

# THE DEVELOPING MIND

The Boone Fetter Clinic: Diagnostic, Clinical and Research Center for Autism and Other Neurodevelopmental and Behavioral Disorders



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## Welcome

It is sometimes difficult to find a trustworthy source for answers to complex questions about your child's health and development, so we provide this newsletter to bring you up-to-date information from specialists and researchers at Children's Hospital Los Angeles, a proud member of the Autism Speaks Autism Treatment Network. For more information about the Boone Fetter Clinic, or if you have a question about your child's development, please call the Autism Warm Line at 323-361-6102.

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To make an appointment, call the Autism Warm Line at 323.361.6102, email [BooneFetterClinic@chla.usc.edu](mailto:BooneFetterClinic@chla.usc.edu) or visit [CHLA.org/AUTISM](http://CHLA.org/AUTISM).

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# Strategies for Developing Effective IEPs for Your Child



**An Individualized Education Program (IEP)** is established for every student in a special education program. The IEP is a plan for providing special education services and support based on your child's unique needs and abilities. It is developed through a partnership between a child's family, school and other service providers, and is

essential for any child with autism or other developmental disorder. Parents should be full members of their child's IEP team. However, some parents feel overwhelmed or unprepared to fully participate and effectively advocate for their child. Here are some ways to make the most of your child's IEP planning process.

## Steps to creating a good IEP:

1. Start with the concern.
2. Review or gather information about the concern.
3. Create measurable goals based on the information gathered.
4. Identify the services and support needed to achieve goals.
5. Identify the right placement or classroom.

**Preparing ahead of time** helps you participate in your child's IEP team and goes a long way toward developing an effective IEP. Think about what is going well, what is not going well and what you think might help. You can also think about what you would like your child to be able to do in a year. These are things that you can discuss with the IEP team. You can even share this list with the IEP team members before the meeting so they know what you would like to discuss.

## **A good IEP depends on good goals.**

There should be a goal for each area that a child needs help in, based on specific information about the child.

## Parent Tips:

- Find resources at your local family resource center.
- Request that your Regional Center service coordinator come with you to the IEP meeting.
- Remember that you are a full member of your child's IEP team.
- Take a voice recorder to help you remember the conversation (let the team know beforehand that you will be recording).
- Ask to take a break during the IEP if you need one.
- Bring a friend or advocate with you to the meeting.
- Take the IEP home with you to review before signing it.
- You can ask for an IEP meeting whenever you want, but IEPs aren't the only way to discuss your child's progress.
- You can also ask for an amendment to your child's IEP.
- Do your best to provide documentation and specific evidence for your requests.
- Find a support group or someone else who understands your situation.

This information can come from assessments, previous work samples, observations and progress toward last year's goals. Parents should know what information the goals are based on, so don't be afraid to ask. Goals should be measurable so that it is easy to tell if a goal was reached. For example, a goal might be to improve reading comprehension, based on previous assessments.

The IEP goals should build on the child's **present levels of performance** (what your child can do now) or assessment information. They shouldn't be too easy (something the child already does or can do in a short period of time) or too hard. An IEP includes a report of your child's progress toward the goals of the previous year. If a child doesn't reach a goal, it is important to know why in order to improve the IEP. Make sure to ask questions about what prevented your child from reaching the goal and whether more information or evaluation is needed.

The IEP also describes the **services and strategies** that will be used to help the child reach his or her goals. Some examples include therapies, accommodations,

modifications, behavior support plans and assistive technology. Your child's **placement** is the type of classroom or school he or she will attend. Special education is not a place, but rather a program designed for each individual child, and any services and support can be offered in any type of classroom or school. Try to identify a placement in which your child can succeed with appropriate supports. You can ask to visit the various classrooms or schools that the district offers before you make a final decision.

Remember that you can also bring other people to the meeting for support, such as a friend or regional center service coordinator. Finally, be sure to find and use the resources to help you come prepared and ready to participate as a full member of your child's IEP team.

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### Resources:

**Parent IEP Coaching and Education at CHLA**  
Contact Fran Goldfarb at  
fgoldfarb@chla.usc.edu or 323-361-3831.

### Disability Rights California

- [disabilityrightsca.org](http://disabilityrightsca.org)
- Special Education Rights and Responsibilities (SERR) Manual: 18 Tips for Getting Quality Special Education Services for your Child

**TASK (Team of Advocates for Special Kids)**  
[www.taskca.org](http://www.taskca.org)

## Research Opportunity: Treating Tummy Troubles to Improve Behavior

Researchers at Children's Hospital Los Angeles have started a new research study focused on kids with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) who also have tummy troubles like constipation and bloating. These gastrointestinal (GI) issues are very common in kids on the spectrum and can create a lot of discomfort, often making school and social interactions more difficult.

