



The Alabama Disabilities Advocacy Program (ADAP) is part of the nationwide federally mandated protection and advocacy (P&A) system.

ADAP's mission is to provide quality, legally-based advocacy services to Alabamians with disabilities in order to protect, promote and expand their rights.

ADAP's vision is one of a society where persons with disabilities are valued, exercise self-determination through meaningful choices and have equality of opportunity.



A FAMILY GUIDE TO INDIVIDUALIZED SERVICE PLANS (ISPs)

For Children and Families receiving services from the
Alabama Department of Human Resources

The Department of Human Resources (DHR) develops Individualized Service Plans (ISPs) for all children and families for whom it is providing child welfare services and foster care.

The ISP is a single, family-focused document that serves all your family members, including children in your home and in out-of-home placements.

No two ISPs look alike. Your family's ISP should reflect its unique strengths and needs. It should describe the goals each of your family members is working toward and the specific responsibilities and actions to be taken by each person involved in planning and implementing the ISP. Your input in the ISP process is vital. You have a right to participate in writing, monitoring and revising your ISP.

An ISP is:

Individualized: The ISP builds on your family's strengths and addresses your family's unique needs.

Service: The ISP identifies the specific services that will be provided to your child and family so the safety and well-being of family members can be achieved.

Plan: The ISP identifies the goals you are seeking as a family, it identifies the steps to be taken to achieve those goals, and identifies who is responsible for each step or service.

Who writes an ISP?

Your child's ISP is written at an ISP team meeting. You and the rest of the ISP team should be partners in developing the ISP.

Besides yourself, your child's ISP team must include:

- your child (if age-appropriate – usually 10 years or older)
- your child's foster parents (if applicable)
- your DHR worker

You or other team members may want other people to participate on your ISP team – perhaps one of your child's teachers, your family pastor, relatives, therapists, or other DHR staff involved with your children and family.

A representative from your child's school or residential treatment facility should be invited to attend and participate in ISP meetings. If a representative cannot attend, an update of your child's progress and current educational needs should be provided to the team prior to the meeting.

If your child receives special education services, then joint ISP/IEP meetings should be held when possible to help service planning and delivery.

What does the ISP contain?

The ISP must plan for:

- your child's physical and mental health, safety, education, and social needs
- any additional assessments needed to help identify your family's strengths and needs and the time frames for obtaining those assessments
- the immediate steps that are going to be taken to meet your child's safety needs (including, when feasible, steps to be carried out in your home)
- a description of the way in which family contact will be maintained (for example: visiting, phone or mail contact) if your child is no longer in your home
- the desired outcomes (often called permanency goals) for your child, and when it's expected that these outcomes will be achieved
- steps to promote a timely return home or placement with relatives, if either of these is your child's permanency goal

At every meeting, ISP team members must review the plan's progress. Team members must document how they have implemented the plan to date and identify any steps that have been completed. Your child's permanency goal and the time frame for achieving that goal must be reviewed at each ISP meeting.

The services that are going to be provided to your child or family should be clearly identified. The plan should describe who will provide the service(s), when the service(s) will begin, and how long each service will last.

When is the ISP written?

An initial ISP meeting must be held within 30 days of when DHR determines that a case will be opened for your child for on-going child welfare services.

If your child has been removed from your home, an ISP meeting must be held within 72 hours of the removal, followed by an update within the next 30 days.

Where are ISP meetings held?

An ISP meeting can be held at any mutually agreed upon location. Make sure the location is one that is convenient for you and discuss any transportation problems with your DHR worker beforehand.



Will I be notified about the ISP meeting?

All team members, including parents, should receive sufficient advance notice of the date, time and location of each ISP meeting to allow them to prepare for and participate in the meeting.

Parents, foster parents, pre-adoptive parents, and relative caregivers must be provided written notice about any ISP meeting.

The remaining team members may receive either verbal or written notice.

What if there are problems with the ISP?

Your DHR worker is responsible for making sure that you understand all the ISP goals and steps. Your DHR worker is also responsible for addressing any concerns you or others may have about how well the ISP is being implemented.

Minor issues that can be resolved without full team involvement may be dealt with informally. Any issues that are potentially controversial or complex, such as a denial or failure to provide services outlined in the ISP, should be handled in a team meeting.

Will I receive a copy of the ISP?

Your DHR caseworker must give you a written copy of the plan at the end of the meeting. If this is not possible, then you should receive a copy at least within 10 days of the date the meeting was held.

When will the ISP be reviewed?

An initial ISP must be reviewed within 30 days of the date



it was developed. After that, the team must review ISPs at least every 6 months and more frequently as needed.

