

# First Words

## *A First Steps Communications Tool for Families From Family to Family*

### Preparing Your Child for Preschool

*“Whether it’s a community preschool, a special education preschool or Head Start, going off to school for the first time is a huge step in your child’s life.”*

It seems like summer just started, but it will soon be time for our kids to head back to the classroom. If your child is transitioning soon or has recently transitioned out of First Steps, you may be preparing to send your child to school for the first time. Whether it’s a community preschool, a special education preschool or Head Start, going off to school for the first time is a huge step in your child’s life. Helping your child know what to expect at school will make this milestone a smooth one. Of course, all of our children are different and preparation techniques that work for some may not work or be appropriate for all.

Below is a list of strategies used by families to assist their child ease into school\*:

- Talk to my child about going to a new setting
- Take my child to meet the new program staff and see the new classroom.
- Read stories and look at books with my child.
- Encourage my child to play alone for short periods of time.
- Teach my child self-care skills
- Teach my child to follow simple directions.
- Give my child experience with a variety of toys and materials and teach my child how to use toys and materials correctly.
- Give my child experience being around other young children.
- Teach my child to care for own belongings (for example, how to put toys away, hang coat).
- Encourage my child to ask for help when needed.
- Encourage my child to communicate with others (children may do this with gestures, spoken language, sign language, etc.).
- Encourage my child to make simple choices (for example, ask my child if she wants to wear pink or white socks, what toys he would like to play with, or if she wants cookies or applesauce for snack).
- Practice short separations from my child, by leaving him in the care of a responsible adult.

If your child seems upset or nervous about going to school, express your concerns with your child’s teachers and school team. They may be able to offer more suggestions to help your child ease into this exciting new phase of life.

*\*Checklist Reprinted with permission from the FACTS/LRE grant, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.*

#### Alphabet Soup

Each month we cover a few abbreviations, terms or acronyms parents might hear or see while in First Steps. Sometimes it is awkward for families to ask. Here are some acronyms that have been covered before, but are worth repeating from time to time.

- **IFSP= Individualized Family Service Plan**

Read all about your IFSP on page two of this issue!

- **IEP = Individualized Education Program**

This is the plan for your child’s educational program used by the school system from ages 3 to 21 or whenever your child exits school-based services.

- **ED Teams = Eligibility Determination Teams**

A team of First Steps providers who do the initial evaluation of your child and determine if he or she is eligible for First Steps services. They will make recommendations about the type and level of services that you will discuss at your IFSP team meeting.

## What Should You Expect From Your IFSP?

An Individualized Family Service Plan is a written plan for First Steps services your child and family will receive. Your IFSP meeting must be held within 45 days of your child's referral to First Steps. IFSPs are reviewed every six months and updated each year in a meeting with you and the professionals on your IFSP team.

Your child's IFSP will initially be developed at an IFSP meeting. At this meeting you will be

- discussing and reviewing information that has been gathered about your child.
- talking about your family's resources, priorities and concerns.
- identifying the progress that will be expected for your child from First Steps.
- identifying strategies, activities, and services that will lead to the progress you hope to reach.

At your first IFSP meeting you, your intake coordinator and a representative of the team of providers who participated in the evaluation of your child (called the ED team) will be involved in the meeting. After the initial meeting, your IFSP team will include you, a service coordinator, a representative from the ED team and possibly some of your ongoing service providers. You may invite others such as family, friends or a child care provider to any of your meetings. Your intake or service coordinator may invite others to the meeting as well, with your permission. You can also ask an advocate to take part in the meeting.

The IFSP meeting will be held at a time and place that works for you and your family. The meeting will also be held in the language you speak.

Your IFSP will include:

- Your child's present level of functioning
- Your family's resources, priorities and concerns related to your child's development
- outcomes (progress) expected from First Steps services
- The First Steps services that will meet your child and family's needs
- The natural environment(s) where those services will be provided
- Other services needed, which are not provided by First Steps
- The date that services will begin and the duration of those services
- The Name of your service coordinator and provider(s) you have chosen
- The type and amount of services that your child will receive
- Information about transitions or changes that you may expect while in First Steps

Your service coordinator will be happy to answer any questions you may have about the IFSP. Keep your service coordinator's phone number handy by posting his or her business card on your refrigerator or family bulletin board!

### Advocacy Tip of the Month

*Successful transitions begin with people thinking about the future, planning ahead, and working together. A new DVD is now available to help families whose children with disabilities are nearing age three and are in transition from First Steps to public school Early Childhood Special Education Services, Head Start programs, or other options.*

*Steps to Success: Transition at Age 3 will help families understand the important activities and timelines in the transition process. The child and family's transition from First Steps should be a time of collaboration among parents and the staff of the sending and receiving agencies.*

*To request a free copy of this DVD, visit the Resources section at <http://www.indianatransition.org> or call Mary Jo Paladino at 574-273-6019.*

## Resources for Families and Providers

Check out these resources on preparing for preschool:

FACTS/LRE, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign  
[http://facts.crc.uiuc.edu/facts4/facts4.html#Preparing\\_for\\_Transition](http://facts.crc.uiuc.edu/facts4/facts4.html#Preparing_for_Transition)

Parenting Me  
<http://www.parentingme.com/prepschl.htm>

Home Basics  
[http://www.homebasics.com/index.cfm?hb\\_value=family&type=article\\_view&doc\\_id=280](http://www.homebasics.com/index.cfm?hb_value=family&type=article_view&doc_id=280)

Scholastic—Family Matters  
<http://www.scholastic.com/familymatters/parentguides/preschool/tools.htm>