"We want to see if successful GI treatment helps children with ASD become more

receptive to social interactions," says Pat Levitt, PhD, who is leading the research. His goal is to set clear guidelines for how doctors can personalize treatments that help with both GI distress and autism symptoms. The hope is that effectively treating tummy troubles will also reduce the need for behavioral medications for many children.

The research team is currently looking for 120 volunteers to take part in this important study. Volunteers will receive the

highest standard of care to relieve their constipation, including regular checkups to look at behavioral changes over the course of one year. If you are interested in participating and to find out more information about the study, please contact the study team at [tummytroubles@chla.usc.edu](mailto:tummytroubles@chla.usc.edu).

## Research Highlight: Too Many Vitamins?



In the largest study of its kind, researchers with the Autism Speaks Autism Treatment Network (ATN) found that supplements and special diets for children with autism commonly result in excessive amounts of some nutrients and deficiencies in others. In particular, they found that many of the children in their study were consuming high and potentially unsafe levels of vitamin A,

folic acid and zinc while not getting enough calcium and vitamin D. The research was supported through the ATN's role as the federally funded Autism Intervention Research Network on Physical Health (AIR-P).

"Few children with autism spectrum disorder need most of the micronutrients they are commonly given as multivitamins," says lead researcher Patricia Stewart, a nutritionist in the Autism Speaks ATN at the University of Rochester Medical Center. "[This] often leads to excess intake that may place children at risk for adverse effects. When supplements are used, careful attention should be given to adequacy of vitamin D and calcium intake."

The authors encourage families and health care providers to individually assess diet and nutrient levels in children with autism who are on restricted diets. Many children with autism tend to be picky or selective eaters. Many are also on gluten-free, casein-free diets, which eliminate wheat and milk products.

"Feeding and nutrition are major issues for many children with autism," comments developmental pediatrician Paul Wang, MD, Autism Speaks' head of medical research. "This new study shows that both nutritional deficiencies and nutritional excesses are common. We don't know the consequences of all these nutritional imbalances. But some could be important."

For example, Wang notes that low calcium intake may contribute to the unusually high rate of bone fractures seen in children with autism. "Many children and families affected by autism can greatly benefit from the support of nutritionists and feeding specialists to ensure both immediate and long-term health," Wang concludes. The 14 medical centers in the Autism Speaks ATN, including Children's Hospital Los Angeles, provide such expertise and work actively to help educate health care providers and families in their surrounding communities.

This article first appeared in Autism Speaks Science News. To learn more about this and other ATN studies, visit: [autismspeaks.org/science](http://autismspeaks.org/science).

## Upcoming Events

### Fiesta Educativa 37<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference

**Admission:** Free

Wednesday, Sept. 11, 2015,  
7 a.m. – 5:45 p.m.  
California State University, Los Angeles  
Golden Eagle Ballroom  
5151 State University Dr.  
Los Angeles, CA 90032

### Special Needs Resource Fair

**Admission:** Free

Saturday, Oct. 17, 2015,  
10 a.m. – 2 p.m.  
California State University, Northridge  
University Student Union  
18111 Nordhoff St.  
Northridge, CA 91330

Sunday, Nov. 15, 2015,  
1 – 4 p.m.  
Skirball Cultural Center  
2701 N. Sepulveda Blvd.  
Los Angeles, CA 90049

### Vista Del Mar Child and Family Services Festival of Families

**Admission:** Adults – \$50; Children – \$25

Sunday, Oct. 11, 2015, noon – 3 p.m.  
3200 Motor Ave.  
Los Angeles, CA 90034

### AMC Sensory-Friendly Films

Kids can enjoy their favorite films in an accepting environment, where the lights are up, the sound is turned down, and they can get up, dance, walk and even shout! Locations throughout L.A. Visit [www.amctheatres.com/programs/sensory-friendly-films](http://www.amctheatres.com/programs/sensory-friendly-films) for more information.

**Autism Warm Phone Line:**  
**323.361.6102**

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