PARENT GUIDE:
SUPPORTING YOUR CHILD WITH AUTISM AT SCHOOL AND NAVIGATING IEPS

Empowering parents to be confident advocates in and out of the classroom.

SHINE-LIGHT.ORG

At ShineLight, we believe that every individual with autism deserves a life filled with dignity, purpose, and opportunity.

Founded in Fayetteville, North Carolina, ShineLight is a trusted provider of personalized services that support individuals with autism at every stage of life. From in-home care and social skills training to supported employment and residential housing, we meet each person where they are—so they can thrive.

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CHAPTER 1

UNDERSTANDING THE SCHOOL EXPERIENCE

UNDERSTANDING THE SCHOOL EXPERIENCE

Children with autism may have unique educational, sensory, and social-emotional needs. The right support and collaboration with school staff can make a significant difference.

Common Challenges

- Difficulty with transitions or changes in routine
- Sensory sensitivities to noise, lights, or crowds
- Trouble with social interaction or communication
- Behavioral or emotional regulation needs
- Understanding abstract language or indirect cues

Strengths to Celebrate

- Honesty and directness
- Strong memory or attention to detail
- Passionate interests or focus
- Creative thinking
- Visual learning skills

CHAPTER 2

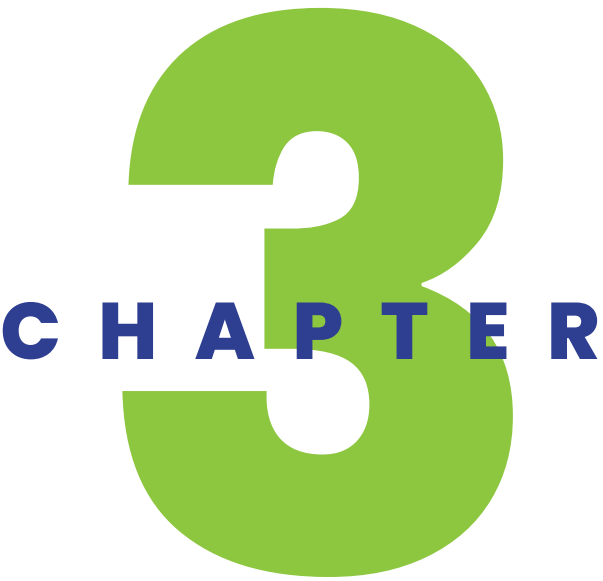
WHAT IS AN IEP?

WHAT IS AN IEP?

An **Individualized Education Program (IEP)** is a legal document that outlines your child's learning goals, services, accommodations, and supports at school. It is created by a team of educators, specialists, and YOU—the parent.

Key IEP Components

- Present Levels of Performance (PLOP):
  - Describes your child's current academic and functional abilities.
- Annual Goals:
  - Measurable goals tailored to your child's needs.
- Accommodations/Modifications:
  - Support tools (e.g., extended time, sensory breaks, visual schedules).
- Services:
  - Includes speech therapy, occupational therapy, or aide support.
- Transition Planning (14+):
  - Prepares your child for life after high school.



BEFORE THE IEP MEETING

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Children with autism may have unique educational, sensory, and social-emotional needs. The right support and collaboration with school staff can make a significant difference.

1. Get Organized

Create a binder or folder with:

- Past IEPs
- Evaluation reports
- Notes from teachers
- Behavior plans or updates

2. Make a Parent Input Statement

- Summarize your child's strengths, challenges, and your priorities.

3. Know Your Rights

- Request evaluations in writing
- Be present for all decisions
- Request interpreters if needed
- Ask for mediation or due process if needed

Tips for IEP meetings

- Bring a support person or advocate
- Ask questions—don't hesitate to pause
- Take notes during the meeting
- Request a draft IEP before signing
- Ask for data (charts, reports) to support decisions

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CHAPTER 4

TOP 10 SCHOOL SUPPORT TIPS

TOP 10 SCHOOL SUPPORT TIPS

1. Build Relationships
- Connect with your child's teacher

2. Establish Routine
- Use checklists and visuals

3. Practice Transitions
- Prepare for changes in routine

4. Use Visuals
- Reinforce learning at home

5. Encourage Self-Advocacy
- Teach your child to communicate needs

6. Check In Weekly
- Email or log communication with staff

7. Celebrate Wins
- Acknowledge small successes

8. Review the IEP Often
- Don't wait for the annual meeting

9. Coordinate on Behavior Plans
- Align school and home supports

10. Join a Team
- Connect with advocacy and parent support groups

CHAPTER 5

HELPFUL RESOURCES

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ShineLight Services

- Social Skills Classes:
  - shine-light.org/social-skills
- Community Living & Support:
  - shine-light.org/community-living
- Employment Support:
  - shine-light.org/employment

Parent Advocacy & Support

- Wrightslaw: wrightslaw.com
- Autism Society of North Carolina: autismsociety-nc.org
- ECAC: ecac-parentcenter.org

Strengths to Celebrate

- Honesty and directness
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- Passionate interests or focus
- Creative thinking
- Visual learning skills

Contact us at shine-light.org/contact to learn more or request a consultation.