

IEP Meeting Tips

- 1. Bring a friend.** Bring an advocate or a member of the community with knowledge of your child's issues, e.g., psychologist, counselor, medical service provider, day care professional, etc. If you do not have access to someone with special skills or training, bring a neighbor or friend. This person can help you sort out what went on in the meeting. If the person also knows your child well, she can provide valuable information on your child's needs.
- 2. Take notes.** Taking notes shows you are taking an active approach to the meeting. It gives you an easy reason to have team members restate issues that are glossed over or discussed in a summary way. You simply tell them you want to accurately reflect the issues in your notes to insure that you understand what is going on. When you take notes, school district professionals tend to take you more seriously and be more responsive to your input.
- 3. Ask questions.** Do not be afraid to ask questions or to seek clarification and definition of issues and subjects you do not understand. Education professionals talk in acronyms (e.g., SED, DIS, etc.) that are not always easily understood by non-educators. You are at the meeting as a participant, not an observer. To participate in a meaningful way, you need to know what everyone is talking about.
- 4. Restate important information.** In updated IEPs, there is a tendency to short hand information. The reasoning is that "we already know that" or "it is written on the three-year IEP." If there is important information about your child such as the existence of an AB 3632 referral, your child's conditions, changes in behavior or health or other factors that may significantly affect the classroom and your child's learning, ask to have them restated on the updated IEP. Also, if your child changes schools or programs, old documents are sometimes lost, misplaced or not reviewed. Anything important should be on the current document you are discussing.
- 5. Ask for a translator.** You have a right to a translator if English is not a language in which you are proficient. If you need a translator and one is not at the meeting, do not proceed. Ask that the meeting be rescheduled. The translator should be a separate staff person and not one of the participants playing two roles. Since IEP meetings can move quickly and be full of technical discussion, you may want to ask for a translator even if you can converse in English in casual conversation. If your English is limited, you can still participate in English as you choose, but ask for help from the translator as complicated issues arise.
- 6. Make goals and objectives specific.** Schools take different approaches from time to time about the specificity of goals and objectives. Sometimes they will try to write general objectives and say that this gives the teacher and student more flexibility to progress. However, in the event a teacher leaves or the student changes schools, the new teacher will greatly benefit from having specific objectives upon which to focus.

7. Add goals and objectives, if necessary. Sometimes teachers come to the IEP with pre-written goals to expedite the process. This is fine, but review the proposed goals carefully. Are they complete? Do they address your concerns? Do they reflect current skill levels? Are they realistic or challenging enough to meet your child's needs? Are interim benchmarks included? Feel free to ask for modifications. Also, feel free to ask for additional goals on issues about which you are concerned.

8. Don't be rushed. If you cannot cover everything in the time allotted, ask for the IEP to be reconvened at a later date, i.e., within a week or 10 days, so that the IEP can be completed. Often, schools schedule multiple IEPs on a single afternoon, one every half hour or 45 minutes. For some IEPs, this is a sufficient amount of time, but it is not sufficient in all or even most cases. Do not let yourself be rushed into finishing or signing the IEP if you are not satisfied that all the relevant issues have been discussed. Tell the team members that you would like to reconvene in a few days to complete the IEP rather than rush it. Before you leave ask for a copy of the IEP to review at home.

9. Sign, but demand translation. If you need the IEP document translated, sign it subject to your agreement with the translation. Write your reservation on the comment space, i.e., "this signature is made subject to my agreement with the translation with which I will be provided by the school." You should sign it, rather than wait for translation, because an unsigned IEP does not require the school to begin implementing services. You want to sign so that needed services can start immediately and not be subject to the delay of waiting for your signature since the translation may not be forthcoming for weeks.

10. Schedule an interim IEP, if appropriate. If your child's progress has been slow, if there have been difficulties with the program, or if your child has severe and complicated issues, you may want to meet more often than once a year to check progress. You can request semi-annual or even quarterly meetings. It is best to include a tentative "next meeting date" on the IEP as you complete it because this focuses attention on the fact that an interim review will occur and the tentative date necessitates contact for confirmation or rescheduling. Even if you do not include such a date on your IEP, any time you have concerns about educational issues or your child's progress, you can request an IEP meeting. Request these in writing so that you have proof of the request and follow up promptly.

This document is also available in Armenian, Chinese, Korean and Spanish.
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