

Stephanie:

Stephanie:

Hey everyone, Stephanie here. I am your founder of The Intentional IEP and your host for all of these guest speaker chats here at The Intentional IEP. I am here today with Jenn and we are going to be talking all about writing IEP goals. And I know this is something that a lot of you were very curious about and Jenn is going to share all of our expertise and knowledge on this topic. But before we get started, Jenn, please share about you, your educational experience and your role at the IEP table.

Jenn:

Absolutely. So my name is Jenn Adams and I am in my 13th year of teaching. I've taught in a ton of different areas. I originally went to school for elementary and early childhood, taught about four years in different placements there. Also, taught a year of alternative education working with disruptive youth in grade six through 12. I'm most known for my role after that, which was a self-contained autistic support teacher in a brick and mortar setting. And this year, I've transferred to a cyber school where I'm teaching autistic support in a cyber setting.

Jenn:

So lots of different areas in which I have worked, but I also feel like that kind of helps me and I've learned a ton to kind of see different perspectives from different teachers in different roles. And my role at the IEP table is that special education teacher or case manager, I guess as other people might call it.

Stephanie:

I love that. I didn't know you switched roles within this last school year. That's awesome.

Jenn:

Yep, just this year. Yep, thank you.

Stephanie:

That's awesome. Well, that's super exciting because I'm intrigued to learn more about that in terms of like IEPs and how that has helped you out with all of this. So let's get started. When it comes to writing IEP goals, at this point, we've already written our present level section and we've chosen what we need to write IEP goals for. So if you've watched any part of the Summer PD Series, I really stress that.

Stephanie:

When you write a solid present level that lead you into, I mean, it tells you exactly what to put in the rest of the IEP, IEP goals to have, what accommodations, blah, blah, blah, all that stuff. So we should have all of the present levels already done. We already know what IEP goals we're choosing, but what comes first when we're actually writing these IEP goals? Where do we start?

Jenn:

Well, I think one of the first things you always want to look at is and this can be really tricky because I think it's different in different states is aligning them to your standards, and this can be different. The

state I currently work in, which is Pennsylvania, we have our state standards and then we also actually have alternative standards. I know not every state has that. And sometimes that's nice and sometimes they still don't help you that much, especially depending on the gap at what those goals are looking at. You could have a high school student that's working on letter identification and there isn't a goal that works with that grade level because that would be a kindergarten level standard.

Jenn:

And if the students in high school, it doesn't match up. And sometimes depending on state law I've found, obviously they want you to find goals that are applicable to the grade level the student's in. And so that's kind of something almost in our special education system that's a little broken, but obviously starting with those standards is the first thing you want to do so that you are sure that you are following the content that should be taught in different areas in different levels.

Jenn:

And then from there, I feel like once you figured out how to connect it to the standards that you want to teach, obviously that's when you get into that nitty-gritty of what you want to include specifically in that IEP goal to make it specific, measurable, and all of that good stuff.

Stephanie:

Yes. So when we get past all of that, is there like a formula for writing an IEP goal? What does an IEP goal need to include? Fill us in.

Jenn:

Well, obviously your IEP goal is always going to want to have the student's name in it because you want to make sure it's specific to that student. So just like in your present ed levels, you're throwing that name in there as much as you can because obviously it's an individualized education plan so you're going to want to make sure their name is in there.

Jenn:

The big one too is the condition in which it's happening. So you need to describe is this goal for every time the student's in the cafeteria? Is that every time a read aloud is happening in the classroom? Is it when they're working on math instruction? Where is that environment in which you want the student to succeed in? Because that can be very specific and change. One student until they've generalized that goal or that strategy that they're using, they might only be able to use it in a certain setting. So we want to make sure that we're specific in that.

Jenn:

Obviously then your measurable part of your goal, the criteria in which you're expecting the student to achieve in. So making sure that you're very specific in that, again, like I said with the condition, you want to make sure you're specific in the criteria that the student has to do in order to master that goal. So if it's tying their shoe, well, there's different ways you can tie your shoe. So you might have to say using a particular method that you're going to use to tie the shoe, or how to button a jacket. Maybe if there's a coat that has six buttons, then you better say six buttons because if the other one has 10 and they can't do it, then that doesn't apply.

Jenn:

So I think sometimes it is tricky. You can kind of overthink your goals sometimes when you're doing those types of things. But also we need to be careful because if another teacher picks up that IEP or the student moves to another classroom, another state, that teacher needs to be able to run with those goals as easily as you would. So I do think that all of those things you need to be very specific, even sometimes if you feel like it's a little silly to be that specific it's going to help your students in the long run if there's ever a change.

Stephanie:

I love the examples that you gave because there's really such a range like tying your shoe, you could do it with the bunny ears or the loop de loop and pull. I'm sure there's some other way.

Jenn:

And then there's kids that use Velcro instead to put their shoes on so.

