

## Family Support: What is the IFSP?

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The Individual Family Service Plan (IFSP) is the first educational plan for the 'whole family'. The IFSP is a legal document mandated by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, (IDEA-Part C), that details the "how to's" to creating positive developmental outcomes for your Deaf child, from birth to 3 years old. These outcomes are highly geared towards language and communication as well as promoting social-emotional, physical, self-help, and cognitive development. This plan involves a team of players including the family, community, and service providers.

A multidisciplinary evaluation by trained early intervention providers will be done. The evaluation recognizes strengths and identify needs. In addition, the parents' concerns and desires are validated and noted. From these discussion, the parents and the Service Coordinator write the IFSP together, which will primary list outcomes, what services can be provided, and who will oversee these outcomes (providers and other people involved in the family's life). An example of a common outcome written in an IFSP is: The family will be aware of early education resources and services pertaining to raising a Deaf infant and toddler.

You will notice that the outcome above is general and focus on the family being the primary key players in promoting successful outcomes. The focus shifts away from the DHH infant and young child as needing intervention. Instead, the whole family is in this together and no one is singled out as the identified person. Within each outcome, the short-term goals are listed along with strategies such as this example: The infant/young child will learn and use X# of words (that are age-appropriate).

Then a provider(s) that best meet the outcomes are chosen by the primary caregivers. These providers will also provide ongoing assessments with the family to ensure that the outcomes are progressing as expected. The ultimate goal is for the family to be empowered in doing the educational tools naturally and quickly in their home environments.

Even with having specialized providers on the IFSP plan, the family can seek community resources such as Parent Mentors, Deaf Mentors, Deaf Role Models, Peer-to-Peer Playtime, and educational settings such as Early Childhood programs that includes play-based and family-centered activities to promote language learning. You can consult with Part C providers, the Statewide Early Hearing Detection and Intervention program, and the Outreach services from the State School for the Deaf to guide you in finding the community resources you need.