

# A Guide to School Programs and IEPs (Individualized Educational Programs)

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## What types of school support programs are available?

One of the most important steps following a medical diagnosis of Autism is appropriate follow-up with your child's school. It is important that teachers, administrators, and therapists understand your child's unique strengths and challenges, so that they can plan the right supports.

Children qualify for special education under a specific eligibility diagnosis: it can be autism, childhood developmental delay, "other health impairment", or a diagnosis under a different label. What matters most is the contents of the Individualized Education Plan (IEP). We usually recommend:

1. **Goals** such as communication, social-emotional skills, academic areas, independence, and motor skills.
  - a. The IEP will list benchmarks listing what sort of goals the child should reach by the end of the year, and how they will be measured. (For example: *[Child] will independently put away his jacket and backpack at the beginning of the day 4 out of 5 times, without adult prompting; [Child] will initiate and sustain interactions with peers about a shared topic of interest 4 out of 5 times, with fading adult support.*)
2. **Accommodations** such as sensory supports, or visual schedules, supports, or timers, or the ability to take breaks, behavioral reinforcement plans, adult support for peer interactions or transitions. Find out more here: <http://tinyurl.com/y76xvpe8>.

3. **Direct Therapies** such as Occupational Therapy (OT) for motor skills, Speech Language Therapy (SLT) for communication, comprehension, or conversation and social skills groups or social worker support for behavior.
4. **Consult Therapies** may include an Occupational Therapist, Behavior Specialist, or Social Worker to help the classroom teacher adapt to your child's needs.
5. **Resource Room/Special Education:** time out of the regular classroom, for more individual instruction.

We recommend that parents read about IEPs, the special education evaluation process, and what will happen during an IEP meeting using trusted resources such as Autism Speaks (<http://tinyurl.com/y5z5bh6j>) and <http://www.Understood.org>.

In general, it can be helpful for your child's outpatient therapists (such as ABA, SLT, OT, or psychotherapist) to communicate with the school team, even attend IEP meetings, so that approaches are consistent across all people your child works with.

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