



# Office for Dispute Resolution

## **IFSP FACILITATION**

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IFSP Facilitation is an option available to parents and County Early Intervention Program staff when they both agree that it would be valuable to have a neutral person—the IFSP Facilitator—present at an IFSP meeting to assist them in discussing issues regarding the IFSP. Most IFSP meetings do not need the services of an IFSP Facilitator. Typically, an IFSP Facilitator is brought into those situations where the parents and County Early Intervention Program staff are having difficulties communicating with one another about the child’s needs. The IFSP Facilitator assists in creating an atmosphere for fair communication and the successful drafting of an IFSP for the child.

### ***Role of the Facilitator***

#### **The Facilitator:**

- Helps the IFSP team focus on the child’s needs.
- With the agreement of all IFSP team members, the IFSP Facilitator may help create an overall agenda and assist in generating ground rules for the meeting.
- Assists the IFSP team to resolve conflicts and disagreements that arise during the meeting. The IFSP Facilitator typically does not address disputes unrelated to the IFSP.
- Helps to maintain open communication among all IFSP team members.
- Models effective communication and listening.
- Helps to keep IFSP team members on task and within the time allotted for the meeting.
- Maintains impartiality and does not take sides, place blame or determine if a particular decision is right or wrong.
- Clarifies points of agreement and disagreement.
- Ensures that the meeting is child-focused.
- Does not impose a decision on the group.
- Is not a member of the IFSP team.
- Does not chair the meeting or write the IFSP.

## ***Benefits of IFSP Facilitation***

### **IFSP Facilitation:**

- Builds and improves relationships among the IFSP team members and between parents and County Early Intervention Program staff.
- Provides opportunities for IFSP team members to resolve conflicts if they arise.
- Encourages parents and professionals to identify new options to address unresolved problems.
- Serves as a more cost efficient mechanism for resolving disputes than more formal proceedings such as due process hearings.
- Is typically a less stressful mechanism for resolving disputes.
- Supports all parties in participating fully.

## ***Family Preparation for IFSP facilitation***

**Good preparation is one key to a successful IFSP meeting. The following suggestions may assist you in preparing. Families can:**

- Make a list of your child's strengths and needs, and your major concerns about his/her needs.
- Prepare a written list of issues you want to discuss and questions you want to ask.
- Consider how your child's disabilities affect his/her daily activities or routines.
- Do you believe your child has been making progress with his/her current program? Make a list of what you think has been working and what has not.
- Do you have a copy of your child's most recent Multidisciplinary Evaluation (MDE) and IFSP? If not, request a copy from the County Early Intervention Program and review it before the meeting to ensure that it is still an accurate and complete picture of your child.
- Be willing to listen carefully and consider possible solutions and options discussed at the meeting.
- Attend a workshop or training conducted by your local Parent and Training Information (PTI) Center (listed below) to learn about your role and responsibilities as a member of the IFSP team. A PTI staff member can answer your questions and help you prepare for the meeting.
  - Parent Education and Advocacy Leadership Center/Pittsburgh (1-866-950-1040)
  - Parent Education Network/York (1-800-522-5827)
  - The Mentor Parent Program/Pittsfield (1-888-447-1431 in PA)
  - Hispanos Unidos para Ninos Excepcionales/Philadelphia (215-425-6203)

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## ***Frequently Asked Questions About IFSP Facilitation***

### ***How do I request IFSP facilitation?***

Either parent or County Early Intervention Program can request IFSP Facilitation; however, since the process is voluntary, both sides must agree. When everyone agrees to IFSP Facilitation, a request form is completed and signed by parents and the County Early Intervention Program and then submitted to the Office for Dispute Resolution (ODR). This form is available from ODR, or online at ODR's website (<http://odr.pattan.net>).

### ***When are IFSP Facilitations scheduled?***

IFSP teams interested in IFSP Facilitation should submit the completed and signed request form to the Office for Dispute Resolution (ODR) at least two (2) weeks prior to the IFSP meeting. ODR will make every attempt to locate a facilitator who is available in the time frame chosen by the IFSP team. If no facilitator is available on this date, however, the IFSP team may need to reschedule the date or proceed without the facilitator. Just as for any IFSP meeting, the IFSP Facilitation meeting is scheduled by the County Early Intervention Program in conjunction with the family.

### ***How will I be notified about the IFSP Facilitation meeting?***

Notification about an IFSP Facilitation meeting is the same as any other IFSP meeting. The County Early Intervention Program is still required to give proper notice of the IFSP meeting to the parents.

### ***Who attends the IFSP Facilitation?***

Attendance at an IFSP Facilitation meeting is the same as any other IFSP meeting. The required members of the IFSP team attend the meeting, in addition to the Facilitator. As with non-facilitated IFSP meetings, parents have the option to invite an advocate or other people who have knowledge or special expertise regarding their child.

### ***Is there any cost for the IFSP Facilitation meeting?***

No, there is no cost to the parents or the County Early Intervention Program for the IFSP Facilitation.

### ***What happens if the IFSP Facilitation is not successful?***

As with any IFSP meeting, if the parties to an IFSP Facilitated meeting are not able to resolve the disagreements preventing them from drafting a mutually-agreeable IFSP, they are free to pursue other forms of dispute resolution such as mediation or a due process hearing.

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### *Does the IFSP Facilitator make decisions for the team?*

No. The role of the Facilitator is to make every effort to ensure that the team is communicating so that the IFSP team, not the IFSP Facilitator, can develop an appropriate IFSP for the student. The Facilitator also assists by offering suggestions for resolving conflict that may be preventing the team from agreeing on the various components of the IFSP. The members of the IFSP team remain the sole decision-makers.