

10 Tips for a successful IEP Meeting

Make a positive contribution to your child's academic plan.

Parents of children with academic challenges frequently struggle to find a program and environment that best meets their child's learning needs. School administrators and parents are integral in designing an effective specialized program through an individual education plan meeting (IEP).

Be prepared, keep your cool and follow these tips to make the most of your child's IEP meeting:

1. **Prepare for the meeting.** Review your child's current IEP, if he has one. Think about what is working well and what isn't, and jot down your thoughts. Request copies of the most recent assessment done by the school district along with any outside testing results. Make a list of questions you want to ask at the IEP meeting and points or insights you would like to share.
2. **Bring support along.** Don't attend the meetings alone. If possible, both parents should attend an IEP meeting, but it is also very helpful to take someone else as an advocate or support person. Ask your school district for a recommendation, or ask a teacher to attend. Brainstorm ahead of time with your advocate and take notes to reduce your anxiety and help you participate more effectively during the meeting.
3. **Look over the IEP invitation.** The notice should tell you who the school district intends to have at the IEP meeting. Are there additional individuals that you would like to attend the meeting? You have the right as a parent to invite other individuals who have knowledge or expertise about your child's special needs. For example, if your child receives speech therapy or other therapies from a provider in private practice you can invite that professional to attend the meeting and make recommendations to the other members of the IEP team.
4. **Schedule the meeting at a convenient time for your family.** You have the right to have the meeting arranged at a mutually convenient time for everyone. If the meeting is not scheduled at a time that works for you, you should contact the appropriate school staff to reschedule.
5. **Ask for clarification.** While at the meeting, make sure you ask all of your questions and get your questions answered. Educational professionals often speak in their own language. If you don't understand something, don't hesitate to ask that it be restated in cleaner terms. It is part of an educator's job to communicate effectively to everyone involved. It is important that all team members understand what is being recommended in the meeting.
6. **Express your desires.** Communicate what you would like to see in the IEP. As the parent, you are a member of the IEP team and can contribute important information about your child's strengths and needs that should be shared with the other members of the IEP team. As your child's number one advocate, you offer a unique perspective and you do not have to agree with what other members of the team recommend.

7. **Keep the meeting on track.** Make sure the meeting focuses on developing a program to meet the unique needs of your child. If the needs of other students or the administrative needs of the school staff creep into the discussion, the meeting can get off track and result in a poor plan. These other needs may be important but should not influence your child's IEP.
8. **Take the time you need.** Make sure issues are discussed sufficiently and the meeting is long enough to complete the task. Sometimes it takes longer to complete the IEP than the time the school has allotted. For example, the IEP meeting is scheduled from 3-5 p.m. and the discussion becomes rushed as five o'clock approaches. Or, sometimes the meeting runs long and individuals cannot stay for the entire time. There is nothing wrong with scheduling another meeting to complete the IEP when all the needed team members can be available.
9. **Keep cool.** Discussions regarding your child's behavior or struggles can be emotional, however, try not to take comments about your child personally or encounter disagreement with anger. While you may be justified in your frustrations with a current education plan or teacher, emotional arguments or complaints may compromise your credibility. Stay focused and keep your thoughts focused on what's best for your child's education.
10. **Say thank you.** As the meeting closes, take the time to praise the positive things that have come out of the meeting and thank those teachers and administrators who have gone out of their way to make your child's school experience a valuable one. Most education professionals work long hours with a child's best interests in mind. Even if you are not completely satisfied with the outcome, your acknowledgement of any efforts to help your child will be appreciated, and help you establish a positive working relationship with your child's academic team.

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