Stephanie:

Even the buttons on a jacket like you just blew my mind. I was like, "Wow, I never even thought like that specifically a student will zipper his jacket." Well, how far? At to what point? Those are great questions to be thinking about. I love those examples. Yes. Well, okay. This next question is perfect actually. What are some things we need to consider when it comes to writing IEP goals?

Jenn:

Well, we need to consider, like I said, those specific scenarios depending on the skill that you want the student to learn. Another example I can give is thinking of things in terms of language. This might be more geared towards speech and language, but also maybe just students that struggle with communication is do you want them to learn the skill receptively or expressively? Do you want them to be able to understand it to receptively take the information in and then go do something, or do they need to be able to speak and say it to you and express it?

Jenn:

So those things are things you also need to consider or when given a verbal direction. So being careful to state if I'm going to ask a student to get ready for the end of the day and they have a goal of completing a task analysis where they get their coat on and all of that, what kind of instruction am I going to do? Am I going to give them a visual that shows them what they need to do or am I going to say it? Because we know in special ed and I'm coming more from that self-contained type model of a classroom, but I know there's a big difference when we're trying to fade students back after they've mastered a goal from me having to say it versus holding up a visual card. It's a lot easier to fade out that visual.

Jenn:

So when you're creating your goals, think about how once the students mastered the goal and that ability to generalize it, it's going to build. What's your steps after? Because if you don't formulate that goal appropriately and help that student achieve that goal appropriately, it may not help you in the steps that come after that.

Stephanie:

That's such great advice.

Jenn:

It's kind of a been there done that. I've done it to myself.

Stephanie:

Yeah. The levels of prompting are so important because it changes the goal so much. I have a free download here for the levels of prompting. It's just a poster you can print and have in your classroom or just use when you're writing IEP goals. But man, the levels of prompting really changes the what you want the child to do.

Jenn:

Yes. And even stating that in the goal using this type of a prompt, using hand over hand or using a verbal prompt, the student will dah, dah, dah, dah, dah, and that can change how they're completing it.

Stephanie:

Yeah. You're so right on that. So how can we make sure that our IEP goals that we write align with the rest of the IEP services and supports that we're writing?

Jenn:

So one thing that I always do when I'm writing my IEP goals is there is an area at least in the IEPs that I write in the state of Pennsylvania, where we have areas of strengths and needs. And typically in that areas of need section, that's where you're actually putting almost specifically the goals that you're putting. You may not put the actual goal, but you're going to put needs to improve expressive language skills, needs to improve skip counting by fives. And so that's where then you formulate those goals.

Jenn:

But I also then try to make sure my SDIs also match up somewhere with those goals. So that's that specially designed instruction that we're going to provide for the student. So if it's things like providing a visual schedule, well, maybe I'm going to provide the visual schedule for what I just talked about with the task analysis of packing up. Well, that's where that SDI works together with that goal. And then in terms of things like the services that our students get. So if our students get other services, I'm thinking you're meaning like speech, OT, things like that. A lot of that works with that whole collaboration piece of working as that team.

Jenn:

And for example, I've had students in the past with communication goals that have maybe assistive technology and I've worked with the speech and language therapist to say, "Okay, I know you're working on getting them to use their device more. How can I get them to use the device in the classroom when you're not here? And also maybe have my staff help with it, so that the parents are doing it with the students too." And that's all part of that collaborative piece of working as a team and understanding that just because you may only be the person that wrote one section of the IEP doesn't mean that you aren't going to be a part of that IEP collectively.

Stephanie:

I love that. That's so important because like OT, you could be working on like pencil grip or picking things up. I mean, even PT like walking in a line.

Jenn:

Going up the steps.

Stephanie:

Going out for recess. Walking down steps. Walking across the stage maybe if you're at the upper elementary or high school level. I think that's important keeping in mind the other services when you're writing IEP goals. How can these other services help with these IEP goals too?

Jenn:

Right, right. Everybody can kind of throw their own little spiel and/or area of expertise into it to kind of make it work for them and use it in their settings too.

Stephanie:

Yeah. And I love that you said the IEP team as a whole like yes. Most times and I feel like this is what I've done and what I've seen and I've done in the past. Usually, the special ed teacher is the one that writes the IEP and we get input from everybody else, which is still the IEP team working together. But I love that you brought it up and put that spin on it that let's connect the supports into the IEP goals. How can we work on them together? I think that's really important.

Stephanie:

And I hope that some of you got like that aha moment. You're like, "Oh my gosh, I can totally do that." And then you don't have to have like a separate speech goal maybe. Sometimes you have to have a separate speech goal if you're working on R controlled words or things like that. But you have the option to work with the other supports too. So I think that's a really important piece of advice.

