



GUIDING LIGHT FAMILY TOOLKIT

Volume 2



Preparing for an ARD/IEP Meeting

Understanding Your Child's Educational Rights, Evaluations, and Support Plans.

Created by parents, for parents.

Walking beside families. One step at a time.



THE GUIDING LIGHT PROMISE

You are not alone.

We know this journey can feel overwhelming, scary, and uncertain. We've been there.

As parents raising children with autism, we've experienced the questions, challenges, and uncertainty that come with navigating special education and finding the right support.

That's why we created Guiding Light Autism Family Support—to walk beside you, provide clarity, and help you take one step at a time.

You don't have to figure it all out today.

Just start with the next right step.

We are here to provide resources, support, and hope as you navigate this journey together with your child.

We promise to listen, support and guide you every step of the way.

With Love and understanding,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Irene Leal'.

Co-Founder

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Esau Leal'.

Co-Founder

Walking beside families. One step at a time.



UNDERSTANDING YOUR CHILD'S RIGHT TO AN EDUCATION

By law, every eligible child with a disability is entitled to a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

This means public schools must provide special education and related services tailored to a child's unique needs at no cost to parents.

When children begin their education in the public school system and have a different way of learning, a team of specialists may conduct assessments and evaluations to better understand the student's current needs.

This information helps the school determine how to best support the student and identify the services they may need to succeed.

Helpful Tip:

Parents are important members of their child's education team.

You have the right to ask questions, review evaluations, and participate in decisions about your child's education.



UNDERSTANDING FAPE

Free Appropriate Public Education

FAPE (Free Appropriate Public Education) is a fundamental educational right protected under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

Under IDEA, eligible children with disabilities are entitled to special education and related services designed to meet their individual needs at no cost to their parents.

What is it?

FAPE is the legal right of eligible students with disabilities to receive an appropriate public education, including individualized special education and related services, at no cost to their parents.

Purpose?

To ensure eligible students with disabilities receive individualized instruction, accommodations, and related services that meet their unique educational needs and help them make appropriate progress in school.

HOW IS FAPE PROVIDED?

For students eligible under IDEA, FAPE is provided through an Individualized Education Program (IEP). The IEP outlines the special education, related services, accommodations, and supports the student needs. The school must implement the IEP and review it at least once a year.

HELPFUL TIP FOR PARENTS

If you believe your child's IEP services or accommodations are not being provided, document your concerns and request an IEP/ARD meeting in writing. You do not have to wait until the annual review to raise concerns about your child's education.



UNDERSTANDING THE FIE

Full Individual Evaluation

An FIE (Full and Individual Evaluation) is a comprehensive assessment conducted by school specialists to determine whether a student has a qualifying disability and identify the academic, behavioral, and physical supports they may need to succeed.

What is it?

A diagnostic report containing test scores and evaluation data.

Purpose?

To determine whether a child qualifies for special education services and identify their educational needs.

How often is it needed?

An initial evaluation is completed to determine eligibility and educational needs. A reevaluation must be considered at least once every three years, unless the parent and school agree it is unnecessary. A reevaluation may also be requested sooner when a student's needs change.

Helpful Tip:

Parents have the right to request a copy of their child's evaluation report and ask questions about the results.

Review the evaluation before the ARD/IEP meeting and write down anything you don't understand.



UNDERSTANDING THE IEP

Individualized Education Program

An IEP (Individualized Education Program) is a legally binding document developed by public school educational professionals and parents that outlines a student's specific learning goals, accommodations, and specialized services for the school year.

What is it?

A living document detailing services and daily support.

Purpose?

To map out how the child will be taught and accommodated.

How often is it needed?

The IEP must be reviewed at least once every year and revised as appropriate based on the student's progress and changing educational needs.

Helpful Tip:

Your child's IEP should reflect their individual needs, not just what the school typically offers.

As a parent, you are an important member of the IEP team. Ask questions, share concerns, and make sure you understand the proposed goals and services before agreeing to the plan.



UNDERSTANDING THE FBA

Functional Behavior Assessment

When behavior in the classroom affects a student's IEP goals or the learning of their peers, a Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA) may be requested. The purpose is to understand what is causing the behavior, why it is occurring, and how school personnel can respond to help the student succeed.

An FBA is a formal, data-driven assessment used to understand the function of a behavior. Specialized school personnel collect information from teachers and observe the student to identify possible reasons behind the behavior.

An FBA recognizes that behavior is communication, and the student may be trying to tell us something.

WHAT, WHERE, AND WHY?

An FBA helps the school team answer three important questions:

WHAT? What specific behavior is occurring? The behavior should be clearly defined so it can be observed and measured.

WHERE? Where and when does the behavior occur? Are there certain environments, activities, or situations that make it more likely?

WHY? What purpose might the behavior serve? Is the student trying to communicate a need, escape an overwhelming situation, gain attention, or access something?



UNDERSTANDING THE ABC MODEL

Antecedent - Behavior - Consequence

The ABC Model is a tool used during a Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA) to understand what happens before, during, and after a behavior. By identifying patterns, the school team can develop more effective supports that address the student's needs.

A – ANTECEDENT (Before)

What happened immediately before the behavior? This could include a difficult assignment, a change in routine, a loud environment, or a request from a teacher.

