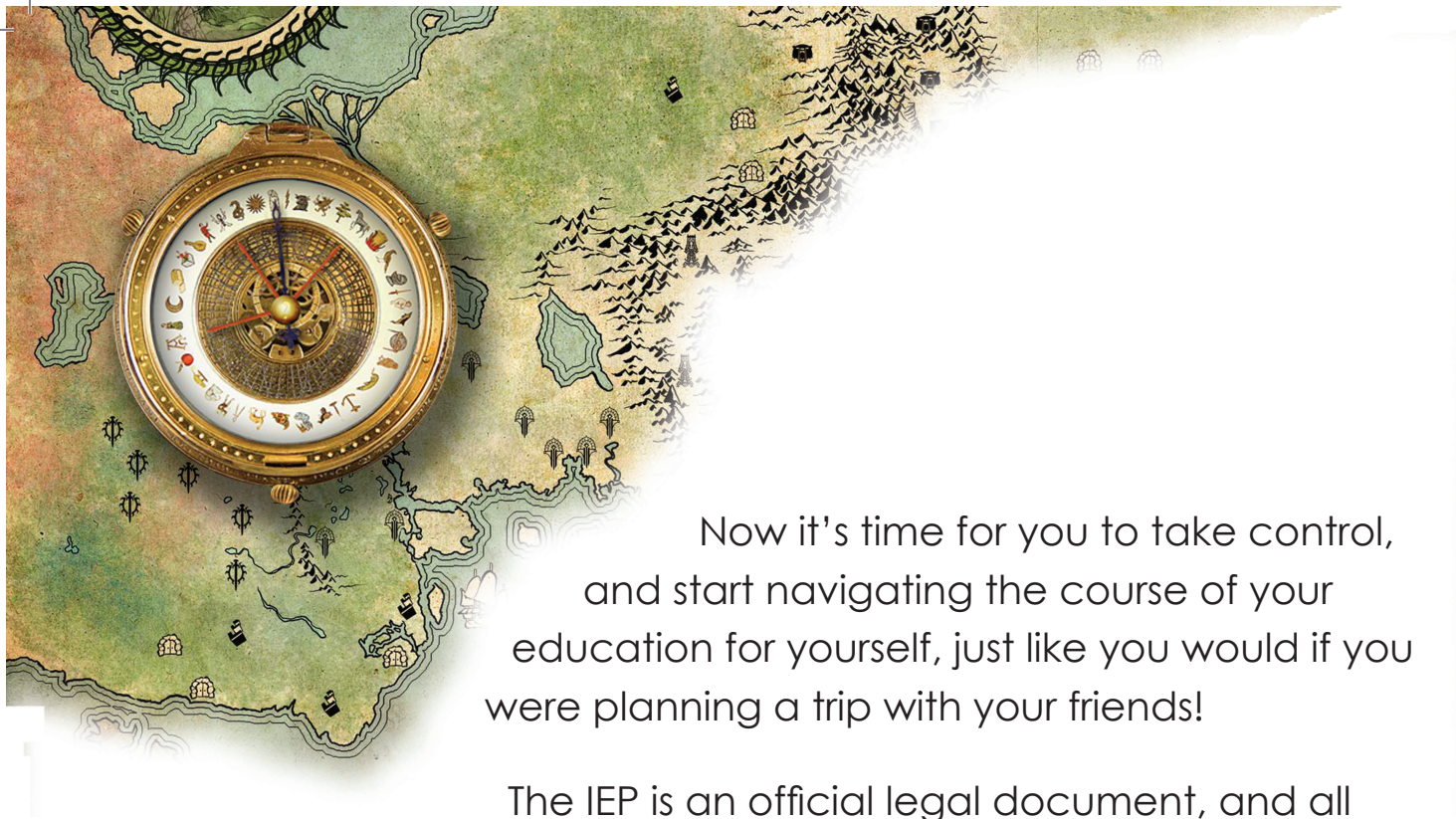
WHAT IS AN IEP?

An IEP is an Individual Education Plan. We all know what it means to have a plan. If there is a goal you want to accomplish, you need to have a plan that will guide you, and set out the steps you need to take to get to the goal.

For example, if you want to go on a trip you will need to plan how you will get to your destination. You need to know what you will bring. And, most of all, you need to know where you are going!