Any team member can call for a meeting to review and revise the ISP. Contact your DHR caseworker if you want to have an ISP meeting.

ISPs must be reviewed and revised when any of the following occur:

- at your request or at the request of your age-appropriate child or other team members
- when changes in your family's circumstances require a review and possible revision to the ISP
- prior to the decision to remove a child from home
- after an emergency change in a child's out-of-home placement
- when a change in an out-of-home placement is anticipated
- when the ISP is not adequately managing risks or new risks are identified
- when you or another team member feels that your child or family is making little or no progress toward the established goals
- when any judicial or administrative review recommends or directs that changes be made to the ISP
- within 30 days of your family's case being closed
- when Medicaid rehabilitation services have been authorized and a treatment plan review is required

Preparing for the ISP meeting

DHR should give you a copy of a document called "Rights of Parents and Children" when your case is opened, but no later than at the first ISP meeting. This document

outlines your family's rights as clients of DHR.

Before the meeting, your DHR worker should schedule a meeting or conference call with you to explain the purpose of the ISP meeting. Be ready to talk with your caseworker about your family's strengths, needs, and goals.

Any documents you have (for example, from your child's doctor, mental health providers or school) should be brought to the caseworker's attention.

Develop a list of questions and issues you would like to discuss at the ISP meeting.

Consider asking supportive friends, advocates, or relatives to attend the meeting with you.

Identify the supports you need in order to participate in the meeting, such as transportation, a reminder call, childcare, or an interpreter. Ask your caseworker to help you with these supports.

What happens at an ISP meeting and what role do I play ?

You play an important role in creating a good, workable ISP. Don't hesitate to share ideas, questions, and concerns with the rest of the ISP team so the developed plan will support both you and your family.

Step 1: Team Review

At the start of the meeting, the DHR worker will invite team members to introduce themselves and will explain the purpose of the meeting. The caseworker will remind team members of the confidential nature of their discussions and of the resulting ISP.

The caseworker, with team input, will summarize your family's case and its current status, distributing any assessments to all team members for review.

Step 2: Identify Strengths and Needs

Every family has strengths - qualities that can be built on to help a family better handle its needs.

Here are some ideas to consider when thinking about your family's strengths . . .

- Your relationship with your extended family
- What motivates your child
- Your job training or education plans
- What your children like best about going to school
- The ways you are an effective parent

- Your relationship with your pastor or church

You and the rest of the ISP team will think about your family's strengths. The team will consider how these strengths can be used to help support your family's needs. At each ISP meeting, these strengths will be reviewed and updated.



In addition to thinking about your family's strengths, you and the ISP team will talk about your family's needs. The team will identify or update those needs that are most important to you and your family and those most critical for your child's safety and health. The team should be specific when describing identified needs in the ISP so that the ISP goals respond precisely to them.

Step 3: Develop Goals

The team will develop ISP goals that address the identified needs. At least one goal should be developed for each need. These goals will be updated as the ISP is reviewed and revised.

Step 4: Develop Services to Support the Goals

The services that are provided to you and your family must be individualized to meet your family's needs.

Below is a list of services that might be provided to you and your family in order for you to achieve your ISP goals. This is not a complete list; your needs might require the ISP team to develop services not listed here.

- Counseling
- Job training
- Respite care
- Substance abuse interventions
- Home-based behavioral training or supports
- Parent advocacy training
- Special education services
- Transportation
- Rent assistance
- In-home tutoring

Team members should be creative in identifying the individualized services that will help your family reach its ISP goals. The team should be open to developing nontraditional strategies if they would be more effective for your family.

Services should be based on you family's needs - NOT on

the availability or cost of services.

If you are an older teenager, you and the ISP team should be thinking about the services you'll need so you are prepared to live independently and go to school or have a job.

Step 5: List the Steps to be Taken to Deliver the Services

Once specific services have been identified, the team will outline the steps it will take to

set up, carry out and monitor the delivery of the services.

The steps must:

- be designed in a logical order that is understandable to your family
- identify who will provide what service and within what time frame
- be designed to enable both you and your family to experience success in a short period of time
- move you and your family toward achieving the desired goals while increasing your ability to function independently

Meetings typically do not last longer than 1 - 1 1/2 hours. In some situations, a meeting may be continued to a later date.

Changes to the ISP should not occur without your agreement, unless the changes the team recommends are directly related to improving the safety of your child or ensuring successful permanence for your child.

At the end of the meeting, the caseworker will remind the team members of their responsibilities, if any, for implementing and monitoring the ISP. Finally, a date for the next ISP review will be set.

If you have questions about developing your ISP or how to work more effectively with DHR, contact ADAP at:

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