

You and your Child's Individualized Education Plan (IEP) meeting

What is an IEP?

- An Individualized Education Plan (IEP) created specifically for your child based on their strengths and areas of concern.
- The IEP meeting is where this will be discussed and created. It must be at a time that is mutually convenient for parents and school personnel, and a translator must be provided for parents who speak a language other than English
- It contains measurable goals to work toward in school program
- States the placement of your child (regular classroom with supports, pull-out for help from special education teacher, a class for students with disabilities, or a school just for children with disabilities) with preference always given to being included in the typical classroom, with supports, for the majority of the day. That should always be the first placement considered.
- Lists related services to be given, such as Occupational, Physical or Speech Therapy, Vision or Orientation and Mobility teachers, sign language interpreter, psychological counseling, Adaptive PE or Music Therapy, and where they will be given
- Lists amount of time per week special education services will be provided, who will give those services, and where those services will be given (pullout or in classroom)
- It is a meeting mandated by law--The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act
- Parents are to be a vital part of the IEP team, which also consists of the student, if appropriate, special education and regular teachers who will work with the child, any related service personnel such as physical, occupational and speech therapists, vision teachers, a person who is authorized to commit resources and programs, person who can interpret any assessments completed on the student, and anyone else who the parent asks to come.

This is a very important meeting for you and your child. This is where you meet with educators and school administrators to discuss and decide on your child's education plan for the school year, and how services will be provided. It can be a little intimidating for parents and for the child, but as you learn more about what services are available for students with disabilities, your child's rights, and how to develop an effective plan, you will become more confident. We have some tips that will help!

Before the meeting even starts, you should:

1. Remember that special education is a **service, not a place**
2. Make sure you have all the necessary paperwork, such as previous IEP, any notes, assessments or tests from professionals that may be relevant to your child's educational needs, and pertinent information from other schools or states if you have moved.
3. Request a copy of the proposed IEP goals (these are only proposed, or draft goals until the whole team agrees which goals are most appropriate for the student), and current assessments from teachers and therapists. Ask to have this at least 3 days before the meeting so you have time to think about it, and change or add any goals

you think are important. If you do not have the goals in time to really review them, you might want to re-schedule the meeting

4. Remember that you are a very valuable member of the IEP team, and that **you** are the expert on your child
5. Check to make sure that each proposed goal is achievable, can be measured, and is clear (if not, ask questions!). Goals have to include measures so you and the school know how your child is progressing and when the goals have been reached, as reported at the end of each grading period when progress is reported
6. Find out who will be attending the meeting, and let the school know if you are bringing anyone, such as a family member, friend, professional, advocate, or someone who works with your child outside of school.
7. Try to bring an advocate or support person with you to help you. Bringing someone with you is very helpful in order to give you support and remind you of anything you may have forgotten to talk about
8. Make sure the IEP team has scheduled enough time for the meeting, so you do not feel rushed. If you have a lot to talk about or have disagreements with the proposed plan, you can ask for a longer meeting or two meetings, one to go over your concerns and a second meeting to complete the formal plan
9. Know what is very important to you, and what you are willing to compromise on--this will show you are willing to negotiate and work with the school team. It will help to make a list to remind yourself of all the points you want to make
10. Know that you can ask, in writing, for an IEP meeting anytime you feel the team needs to meet. This is especially important when you are concerned about the plan; you can agree to try certain approaches and then ask to meet again in a few months to review progress and any difficulties and reassess if the plan is working, or it needs adjustment

During the meeting tips:

1. Go into the meeting with a positive attitude, assuming that everyone there wants the best for your child. Bringing goodies never hurts, and will relax everyone.
2. School personnel will be dressed in business attire, so you may want to dress in something that makes you feel confident
3. Do not sit across from the school team, sit next to them--it creates a friendlier environment and will make you feel less intimidated
4. Start by sharing your dreams for your child, as well as your nightmares. Share your vision of what you want your child's life to look like now and in the future, as an adult. This will not take very long, and will help the IEP team to see how goals can help to achieve those dreams
5. Make sure your child's strengths are talked about and not just areas of concern. Children learn differently and your child's strengths will include his learning styles
6. Always ask questions if you do not understand something. You can repeat back what you think you heard for clarification. Invite the team to ask you any questions they may have. The team will work better if everyone feels comfortable.
7. Show the other members of the team respect, and expect them to respect you
8. Thank anyone who has been helpful to you or your child

9. As proposed goals are read, tell about any changes you wish, or any other goals you think are important, and why. Ask how progress will be reported to you. The report card alone may not give you detailed information on your child's IEP progress
10. If you find your emotions are getting the best of you or you feel overwhelmed, you can ask for a short break to relax, refresh, and get ready to continue
11. Remember that you are all there to develop a plan to help your child, and keep the meeting focused on that
12. Make sure the designated note taker includes your input into the notes. You should read over the notes yourself before you agree to or sign the document.
13. Remember that a signed IEP is a legal document, and must be followed
14. The IEP should have information about who is responsible for working on each goal for your child. Each service your child will receive must be listed in the IEP, including who will be making any needed adaptations and modifications, the frequency and duration of services, timelines for accomplishing goals, and how each goal will be monitored, by whom, and evaluated
15. Any statements about lack of funding or the school not having the staff for that is not an acceptable reason for not providing a needed service for your child. While staffing may be a problem, ask the team how this problem will be resolved, when it will be resolved, and what they plan to do in the meantime. If a school cannot provide a service that is needed then they may need to send her to a private provider, such as a therapist, at the school's expense, or to another school that can provide the service
16. Any assistive technology your child needs, or a behavior plan, transition goals and extended school year services must be written into the IEP
17. As the meeting ends, you will be asked to sign that you agree with the IEP. Read it completely yourself (or have your advocate read it to you) BEFORE you sign anything. Be sure your input is written there. If you do not agree with it, you should not sign it. If you do not sign, they will schedule another meeting within 10 days to see if everyone can come to agreement. You can also ask to take a copy home so you can reread it and think about it before you sign.
18. If you sign, they should make a copy of each page for you to take home. (at no charge to you). If they cannot do this, they should send one home to you within a few days.

After the meeting:

1. Put the new IEP in a file or notebook so you can always find it.
2. If someone was especially helpful, send them a note of thanks. This is not only good manners, it helps build relationships
3. If your child was at the meeting, talk to him about it
4. Use the IEP to help keep track of progress. The IEP goals and progress toward them are the basis for your child's report card.
5. Remember that the IEP must begin being implemented within 10 days of the document being signed
6. Ask for a meeting with any of the personnel working with your child if you have concerns or questions