Creating an IEP is a lot like planning a trip. The difference is, instead of organizing a vacation, you are planning for your future!

A lot of students with disabilities are used to having adults make the decisions about their education. Teachers, parents and school personnel have been making a lot of decisions about your IEP and what it would include every since you started school. It's great to have help, and the adults that have worked on your IEP probably set goals that they thought were right for you.



Now it's time for you to take control, and start navigating the course of your education for yourself, just like you would if you were planning a trip with your friends!

The IEP is an official legal document, and all students with disabilities are entitled to have one by law. It is created by parents, teachers, school personnel, and most importantly, the students whose education and life it will effect the most.

The IEP states what a student is able to do currently, and what specific goals they would like to achieve. It gives details about how the student is doing, and also sets out what the student wants to accomplish in terms of school or work. It also says what accommodations the student will receive. Accommodations are special tools, guidelines or educational strategies that are designed to help a student with their specific needs and goals. Accommodations are kind of like a map or GPS to some one is planning a trip. They are tools that can be used to make the trip easier.

A student's IEP is designed to not only clearly define the student's performance and accommodations, but also to help teachers become more aware of the student's disability and how it effects how they learn.

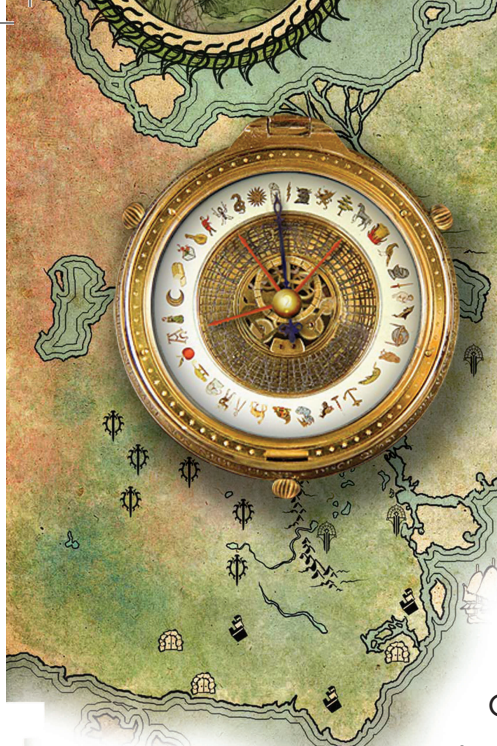
“In order to be a leader in your IEP meeting, you need to be familiar with what is included in an IEP.”

PARTS THAT AN IEP MUST INCLUDE

According to law, there are a few things that every IEP has to include. Here's a list, so you will know what to look for in your own IEP:

- Measure of student's current level of education and functional performance – this means that the IEP will state how you are doing in school now.
- Accommodations that the student will be eligible for – this will be a list of things the school will do or provide to help you succeed.
- Academic and functional goals for the following years plus ways to show progress – this means that the IEP will list all of your specific goals, along with standards that you will meet along the way that can measure your progress
- Schedule of services – this section says when and where your services will be provided
- May contain social and behavioral goals as well – if your IEP includes this section, it will list extra goals that are not only school-related

The main thing to know about the IEP is that it is a plan. Just like a map can show you the way to get where you want to go, the IEP lays out the specific place you want to get to in



your education, and gives you the route to get there. Remember, you are the only person that really knows where you want to go and what you want to achieve, and taking a leadership role in creating your own IEP is a great way to make sure you have everything you need to get there!

WHY DO I NEED TO WORRY ABOUT MY IEP?

You might be wondering, “Why do I need worry about my IEP?” Your parents and teachers have been taking care of it for you ever since you’ve been in school, and they’ve probably done a pretty good job. You are progressing through school, and everything seems fine.

That made sense when you were younger, but now that you are a young adult, isn’t it time for you to start making decisions about your future for yourself? You’re the only person that really knows what you want, what your goals are, and where you want to go. If you want your life to be what you imagine, you need to take control of the planning process. Since the IEP sets out all of your accommodations and goals, one of the best ways to set the course for your future is to make sure your IEP includes everything you need to have the future you want for yourself.

“Remember, when you go into your IEP meeting, you want to be prepared.”

