

Chapter 4: Planning Support for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders

Developing Individualized Program Plans (IPPs)

There is considerable variability in how learning and behavioural characteristics affect a particular individual with autism spectrum disorders so programming must be individualized. Knowing how autism spectrum disorders affects students' abilities to process information and communicate are critically important to planning.

Students' educational programming may include a combination of instructional activities from the regular curriculum, as well as activities based on goals and objectives that are unique to the individual and set out in an individualized program plan (IPP).

IPPs are developed through collaboration by a school-based team that includes classroom teachers, parents and students themselves, when appropriate. In some cases, planning involves others, such as teacher assistants, program specialists, speech-language pathologists, occupational therapists, behaviour consultants and school psychologists. School staff need to be aware of the interventions being used to support students outside the school environment, so that school programs can be as congruent as possible with those programs or therapies. In addition to programs or therapies offered through the school, some families access private therapy services. Because students with autism spectrum disorders have difficulty with change, it is important that these supports complement each other.

Contents of individualized program plans

IPPs are flexible working documents that summarize the goals and objectives for student learning during the school year. They are intended to guide the work of educators and provide information on the types of modifications, adaptations, strategies and services that will be used to support students. IPPs do not describe everything that will be taught nor are they written in stone.

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For more on integrating
planning, see on pages 36–38.
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Essential and Supportive Skills for Students with Developmental Disabilities (Alberta Education, 1995), Book 2 of the *Programming for Students with Special Needs* series, provides checklists and information on functional skills within developmental domains.
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See Appendix B, pages 173–174, for an example of how to integrate goals in an IPP with regular class activities.
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See pages 139–170 for sample IPP documents.
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See Appendix C, page 175, for a blank Modification Planning Form.
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Effective IPPs include the following.

- They contain personal and educational data, including assessment information.
- They contain information about students’ strengths and needs.
- They state long-term goals and short-term objectives. Long-term goals describe what students are expected to accomplish within a specified time period. They are based on the prioritized needs of students. Short-term objectives represent the intermediate steps between students’ current skills and the projected long-term goals. These short-term objectives can be related to the regular curriculum or developed as individualized objectives and organized into developmental domains, such as communication, socialization, behaviour and functional life skills.
- IPPs include transition goals, such as vocational skills or, in the case of younger students, goals that address the development of independent work skills.
- IPPs contain information about support services that will be used in working toward goals and objectives.
- They state how student progress will be assessed, evaluated and communicated.
- IPPs assign responsibility for carrying out specific aspects of the plan.

IPPs are broad plans that guide the daily instructional activities for students. IPPs may need to be revised throughout the year.

When developing IPPs, it is important to plan adaptations to instruction, classroom environment and classroom management that address the needs of students and enable them to function optimally in the classroom. Communication and social skills are key areas of development for students with autism spectrum disorders and must be addressed in IPPs.

Roles and Responsibilities

The following school personnel and stakeholders may be involved in developing IPPs, depending on the needs of students and the availability of resources.

Parents—Parents have knowledge and experience that is valuable in developing effective programs. This knowledge is key to answering the fundamental question: What skills are most important for my child to develop in order to enhance his or her life now and in the future? Parents have worked out ways to communicate and manage their children at home that can be transferable to the school setting. When families and schools work together, students benefit from the resulting consistency.

Classroom Teachers—Teachers are responsible for planning and implementing the education programs of all students in their classes. When a student with autism spectrum disorders needs specialized programming and instruction, teachers modify instructional methods and materials, and work collaboratively with available specialists to ensure there is a well-planned, coordinated approach. Teachers should also be aware of parent priorities and expectations.

School Principals—The duties of principals include implementing education programs for all students in the school, assigning staff, allocating resources and ensuring teachers have the information and resources they need to work with students. Principals can facilitate the collaboration of school-based teams in supporting students with special needs and establish procedures for involving parents in the IPP process.

Specialist Teachers—Some districts employ program specialists or specialist teachers. These individuals typically have specialized knowledge and skills in the area of special education. In some cases, specialist teachers may be resource teachers. For some students with autism spectrum disorders, resource teachers provide direct instruction, while in other cases, specialist teachers provide consultative support to classroom teachers. Specialist teachers may also conduct formalized assessments to determine strengths and areas of need.

Teacher Assistants—In some cases, teacher assistants work in classes with students with autism spectrum disorders. Teachers design programs for students with special needs, however teacher assistants play a key role in performing a variety of functions from personal care to assisting with instructional programs. Working under the supervision of teachers or principals, teacher assistants are often involved in shaping appropriate behaviours, developing independent living skills, facilitating interactions with others and stimulating communication. It is critical that the roles of teachers and teacher assistants be clearly defined.

Speech-Language Pathologists (SLPs)—Speech-language pathologists have specialized training in assessing communication needs and designing programs to improve communication. Because communication difficulties are a significant problem for students with autism spectrum disorders, SLPs can play a critical role in setting appropriate goals and developing strategies to meet the needs of individual students. The services provided by SLPs may involve direct therapy or be more consultative in nature.

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For contact information for regional educational consultation services, see page 193.
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Psychologists—Psychologists bring knowledge and experience regarding child development, behaviour modification and diagnosis/assessment to the team. They often play a critical role in the development of behaviour management plans. A comprehensive psycho-educational assessment can be helpful in determining student strengths and areas of need, levels of functioning, and in identifying individualized goals.

Occupational Therapists—Occupational therapists focus on the development of adaptations, addressing sensory issues and the development of fine motor skills. They often assist in the development of “sensory diets” to address specific arousal or sensory issues that interfere with learning. Occupational therapy also addresses areas that interfere with self-care, play/recreation and/or vocational skills.