Jenn:

Sorry to cut you off, but just one thing I was thinking of as you were talking was too I think a lot of times those related services, especially at the elementary level are so segregated from the regular classroom because typically the kids are pulled out because they might be working on such a very specific skill. A lot of my self-contained experiences in middle school or high school secondary, and we're really working on generalizing. So that's kind of like we're pulling away from doing that pullout session and it's more of those providers are pushing in. So I guess maybe that's where some of my thought process comes from that, but I don't think that should be only a secondary thing.

Jenn:

We should be encouraging those providers to come into our classrooms. I think there's so much for the outside providers that they can learn about what we're doing in the classroom that also then can kind of encourage that collaboration together as well.

Stephanie:

I love that. And actually in the Summer PD Series, we had a session or two about how ... Because I was having conversations in my free Facebook Group and one thing that a lot of people were like, "I need

help with this. How do I do it?" Is when kids go from elementary to middle school, there's this disconnect. And sometimes the elementary is writing the IEP for the next school year and the next school year teacher has no idea what's coming.

Stephanie:

So we actually had a session, a session or two, I forget how many there were and I'll link this in our PD Series here for y'all, but about how you can get that collaboration between different schools, different grade levels when kids are transitioning to that other school. And that's a great piece of it. Elementary teachers would never know unless we asked how does supports happen in middle school? Because it's very different than elementary school most of the time.

Jenn:

Yeah, absolutely.

Stephanie:

I love that so much. Well, last question. What is your one best piece of advice for writing IEP goals?

Jenn:

Well, this one is going to go a little sappy for me I think and not so technical. I feel like we've talked a lot of technical stuff in this chat. I'm always about what's best for kids. What is best for that student? And I understand there needs to be collaboration. Obviously, you need the family on board with your goals. You can't come up with some crazy goal that is not something that everybody agrees on, but it's just what is going to help that child at any age become more independent, more able to function in our society?

Jenn:

I tend to always go towards those more functional life skills-based goals, no matter what population I'm working with. But I just always look at students in that way of we're trying to create productive citizens in our society and what can we do to help them do that? And if it's learning to identify letters, then that's what that is. It doesn't mean it always has to be a functional or a life skills-based goal, but just making sure as we're looking at goals for our students that we're picking things that we feel is individually best for that child and not collectively creating goals that maybe works because you want to have a group work for a session or something.

Jenn:

I've seen that sometimes where goals are created and every kid has the same WH-question goal just because you can then run a small group, but is that really what's best for those four students to all have a WH-question goal? That's something too that I've always struggled with sometimes with others. Yes, is that easier for us as teachers to make sure we're all assessing, but is that truly what's best for those students?

Stephanie:

Okay. Well, if you do that and you're watching this, will you please send me a message? Because I have a lot of questions for you just for personal knowledge. I've never seen that and I've never written goals to

be able to do that. And I see the genius in it, but at the same time I'm like, "That's not individualized questions."

Jenn:

So I would say it's not so much teachers I've seen that with, I've seen related service providers do that. I've had some related service providers that have said like, "I feel really comfortable teaching WH-questions so I'm always going to figure out a way to make that one of the kid's goals." Instead of actually doing what we said earlier like looking at the standards, seeing what the child needs and that's obviously not best practice. But it's also frustrating as a special ed teacher or the case manager because, yes, ultimately you're the one who's writing this IEP and you're constantly knowing you're getting that input from a team member that maybe isn't what's best for that student.

Jenn:

And so if you can always do what's best for the kids, even though sometimes you might have to speak up and say something to other team members just to make sure they're on the same page, please don't be afraid to do it because you're doing what's best for the kids.

Stephanie:

That's great advice. I think that's so important. I still have so many questions about that, but [inaudible 00:17:36] for after this. But thank you so much, Jenn, for coming and talking to us today, all about writing IEP goals. You shared so much knowledge. I hope that those of you watching just were taking notes fervently and just great. Oh my gosh, so, so good. Thank you so much.

Jenn:

Thank you for having me.

Stephanie:

Yes, of course. Please share where we can find you on social media and on the internet. And again, like any other video, guys, you can find links to all of Jenn's things below this video.

Jenn:

Absolutely. So you can find me on my website and blog, which is www.teachloveautism.com. You can also find me on Instagram at the same handle, Teach Love Autism. Facebook, Pinterest, all over the place. But if you get those first couple, you'll find me I'm sure.

Stephanie:

Awesome. And again, her links are all below here. So if you go to her website, I know that you can click and find all the social media things from there, but I will include as many links as I can for social media for Jenn below. And again, thank you so much, Jenn, for coming in today to be a guest speaker to chat about writing IEP goals. It's such an important topic and important section of the IEP. I really enjoyed our chat today.

Jenn:

Yeah, it was great. Thanks.

This transcript was exported on May 18, 2022 - view latest version [here](#).

Stephanie:

You're welcome so much. Thank you, thank you, thank you. And guys, we will see you in the next chat.