



Enhancing Family Participation in the IFSP/IEP Process

What do we know about family participation in the IFSP/IEP process?

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Family Participation in the IFSP process

Research about family participation in the IFSP process has been primarily favorable. Below are some highlights from this literature:

- ⇒ Families feel valued as members of the multi-disciplinary team and they want to participate in their child's educational plan (Able-Boone, 1993).
- ⇒ Parent participation in the IFSP process is considered a vital part of the development of outcomes, goals and objectives (Campbell, 1992; Able-Boone, 1993).
- ⇒ Families realize that their child with disabilities or delays is a vital part of their family (Able-Boone, 1993).
- ⇒ Professionals in one study indicated they felt the IFSP process was too professionally focused and families were overwhelmed. However, families felt the meetings went well (Able-Boone, 1993).
- ⇒ More parent language is used on the IFSP after formal training of family members and service providers (Campbell, 1990).

Family Participation in the IEP Process

In spite of the requirements of PL 94-142 which mandated parental participation in IEP meetings, research demonstrates that many families do not actively participate in the IEP meetings (Turnbull & Turnbull, 1990). Below is a brief summary of this literature:

- ⇒ Parental contributions accounted for less than 25% of the total contributions of the IEP conference and the mean length of IEP conferences was 36 minutes (Goldstein, Strickland, Turnbull & Curry, 1980).
- ⇒ When parents participated in IEP development, only 14% made suggestions and expressed opinions and a mere 6.3% understood everything that was said during the meeting. (Lynch & Stein, 1982).
- ⇒ Seventy-six percent of family members indicated they were very satisfied or satisfied with their child's special education program (Lynch & Stein, 1982).
- ⇒ Parents participated 30% less in the conferences than the special educator (Vacc, Vallecora, Parker, Bonner, Lester, Richardson, and Yates, 1985).
- ⇒ The main activity in one study was securing the parents' signature on the IEP documents rather than encouraging participation in the meeting. Secondly, special education jargon was used throughout all the meetings (Harry, Allen & McLaughlin, 1995).

What Do These Research Findings Mean to Us?

The literature on the IFSP process suggests it is a more interactive, family-guided process, and yet there is evidence families are still participating in a passive manner (Able-Boone, 1993). The literature on the IEP process suggests after more than a decade of implementation, research and recommendations for change, significant progress in making families "partners" in the IEP process has not been evident. Examining ways to increase family participation in both the IFSP and IEP process will assist in making the fields of early intervention and early childhood special education more effective in delivery services to young children with disabilities and their families.