

IEP Meetings: Tips for Parents

An IEP meeting is an opportunity to develop a collaborative partnership between staff members and family members. The following strategies can be useful in developing a positive relationship with professionals who are part of your child's IEP team. Remember, most staff members are there because they have made working with children a life's passion and want what is best for them.

- Before the meeting review the information on your child. Bring your records to the meeting as well as examples of your child's work that highlight strengths and reflect concerns.
- Talk with your child before the meeting. Ask your child questions about his or her perceptions of school. Is work easy or hard this year? Are supports working in the general education classes? Are there supports your child will not accept in the general education classroom? If your child will be attending the meeting, explain how the meeting will work and how important it is for him or her to share goals and dreams.
- Write down your ideas before the meeting. Organize your thoughts and concerns; write down your long term and short term goals for your child and your family.
- Take someone with you to the meeting if you need the support. Let the school know you will have someone attending with you.
- Assume everyone involved in the meeting is participating with the best intentions. Share positive comments with the staff. Keep the meeting focused on the needs of your child. While it may be difficult, don't bring up past issues unless they are relevant to the discussion. Share as a concern, not an accusation.
- Take notes. You may hear a lot of new information or different opinions. Just like children, adults communicate differently too! Go back over your notes at the end of the meeting; ask the other participants if what you heard is what they meant to say.
- Work with the school staff so they understand your culture and your cultural values if you are from a different ethnic background or culture. Take the time to correct wrong assumptions.
- Ask the staff questions when you don't understand something that has been shared or if staff has used a term you don't understand. Not only will it help you understand the intent of the communication better, but other members of the IEP team may need the clarification as well.
- Keep focused on each area of the IEP. Try not to move to another area until you are comfortable it meets your child's needs. If information you need is not available at the meeting, make a note of what is missing, who will get the information, and when they will get it. Then everyone can agree to move on and come back at a later date to discuss.
- Take a firm stand only on important issues. Be willing to compromise and don't expect the school to implement all of your ideas. Remember the staff is trying to put together a program that is appropriate for your child. Try to work with the IEP team to find a solution that will work for everyone.
- End the meeting with a plan. Review all of the points that have been made. Check that everyone understands the goals and objectives that have been agreed upon at the meeting.
- Set up times to check in. Ask the staff what type of communication works best for you to check on the progress of your child's program.
- After the meeting, write a short note to the staff that reviews your understanding of the meeting. Remember to thank them for working on behalf of your child.

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