

5 Rules of Successful IEP Meetings

Keep these rules in mind as you prepare your IEP meeting.

1. KNOW WHAT YOU WANT

Make requests in writing. If you make a verbal request, be sure to follow up with a letter. If you have a problem, think about possible solutions to the problem. Describe the problem and solutions in clear language. You want the IEP team members to understand the problem and your proposed solutions.

When you are prepared, you can participate effectively in meetings.

Answer these questions:

- What do you want?
- What action do you want the IEP team to take?
- What facts support your request?

If the team ignores or belittles your solutions, it is important to document this in a polite follow-up letter after the meeting.

2. DO NOT BLAME OR CRITICIZE

When you describe problems or express concerns to an IEP team, stick to the facts. Do not blame or criticize. If a team member reacts defensively, be careful!

When people feel defensive, anxious, or angry, their ability and willingness to solve problems diminishes. If you stick to the facts, you make it more likely that the team will develop creative solutions to problems, rather than feel defensive.

3. PROTECT THE PARENT-SCHOOL RELATIONSHIP

In parent-school negotiations, you need to separate your personal relationships from the problems. If you view a person across the table as the problem, you are likely to feel mistrustful and angry.

When you negotiate, you have two interests:

- To solve problems
- To protect parent-school relationships

You will negotiate again!

4. SEEK WIN-WIN SOLUTIONS TO PROBLEMS

When IEP teams develop mutually acceptable solutions to problems, team members are committed to the success of their solutions. If negotiations shift to a win-lose perspective, and one side loses, expect them to sabotage the solution.

5. UNDERSTAND THE SCHOOL'S POSITION

To be a successful negotiator, you must be able to step into the shoes of the people on the other side of the table. You need to be able to answer these questions:

- What are their perceptions? How do the school members of the IEP team see the problem?
- What are their interests? What do they want?
- What are their fears? What are they afraid will happen if they give you what you want?

When you can answer these questions, it will be easier to develop solutions that allow you and the school to meet your child's needs.

PRE-MEETING WORKSHEET

LOCATION: _____

DATE: _____

What is the purpose of the meeting? _____

Who requested the meeting? _____

Who will attend the meeting (e.g., teachers, administrators, parent, child)? _____

What do you want? _____

What do they want? _____

What action do you want them to take? _____

How motivated are they to give you what you want? _____

What will prevent them from giving you what you want?

How can you alleviate their concerns?

Child's Need/ Parent Request	School's Response	Resolved	Start Date	Responsible Person

4 mistakes Parents Make in IEP's

Keep these in mind as you prepare your IEP meeting as well as during and after the IEP meeting.

1. FAILING TO MAKE A LONG TERM PLAN FOR THEIR CHILD'S EDUCATION OR THE FUTURE

Some parents do not think about the future until it arrives. They don't have long-range goals for their child. They don't think about what they want their child to be able to do when he leaves the public school system. They don't have a plan.

Imagine your child as a young adult. What should your child be able to do? Do you envision your child working at a job and raising a family? Will he be a member of the community? What does he need to learn so he is prepared for "further education, employment, and independent living?"

Your child's special education is a long-term project. A plan will help you stay focused, anticipate problems, and prepare for the future. Your plan should include academic and behavioral, social, and emotional goals, including hobbies, personal interests, sports and fitness, family, friendships, and the community. Your plan should be revisited and revised as your child grows.

2. NOT UNDERSTANDING THEIR CHILD'S DISABILITY AND ALLOWING THE SCHOOL TO MAKE THE DECISIONS ABOUT THEIR CHILD'S SPECIAL EDUCATION

Some parents don't understand their child's disability, how the disability affects the child's learning, or how the child needs to be taught.

They don't know what services and supports their child needs. They don't know if their child is making progress. They don't know the steps they must take to ensure that their child receives an appropriate education.

These parents have given decision-making authority to the school. They assume school personnel will make wise decisions about educating their child. The school may have low expectations for the child and parents tend to accept the school's low expectations.

If you do not ensure that your child receives an appropriate education and learns the skills necessary to be an independent, self-sufficient member of the community, you will deal with the outcome long past childhood.

And if you are tempted to lower your expectations, consider this: Your child will internalize your low expectations. A vicious cycle begins. Low expectations lead to low achievement.

3. FORGETTING TO KEEP YOUR EMOTIONS UNDER CONTROL

As a parent, your emotions may be your Achilles' heel.

If you are like many parents, when you learn that your child has a disability, you turn to school personnel and medical specialists for help. If you and the school disagree about what is appropriate for your child, you may feel shocked and angry. You may feel betrayed by the system you trusted. Once lost, trust is hard to regain.

4. NOT DOCUMENTING EVENTS AND CONVERSATIONS IN WRITING

"I told the IEP team that my child was not making progress. The team agreed and said they would provide more services."

Assume the school did not provide more services. How can you prove they agreed to do so?

One common mistake parents make is not writing things down as they happen. When you write things down — in a letter, log, or journal — you are taking steps to protect your child's interests.

In general, the best way to document events and problems is by writing short polite letters to the school. Describe what happened or what you were told. Use facts, not emotions. Your letters will become part of your child's file.

Be sure to keep a copy of all correspondence for your records.