B – BEHAVIOR (During)

What exactly did the student do? Describe the behavior in clear, observable terms rather than using labels such as "disruptive" or "defiant."

C – CONSEQUENCE (After)

What happened immediately after the behavior? Did the student receive attention, get a break, receive help, or experience another response?

REAL-LIFE CLASSROOM EXAMPLE

A – Antecedent: A teacher asks a student to begin a difficult writing assignment.

B – Behavior: The student pushes the worksheet away and puts their head down.

C – Consequence: The teacher removes the assignment and allows the student to take a break.

What might this tell us?

The student may be overwhelmed by the assignment or struggling to communicate that they need help. Repeated observations can help the team understand the pattern and identify appropriate supports.



UNDERSTANDING THE BIP

Behavior Intervention Plan

A Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP) is a written support plan developed using information gathered during a Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA).

The BIP helps teachers and school staff understand how to prevent challenging behaviors, respond appropriately when they occur, and teach the student more effective ways to communicate their needs.

The goal is to create a positive learning environment where the student can make progress toward their IEP goals.

THREE KEY COMPONENTS OF A BIP

1. Prevention Strategies What can teachers and staff do to prevent the behavior before it occurs?

Examples: Visual schedules, advance warnings before transitions, sensory breaks, or adjusting difficult assignments.

2. Replacement Behaviors What appropriate skill can the student learn instead of the challenging behavior?

Examples: Asking for help, requesting a break, using a communication device, or expressing frustration appropriately.

3. Positive Reinforcement & Staff Response How will staff encourage appropriate behavior and respond consistently when challenges occur?

Examples: Praising the student for requesting help, rewarding positive behaviors, and following an agreed-upon response plan.

REAL-LIFE CLASSROOM EXAMPLE

Situation: A student becomes overwhelmed during difficult writing assignments and pushes their worksheet away.

1. Prevention Strategy: The teacher breaks the assignment into smaller steps and provides visual instructions.

2. Replacement Behavior: The student is taught to request help or a break using words, gestures, or a communication device.

3. Positive Reinforcement: When the student appropriately requests help, the teacher responds promptly and praises the student's communication.

What does this accomplish?

Instead of simply reacting to challenging behavior, the BIP helps staff prevent difficulties, teach new skills, and support the student's progress toward their IEP goals.



UNDERSTANDING THE ARD/IEP MEETING

Admission, Review, and Dismissal

An ARD/IEP meeting brings parents and school personnel together to make important decisions about a student's special education services. These meetings may take place after an initial evaluation, during an annual IEP review, or when changes to the student's educational program are needed. In Texas, this is called an Admission, Review, and Dismissal (ARD) meeting. In most other states, it is commonly called an IEP meeting. During the meeting, the team reviews the student's progress, discusses educational needs, develops or updates goals, and determines appropriate services, accommodations, and supports.

IMPORTANT – PARENTS ARE EQUAL MEMBERS OF THE ARD/IEP TEAM

Parents have the right to participate in ARD/IEP meetings, ask questions, express concerns, and provide input about their child's educational needs. You can request changes to goals, accommodations, or services and ask the school to explain its recommendations. You do not have to agree with every proposal. If you disagree with a decision, ask about your procedural safeguards and available dispute-resolution options.

WHAT HAPPENS DURING AN ARD/IEP MEETING?

1. **Review Evaluation Results:** The team reviews evaluation results, discusses the student's strengths and needs, and determines eligibility for special education services when applicable.
2. **Develop the IEP:** Parents and school personnel discuss educational goals, accommodations, specialized instruction, and related services based on the student's individual needs.
3. **Discuss Placement & Support:** The team determines how and where services will be provided, considering the student's right to learn in the least restrictive environment (LRE) appropriate for their needs.
4. **Review Decisions & Next Steps:** The team reviews proposed decisions, addresses parent questions and concerns, and explains how the IEP will be implemented. Parents can request clarification or express disagreement before decisions are finalized.

ANNUAL ARD/IEP REVIEWS

Schools must review a student's IEP at least once a year. During this meeting, the team discusses the student's progress, reviews current goals, and determines whether changes to services, accommodations, or educational goals are needed.

PARENTS CAN REQUEST A MEETING

Parents do not have to wait until the annual review to request an ARD/IEP meeting.

Common reasons include:

- New behaviors affecting learning
- IEP goals that have been mastered or need adjustment
- Regression or lack of progress
- Accommodations or services not being provided

IMPORTANT FOR TEXAS FAMILIES

Texas uses the term ARD (Admission, Review, and Dismissal). Other states generally use IEP meeting; New York also uses the term CSE (Committee on Special Education).

Parents can request a meeting in writing and ask the school to respond. The exact procedures and timelines vary by state.



Guiding Light

AUTISM FAMILY SUPPORT

You are not alone. We are here to help.

HOPE • MISSION • NEXT STEPS

HOPE

There will be hard days. There will be uncertain days. But there will also be breakthrough days. Hope is our compass. Progress is our purpose. Your child's potential is our promise.

Our Mission

To walk beside families after an autism diagnosis by providing clear guidance, practical resources, and compassionate support—one step at a time.

YOUR NEXT STEP STARTS HERE

♥ Ready for personalized support?

Schedule your **FREE 30-minute consultation** today.

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