



Tips for a Successful IEP Meeting

By Jan Baumel, M.S.

1 Comment

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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 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.

Know the purpose and format of the IEP meeting and who will be there ahead of time. That way you won't be surprised by the number of people around the table or the process being followed.

Send copies of any private assessment reports to the team ahead of time so they can be familiar with the data before the meeting, rather than take valuable time from the meeting to review them.

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. 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.

Be prepared for district staff to present assessment data and their professional opinions about what they've observed and feel is appropriate for your child. This may be different from your input but just as valid. It's important to "see the big picture" -- understand your child as a whole 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.

Don't hesitate to ask questions and seek clarification. In any profession, people talk in jargon at times. If you prefer, write down your concerns and meet with one of the team members later for more explanation.



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. If you decide to bring a friend or advocate, you should inform the school 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 go to the IEP meeting with 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.

Ask to take the IEP home to review if you're unable to make a final decision at the meeting. You can agree to parts of the IEP or all of it. However, you should agree to sign where it shows you attended the meeting.

After the meeting

Return the unsigned IEP to school as soon as you have made your decisions and placed them in writing. If you have serious doubt or concerns, contact one of the team members or request another IEP meeting.

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 participants for clarification. Remember you can always change your mind and withdraw permission for any or all of the parts you agreed to.

Talk to your child, in terms he'll understand, about what was discussed at the 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.

Develop a collaborative relationship with the professionals who interact regularly with your child. Meet with his special education teacher to learn how you can reinforce the skills and strategies being taught to him.

Jan Baumel, M.S., Licensed Educational Psychologist, spent 35 years in education as a teacher, school psychologist, and special education administrator before joining Schwab Learning. Today she is a consultant to local school districts and university field supervisor for student teacher.

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