Putting together your own IEP is all about being prepared to be all that you can be. When planning a trip, you make sure and have a jack in your car, money for gas and a list of destinations as part of your plan. Like the IEP, it is all about being prepared.

Taking a leadership role in the IEP process will give you a sense of empowerment, and the ability to advocate for your own needs. Empowerment means giving yourself more power over the situation, in this case the IEP process.

It will allow you to share your opinions about what will work for you and what will not. It will help you understand how your disability affects your school activities and how you can manage it. It will help you to understand your academic strengths and give you a chance to integrate those strengths into your whole school experience. Planning your own IEP is an opportunity for self-discovery, and the bigger role you play; the more comfortable you will be making decisions for yourself and shaping your own future.

Remember, when you go into your IEP meeting, you want to be prepared. The more you know the more effective you can be in shaping your own future. You should get a copy of your existing IEP ahead of time, and know what accommodations it calls for. This is much the same if you are going a trip. You look back on your last trip and see what helped you the last time.



You should also make sure to read the goals it lists, and determine for yourself where you think you are in terms of reaching them. Then come up with some clear ideas about goals you would like to reach. Knowing why your IEP is important and being ready to talk about your ideas and goals will help you to take a more active role and be part of the process.

WHO SHOULD BE AT MY IEP MEETING?

Just like you need to know who to bring with you when you go on a trip, you need to know who will be at your IEP meeting. This is the group of people that you will rely on to answer your questions and help you realize your vision for the future. If there's someone that you think could play a role in creating your IEP, don't be afraid to ask them to participate.

SO WHO SHOULD BE THERE? HERE'S A SHORT LIST:

YOU – This might seem pretty obvious, but it's easy to overlook the fact that you are the most important person at the IEP meeting. The IEP meeting is all about you and your needs. That means that you should be there, and you should have a lot to say about your own future. Remember to speak for yourself as much as possible. You provide the best insight into where you stand and what you want, so speak up!

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Teachers – Your teachers should be at the IEP meeting, because they know how you do in the classroom. They can provide important perspective on your progress toward your academic goals, and insight about what you might be ready to do next. They are also familiar with your learning style and academic needs, and can suggest the right accommodations for you. You can request that certain teachers come to your IEP meeting.

School District Representative – Many school districts have a representative whose job it is to attend IEP meetings. This individual will have a lot of information about the IEP and what it should include, are aware of all the accommodations available and should be able to answer your questions about the process. They will also have access to all of your records, including your current IEP and the goals it includes. You can request that a District Representative come to your IEP meeting.

Parents – Even though you are starting to take more of a decision-making role in putting together your IEP, there is still a part for your parents or guardian to play. If you are under 18, your parent or legal guardian must sign all of your paperwork. Your parent/guardian also knows you well, and will be able to share their views on your academic progress and goals. Before your meeting, make sure that your parent/guardian knows that you want to take a lead role in the IEP meeting, and ask them to support you in that. Your parents are there to be an advocate for you.



Other People – In addition to the people listed here, there may be other individuals that you would like to have at your IEP meeting. You might want a therapist that you work with to attend. There may be a tutor that helps you with your academic work outside of school. If there is somebody that you think knows you well and can provide positive input in the IEP process, go ahead and invite them. It's within your legal rights to have anyone you want at the meeting, as long as you notify the school before the meeting.

WHERE AND WHEN WILL MY IEP MEETING TAKE PLACE?

Most of the time, your IEP meeting will take place at your school. You should receive written notice before to the meeting, telling you where and when it is going to be held. If you need special accommodations in terms of the location of the meeting, your school district should be able to honor your request. The only rule that applies to the location of an IEP meeting states that the location of the meeting must be agreed upon by the parents/guardian, if you are under the age of 18, and the school.

By law, you are entitled to at least one IEP meeting per year. You also have the right to request an IEP meeting whenever you feel like you need one. If there is something in

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keep you from succeeding.”*

your IEP that you want to change, it may be a good idea to arrange a new meeting. Goals and plans can change during the school year, and it's smart to make sure that your IEP reflects what you are really doing. You don't want it to get outdated. If you have some type of problem or concern that is affecting your performance in school, an IEP meeting can also be a good place to discuss it and find a solution. If there's something you want to change about your academic plan, or if there is a need that is not being met, don't be afraid to ask for an IEP meeting to address it!

