

## **IEP Meetings: Tips for Parents When There Are Disagreements**

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It is easy at times for everyone at an IEP meeting to get frustrated. It can be a challenge to balance all of the needs and demands placed on all of the participants. It is important to continue to be respectful of each other and to remember the purpose of the meeting: developing an IEP that is appropriate for your child.

The following techniques come from the literature on mediation, negotiation, and problem solving. They are adapted from the *Special Education Handbook* located at [www.ldonline.org](http://www.ldonline.org).

- Accept the feelings of others about the issue. Realize that even though you may disagree with another person's opinion or feelings, he or she has a right to have his or her own beliefs.
- Identify what is important or valued. Focus on your child's needs and your concerns. Do not go into a meeting with a solution already worked out. Present your concerns and express what you feel your child's needs are.
- Realize that people's perceptions differ. You and the school see your child in different settings and his or her behavior may differ depending on the setting. You have the advantage of seeing your child in more settings but the school has the advantage of seeing dozens of children the same age and may have a different perspective of typical expectations and performances.
- Realize also that people may come to a meeting with different expectations of what the outcome will be. Be willing to listen and consider the ideas of others.
- Know that some people may lack complete knowledge about an issue. Be prepared to share your information from outside sources, private evaluations, etc.
- Understand the procedures and limitations of the system. While it is important to know your rights under the law, there are services and/or rights that are not covered under law that you may feel are important. For example, you may express your preference for a specific teacher to your school principal, but having a child with special needs does not give you any more rights in choosing a teacher than parents of general education students are given.
- Recognize that schools do not have to give the optimal program; they must provide a reasonably designed program that offers educational benefit.
- When you cannot agree to a solution to an issue or concern, agree on a problem statement. Write it down in simple language that everyone will understand. Don't lose your temper. Parents who become angry are often seen as uncooperative by school staff.
- Brainstorm possible solutions. Keep from criticizing others' ideas. The goal of brainstorming is to feel free to create a lot of ideas without having anyone criticize them.
- Discuss each of the possible consequences of the brainstorming ideas. Discuss an idea's good and bad points and why it may not work.
- Develop a plan and go over it so everyone understands the plan and his or her role in it. Make sure it is in writing and each participant has a copy.
- End the meeting and schedule another date to meet if communication has completely broken down. Very little progress will be made if there is a lack of communication or if members can't think clearly due to emotions. While it may be inconvenient, it is important when making long-term decisions about your child's program.

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