

The Decision Tree

Child Indicator Seeds for Success



Writing an Honest, Balanced and Meaningful IFSP Narrative by: [Dana Childress, M.Ed.](#)

Does this sound familiar?

Devin is a happy little boy who enjoys playing with musical toys, splashing in the bathtub, and looking at books with his grandmother. During the assessment today, Devin was able to stack three blocks, scribble with a crayon, and point to four pictures in a book. He sat independently, pulled to stand at furniture, and crawled across the floor to get to his mom when she called his name. He is beginning to take a few steps but is not yet walking without his hands held. Devin uses approximately 12 words and signs to communicate and understands simple 1-step directions, such as give me, come here, and find your ball. He tantrums often throughout the day and can be difficult to calm down. He is a good eater and feeds himself using his fingers. He has begun to use a spoon with lots of spilling. He primarily drinks from a bottle but can use a sippy cup as well....

Sounds like Devin is doing quite well developmentally, doesn't it? From this IFSP narrative, you have no idea that Devin is actually 28 months old and is showing global developmental delays. What is missing from this narrative? What is needed so that any reader clearly understands Devin's developmental status?

Writing an Honest, Balanced IFSP Narrative

The IFSP narrative is intended to provide a summary of the child's developmental status based on information gathered from the child assessment. This summary should include the child strengths AND functional limitations and needs. It can be so easy to over-emphasize the child's strengths and the skills a child can do in an effort to present a positive perspective. When we do this, we are sharing only half of the story. Every child has areas of strength and limitations and understanding both is vital to developing individualized outcomes and intervention strategies.

The IFSP narrative should present an honest description of the assessment findings and do so in a balanced manner that helps others understand what the child can do and what he has not yet mastered. This helps the parents understand the child's development from a holistic and functional perspective and recognize what skills and abilities come next. It also provides background information for understanding family priorities related to what goes well for the child and where the struggles may be and why.

The OTHER Problem with this Narrative

Did you notice the other problem? This narrative reads like a list of test skills in paragraph format. When a narrative is written like this, it can be very difficult for families, child care providers, insurance reviewers, and others to understand the relationship between the skills the child demonstrated based on test items and the functional abilities and struggles that occur in everyday life. Many states are moving to crafting the IFSP narrative from the perspective of the three OSEP child outcome indicators (i.e., positive social-emotional skills, acquisition of skills and knowledge, and use of appropriate behaviors to meet needs). Framing the IFSP narrative using the child outcomes can help all team members understand and use assessment information to inform intervention decisions.

Check out the rest of this blog post on the [EI Strategies for Success Blog](#) for 7 tips from Dana and ideas from other providers to help you write an honest, balanced and meaningful IFSP narrative.