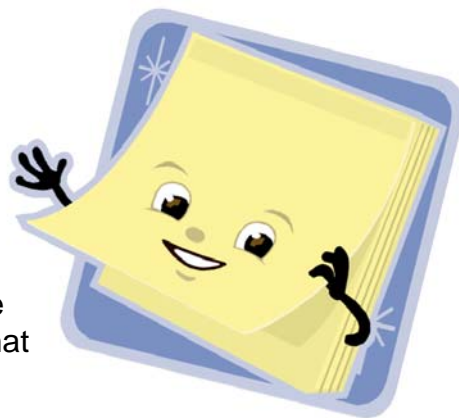


Tips for a Successful IEP Meeting



As a parent, do you approach IEP meetings with fear and dread? If so, here are some suggestions to help you feel more at ease and able to participate as a full member of the team that plans your child's special education program.

Before the meeting:

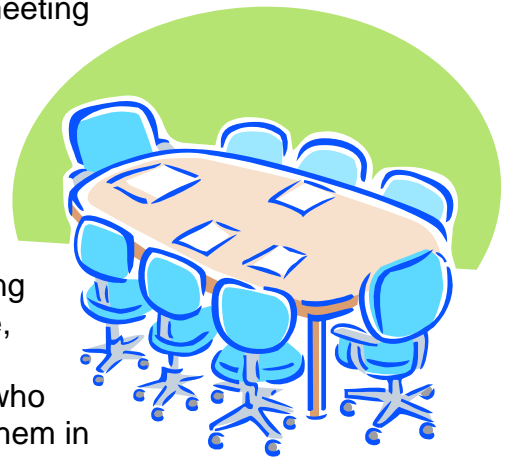
- **Build a positive relationship with at least one person on the IEP team**, such as the classroom teacher, principal, or school psychologist, before the meeting. Such a relationship will help you feel more comfortable and know someone else hears your point of view.
- **Plan ahead and put your thoughts down on paper**, so you won't forget to mention what's important to you during the meeting. Complete the IEP Planning Form before the meeting. **Know the purpose and format of the IEP meeting and who will be there** ahead of time that you should be aware of, including who can be excused from IEP meetings, and alternative ways to hold IEP team meetings. That way you won't be surprised by the number of people around the table or the process being followed.
- **If you wish to share the results of a private evaluation with the IEP team, send copies of the reports to the team ahead of time** so they can be familiar with the data before the meeting, rather than take valuable time during the meeting to review them. In some cases parents may feel that sharing this report (or particular aspects of the report) will not be of benefit to the IEP process; it's your choice whether to do so.
- **Review current reports, last year's IEP** (if applicable), and **Parents' Rights and Responsibilities** sent to you annually.

During the meeting:

- **Understand that, as the parent, you are an integral part of the IEP team.** In fact, federal law requires schools to insure that IEP teams include the parents of the child. Anything you can do to make yourself more comfortable in this meeting will help you to participate more actively.
- **Find a way to personalize your child.** When you talk about him, make him recognizable to all team members. Remember that you know him best — strengths, talents, interests and needs, so take in what the professionals have to say, but add your perspective also. Some parents bring a photograph of their child to help keep the discussion student-focused.
- **Be prepared for district staff to refer to assessment data and their observations, to support their opinions** about what is appropriate for your child. This may be

different from your input but is just as valid. It's important to "see the big picture" — understand your child from different professional points-of-view— to assist in educational planning.

- **Keep focused on what you want answered or provided for your child, not on how to get there** — that's the job of the professionals. For example, if you want your child to make more growth in reading, keep that foremost, and don't get stuck on asking for a specific method of teaching you heard about from a friend. However, do make sure that special education and related services are based on peer-reviewed research, to the extent that is practicable .
- **Don't hesitate to ask questions and seek clarification.** In any profession, people talk in jargon at times. Since understanding the discussion is essential to supporting your child, you can request at the beginning of the meeting that participants explain any acronyms or special vocabulary they use when they speak.
- **Bring a trusted person with you** — spouse, partner, relative, neighbor, friend — so you'll have a support system and another set of ears to hear what others have said. The law requires that this person have knowledge or special expertise regarding your child. If you decide to bring a friend or advocate, you should inform the school so they are aware of whom you're bringing. Be prepared for them to ask who the person is and why you have decided to include them in the meeting. The school should tell you if they have a specific policy on other attendees at the IEP meeting.



If no one is available to accompany you, you may wish to audiotape the meeting so you can listen to the tape later. However, you'll need to notify the district ahead of time of your intentions; in that case, it's likely the district will also audiotape.

- **Involve your child in the IEP meeting to the extent appropriate for his age.** At age 14, he must be invited to attend; at age 16, he'll be expected to participate. In fact, federal law requires that the child be included in the IEP meeting whenever transition services are going to be discussed. Those discussions begin with the first IEP to be in effect when the child turns 16 — or younger if the IEP team finds it appropriate to do so. When he's 18, he'll be the adult making decisions about his own placement, so it's never too early to include him in the process.
- **Ask to take the IEP home to review** if you're unable to make a final decision at the meeting. You are not required to sign it if you disagree with the IEP, or even if you're uncertain about whether you agree with the IEP. However, you should agree to sign where it shows you attended the meeting.

After the meeting:

- **If you have serious doubts or concerns about the IEP, put those concerns in writing and return them to school with the unsigned IEP as soon as you have made your decisions.** You can then request another IEP meeting. **If you have agreed to the IEP, review the agreed upon IEP to make sure you understand it.** If not, talk to the trusted person you brought to the meeting, or contact one of the other IEP participants for clarification. Remember you can always change your mind and withdraw permission for any or all of the parts of the IEP you agreed to.
- **Talk to your child, in terms he'll understand, about what was discussed at the IEP meeting.** Be sure to discuss the progress he's made. Review goals and objectives so he'll know what he's going to be working on during the coming year.
- **Place the IEP in the binder or file where you keep other school notices and reports.** This makes it easy to access for future reference.



- **Note on your calendar the dates that you can expect to receive regular reports from the school of your child's progress toward his annual IEP goals.** Make sure that you're receiving the reports in a timely way and that they include data that document your child's progress.
- **Develop a collaborative relationship with the professionals** who interact regularly with your child. Meet with his special education teacher to share observations and to learn how you can reinforce at home the skills and strategies being taught to him at school.

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