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INDIVIDUALIZED EDUCATION PLANS
USING THE CIRCLE PROCESS

Inclusion is the key to the IEP process, both for the student and planning for the individual's educational programming. Frequently, parents and classroom teachers feel left out by the "Special Education experts" – even though they see the child the most everyday. The premise of inclusion in a circle fits perfectly here—no one feels left out.

Often the case manager acts as the circle keeper. In that role, she should create a tone of hope and optimism. The keeper should articulate progress that is being made and keep the focus on unresolved issues.

The talking piece is especially useful in keeping conversation focused and equal. Two "specialist", for example cannot dominate conversation. Parents are encouraged to bring a talking piece that best represents their child to the meeting.

The format might include this schedule:

- Introductions
- Meeting guidelines
- Introduce the talking piece and explain its significance
- Using the talking piece, discuss the child's strengths
- Discuss achieved goals
- Discuss future goals and how they should be placed in the IEP
- Using the talking piece, reach a consensus on goals
- Complete the remaining IEP procedures

End the circle with a formal closing that affirms both the parent, the regular classroom teacher.

We have found the circle format favorable for IEP meetings. Parents and teachers both say they feel safe, included and that their opinions are heard.