Physical Therapists/Adaptive Physical Education Teachers—Physical therapists and adaptive physical education teachers generally focus on the development of gross motor skills and address motor coordination issues. Gross motor issues often have a negative impact on adaptive living skills, recreational skills and/or peer acceptance.

Behaviour Specialists—Behaviour specialists assist in developing and implementing individualized behaviour management plans. This is generally achieved by conducting a functional behavioural analysis, identifying effective motivators, and developing a plan for supporting appropriate behaviours given existing resources and supports.

Strategies to Facilitate Effective IPPs

IPPs are most effective when they are working documents that are consulted and updated regularly. Strategies to facilitate the IPP process are outlined below.

Enhance the collaborative team

- Actively involve parents in the IPP process.
 - Seek parental input prior to IPP conferences, e.g., send home a form seeking information about parent goals, children’s preferences.
 - Discuss how and when parents want to be involved in their children’s education programs, and how they want to be kept informed.
 - Assist parents in preparing for IPP meetings.

- Create a draft IPP and invite meaningful input from parents. Make changes and additions with their input.
- Provide parents with a copy of the IPP to facilitate their support at home and as a working copy to record their observations, questions and ideas.
- Actively involve students in the IPP process and increase participation as students mature.
 - Involve students in setting goals and evaluating progress to increase ownership and motivation.
 - Involve students in IPP conferences, as appropriate.
 - Support students in taking responsibility for describing their needs and seeking appropriate support.
- Involve appropriate school personnel in developing IPPs.
 - All school personnel involved in providing instruction and support for students should be involved in developing IPPs. Classroom teachers are better able to use IPPs as instructional guides when they are involved in their development.
 - IPPs are most effective when viewed in the context of an active problem-solving process.
- Create an organizational structure such as the Student Support Team, to facilitate team planning.
 - Provide professional development and guidance for teachers to increase understanding of the purpose and structure of IPPs.
 - Build in support for the IPP process, e.g., time for involvement, communication, access to additional expertise.

Consider individual needs

- Consider students' academic, cognitive and processing strengths. How can instruction build on strengths?
- Use multiple sources of assessment data to determine strengths and needs.
- Consider students' needs including social, behavioural communication, self-help and academic needs.
- Consider the appropriate balance for individual students. Each student should participate in the regular curriculum as much as possible with accommodations to support success. Students may also need specialized instruction to develop skills and strategies.
- Consider the student's chronological age and developmental level when identifying goals.
- Focus on key goals for the individual student.

- IPPs should be transition-driven. The team should think about the student's immediate and future needs during goal setting.
- To be useful for ongoing instruction and monitoring, IPPs need to be accessible working documents. Some teachers keep them in binders in their desks for planning instruction and noting observations.
- If there are several teachers responsible for a student's education program, it is important to develop procedures for all teachers to have access to the IPP so they can use it to plan instruction, monitor progress, and contribute to evaluating and revising goals and objectives.

Monitor student progress

- Use diverse assessment and evaluation strategies to measure and communicate student progress.
- Monitor progress frequently. If objectives are met, set new ones. If the student is not demonstrating progress, review the program and make changes.
- Use IPPs as working documents. Record, note or attach assessment information.
- Make revisions and additions as required.

Guide transition planning

- Collaborative, comprehensive transition plans should be included in IPPs.

Integrated Case Management

Integrated case management (ICM) is a team approach to assess, structure and monitor the delivery of various services to individual children and their families through a single holistic plan. The approach puts families at the centre and gives them an active voice in developing an action plan and shaping services. This approach relies on multiple perspectives and requires creative and critical thinking skills. It requires ongoing reflection on practice and service delivery.

An integrated case management approach ensures that services for a family are coordinated, proactive and well planned. It ensures people are working towards a common goal, are speaking the same language and using the same process in working with children and families. This team approach avoids gaps in service, ensures that services are not needlessly duplicated and gets the right services working for children and their families. One important advantage of such an approach is that even though individual team members

may change over time, the process is continuous and the child and the family always knows some members of the team.

The team is made up of family members, teaching staff and other support people as well as service providers, such as speech pathologists or occupational therapists. The team meets on a regular basis to plan and respond to the needs of the child. To put together a team, identify all those who are involved with the child, including teaching staff, other professionals, agencies and community supports, and who in the family will participate. Identify any other important people who could support the family, such as extended family members, friends and advocates. Discuss issues of confidentiality, expectations, respect for privacy and obtain written consent for the sharing of information.

Participants in integrated case management teams need to demonstrate respect, use effective communication skills, be able to disagree, be committed to working towards common goals, be clear about roles and responsibilities, and respect privacy and confidentiality. The success of the team is dependent on all members participating willingly and to the best of their ability.

Integrated case management meetings should be solution-focused and mirror the IPP process. A team meeting could involve the following steps.

1. Collect information about strengths and concerns.
2. Establish what is most important.
3. Identify the desired outcomes or goals and make them realistic and concrete.
4. State the outcome in positive terms as if it is already happening. For example, Bobby participates in after-school recreational program three days a week.
5. Develop an action plan to achieve these goals. The strategies in the action plan should build on strengths and supports the child and family already have. An effective action plan directs everyone's energies to the same goals and is realistic, concrete and specific.
6. Assign tasks, get commitment and establish timelines.
7. Regularly review and revise the plan to make sure it is working for everyone involved.

Consider the following strategies for effective integrated case management.

- Involve all service providers from the earliest stages of decision making.
- Ensure adequate time to respond to issues and concerns.

- Keep number of participants as low as possible without leaving important players out.
- Start with strengths; deal with the least controversial issues first.
- Gradually increase level of child and family involvement, as they are ready to take on more responsibility.
- Work to eliminate barriers, such as transportation, time and location.