Much like if you are on a trip and you see someplace that you would like to visit, such as a mall or some other attractions, you make adjustments in your schedule and make the time to stop. The IEP is not meant to keep you from succeeding. If it starts to get in the way of you succeeding you can call a meeting to change it.

HOW DO I PARTICIPATE IN MY IEP MEETING?

Now that you know what the IEP is, why it's important to participate and when and where it is held, the next step is to think about the meeting itself. To help you know what to do and what to expect, we've put together some things that you should think about doing before, during and after your IEP meeting.



BEFORE

Before your meeting, make sure that you let all of the participants know that you want to take a leadership role. You should be familiar with everything that is in your current IEP, which you can get from your school. That includes all of your current goals, as well as any accommodations you need.

You want have a clear view of how you have progressed since you last IEP Meeting. If you have any questions, make sure and get them answered before the meeting.

As you review your last IEP, make a list of your strengths and weaknesses. Ask yourself what you will require to be successful in the coming year. Also make a list of potential academic or vocational goals for the up coming school year.

DURING

Don't be afraid to take charge at the beginning of the meeting!

Make sure that everyone knows all of the other participants in the meeting. You may want to start the meeting yourself by talking about the goals from your last IEP, and how you feel about your progress. Reflect on the last year and point out where you have been successful.

“Don’t be afraid to take charge at the beginning of the meeting!”

Make sure that your ideas are stated clearly and that everything written in the new IEP is the way you want it to be. Listen to what the people are saying, while also including your own opinions. Present your point of view as you want it to come across.

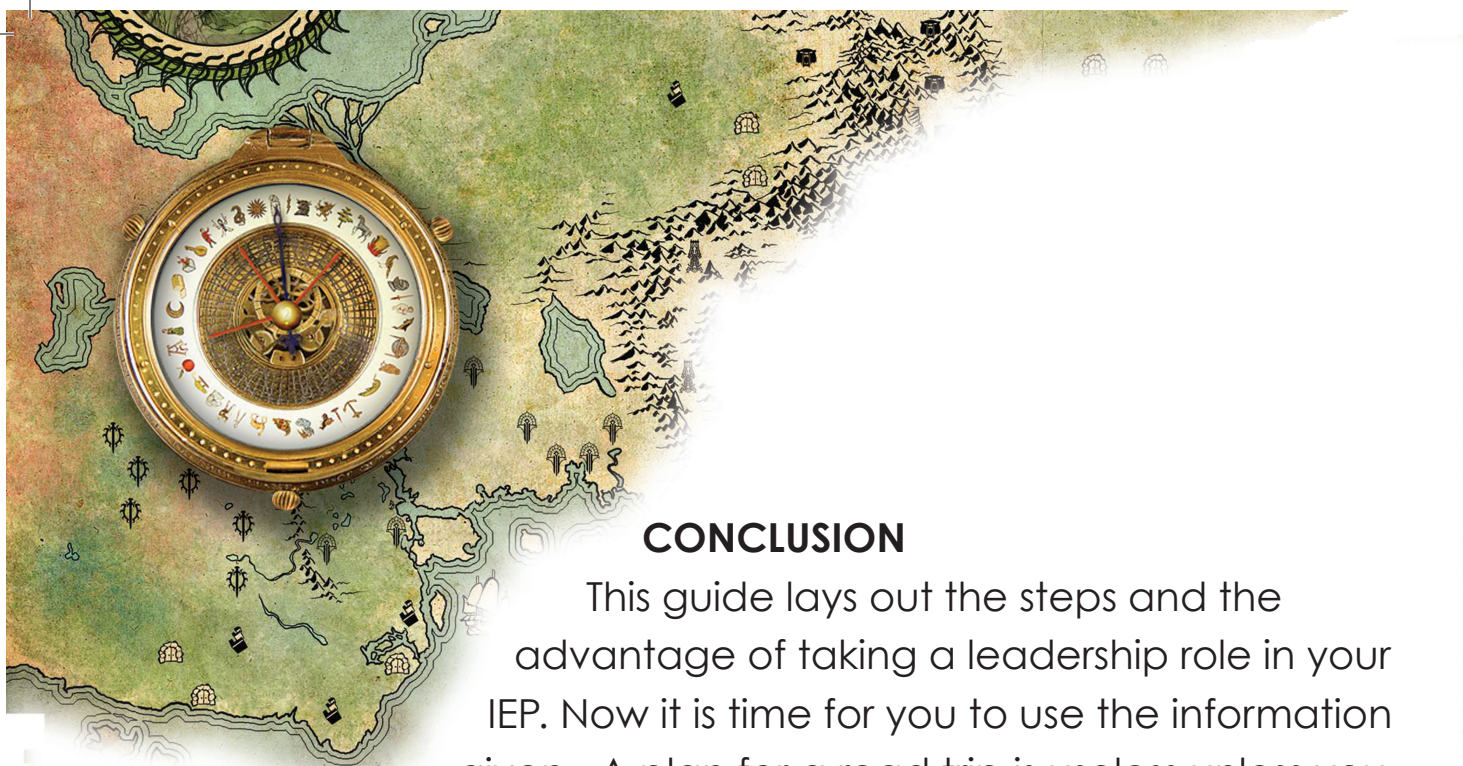
Request all needed accommodations. Also make sure your goals are ones that will benefit you in the coming year. Make sure that your needs will be met.

Be sure to ask questions if you don’t understand something. Don’t let the other people at the meeting take away your confidence. Remember, this IEP represents a plan for your future, so you are the one that should be making the decisions!

AFTER

After you get the final IEP document, review it to make sure that the ideas discussed and agreed upon during the meeting are included and written down the way you expected them to be.

As the year goes on, you should refer back to your IEP to make sure that you are getting the services and accommodations that were agreed upon. It’s good to refer back to your goals often, so you can see if you are headed in the right direction.



CONCLUSION

This guide lays out the steps and the advantage of taking a leadership role in your IEP. Now it is time for you to use the information given. A plan for a road trip is useless unless you go on an actual trip; this guide is also useless unless you use the information in it to take a leadership role in your IEP meeting. You can read and reread this guide a dozen times, but it is not until you begin using the idea and suggestion that it begins to make a difference.

We hope this guide makes a difference for you. We hope this guide give you the first steps toward your independence. Remember the IEP is about you. Why should you not be main focus? You know your self better than anyone else knows you.

This guide will help you to take a leadership role before, during and after your IEP meeting. It is up to you to use the information in this guide!

Now it is time for you to use the information given. A plan for a road trip is useless unless you go on an actual trip; this guide is also useless you use the information in it to take a leadership role in your IEP meeting.

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**The
Family
Café**

The Florida Youth Council is a
program of The Family Café

*"If you don't run your own
life, someone else will."*
— John Atkinson



Source Guide

The Family Café has been fostering collaboration, advocacy, friendship and empowerment among individuals with disabilities and their families in Florida since 1998. The organization's mission is to facilitate communication, encourage dialogue and serve as a source of information about available supports and services. The Family Café Annual Conference, held each spring in Orlando, brings together thousands of individuals and their family members to network with each other, share best practices, explore available products and services and connect with state policy-makers. Thanks to a generous grant from the US Department of Health and Human Services, Administration on Developmental Disabilities, The Family Café also operates The Florida Youth Council, a dedicated group of youth and emerging leaders with disabilities committed to the support and advancement of their peers. To learn more about The Family Café, please visit us online.

www.familycafe.net

(850) 224-4670

The Institute for Educational Leadership's (IEL) mission is to improve education -- and the lives of children and their families -- through positive and visionary change. Every day, we face that challenge by bringing together diverse constituencies and empowering leaders with knowledge and applicable ideas. This is why foundations, corporations and generous individuals support our work, and why our teams often include the most innovative federal, state and local government agencies and many of the nation's leading nonprofit organizations. We invite you to explore our site and learn more about IEL's organization, people, programs and publications.

www.iel.org

(202) 822-8405

The Florida Department of Education (DOE) has many goals including raising student achievement, giving all students to the K-20 education system and to helping students to be part of a skilled workforce and part of economic development.

www.fldoe.org

(850) 245-0505

You can also use the following link to go directly to list of all the school Superintendents in the state of Florida.

<http://www.fldoe.org/eias/flmove/supers.asp>



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