

# 10. IEP MEETING PREPARATION

The IEP meeting is an opportunity for parents or caregivers, school staff and others to get together as a team to discuss the child's needs. This meeting is legally required if a child is referred for assessment. The IEP team will review assessment results and use those results to determine whether or not the child qualifies for specific programs under the law. If the child qualifies, the team will develop a service plan to address any of the child's unmet educational needs. Information from the assessment results can also be used to form a plan to help the child even if the child doesn't qualify for services under a specific law.



## Parent rights regarding assessments

- Can ask to have all assessments explained clearly
- Can receive assessments at IEP meeting and ask to reconvene after the parent has had an opportunity to review the results
- The parent or advocate can also ask the child's pediatrician, counselor, or another professional to review the assessment results

To adequately serve the child, parents and advocates should prepare for the IEP meeting.

## To prepare for the IEP meeting:

### Ask for copy of all assessment results five days prior to IEP meeting

Though the district is not required to provide the results early, (and they may not even be available) district representatives may do so, especially if the advocate states a desire to save time at the IEP meeting.

### **Review all assessments and document any questions**

Only a lack of experience will prevent the advocate from understanding the assessment results. Ask for clarification whenever necessary.

If the advocate does not receive the assessment results prior to the meeting, he or she can ask for a postponement. This will allow time to review the results and consult with other relevant professionals (such as the child's pediatrician or social worker) before making any service decisions.

### **Determine whether the child should attend IEP meeting**

The decision depends on the:

- Nature of the child's difficulties
- Child's age and maturity level
- Child's interest
- Amount of information the child may be able to provide

The advocate can talk to the child's teacher, counselor, or others to get their opinion. If the child is aware of his or her difficulties and is interested in being a part of the process, he or she should be encouraged to participate. The IEP meeting can provide a good learning opportunity for self-advocating. Studies have also shown that a child's participation encourages child success within the educational program.

Child participation should always be optional. An IEP meeting involves a lot of adult's focusing on the child's difficulties. For some children, this is a very unpleasant experience.

### **Consider asking a support person (CASA, social worker, private psychologist) to attend the IEP meeting with the advocate.**

This person can provide moral support and supplement the advocate's knowledge and experience with the child.

### **Consider inviting other relevant professionals or service providers to the IEP meeting.**

Advocates may bring anyone they feel might have information or insight that could help the child.

### **24 hours in advance of the meeting—Request that meeting be tape-recorded.**

The parent can request that the school staff tape the IEP meeting. The parent has a legal right to do so.

The tape can be used after the IEP meeting to:

- Review what was said and agreed to at the meeting
- Go over the contents of the meeting with the child

Research has shown that taping the meeting reduces negative comments and helps keep the meeting focused on the child.

### **Document the advocate concerns for the meeting.**

Usually many people attend an IEP meeting. This can be overwhelming for even the most prepared. The advocate should write down questions, concerns and ideas and bring that list to the IEP meeting.

### **Before the IEP meeting, the parent should expect:**

A copy of form 9, Parent/Student Notice of Individualized Education Plan Meeting information on the form includes:

- Student name, parent or guardian, the proposed date, time and place of the meeting,
- A description of the action the school is proposing, which could include:
  - Initiating or changing the identification, evaluation or educational placement of the child
  - Holding an annual review meeting
  - Refusing to initiate, or change the identification, evaluation or educational placement of the child.

The letter/form also includes the reasons for the proposed action. This could be because the school wants to determine if a child is eligible for services or make a change to the child's placement or service plan.

The notice will indicate who will attend the meeting. Possible attendees include: the school administrator(s), regular and/or special education teachers, nurse, psychologist and others.

Parents are asked to sign and return the notice, indicating they can attend at the proposed date and time or indicating a better date and time.

Parents may also be asked to sign a release form that will allow for the exchange of information concerning the child between different agencies. The school must have the parent's permission before school officials can release information about the child to other agencies. (See section on "Confidentiality/Record Access" for more information)

The parent may also receive a questionnaire that will ask the parent to list concerns and goals for the IEP meeting.

### **Even without the questionnaire, the parent and advocate can write down:**

- The child's strengths
- Concerns about the child's academic, social, physical and emotional health
- Goals that focus on positive change for the child
- Ideas and observations that may help the team come up with realistic, effective solutions for the child

### **The child can help:**

Depending on the child's age and maturity level, it may be appropriate to tell the child about the proposed IEP meeting and the reason for it. The child may be able to provide information for the IEP

team. This information can include when the child experiences the problems, and why the child believes he or she has the problem(s). The child can also identify situations or services that have helped the child with these problems.

**If the child is experiencing:**

- Academic challenges—Explain that the school wants to identify the child’s learning style and provide information in the way the child learns best
- Physical challenges—Explain that the school needs and wants to provide all the help the child needs to succeed and be comfortable in school
- Emotional difficulties—Explain that the school staff and service providers care about the child and want to provide the most supportive environment possible
- Behavioral difficulty—Explain that the school wants to establish positive ways to help the child cope with his or her feelings and actions

Explain that the child’s input is very important.

**The advocate can ask the child to think about:**

- Areas where the child feels strong, successful
- Areas where the child would like more help
  - Can be general or specific (i.e., “I hate math,” “I would like \_\_\_ to read with me more,” “I get angry when...”)
  - Can be at school, at home, with friends, planning for the future (especially important for older students transitioning into adulthood)
- Child’s goals and ambitions—
  - For the rest of the school year, the next year, and beyond. Older students can consider vocational interests, college plans and independent living skills (if the child remains unfocused about long-term education or career goals, a meeting with a vocational or college counselor can be recommended)
- Ways the child feels he or she learns best
- Ways the child can build on those strengths regarding more difficult subjects
- Ways the child can take steps to help or get help independently to move toward self-advocacy

If the child will attend the meeting, the advocate can prepare him or her by informing the child of the time and location of the meeting and identifying those who will attend. The advocate can also give an overview of the meeting process:

- Assessment results will be reviewed and discussed
- The team will determine if the child qualifies for one or more programs under the law

- The team, including the child, will establish strategies to help that child get the most out of school.

If possible, someone should attend the meeting specifically to support the child. This can be a care provider, advocate, family member, CASA or other supportive person.

## **Advocate Preparation**

The best way to serve the child at an IEP meeting is to come prepared, mentally and emotionally. Many people dread the thought of sitting in a room full of “experts” who will talk about what is wrong with the child. While the fears are understandable, they don’t need to be realized.

### **The parent or advocate can:**

- Maintain a positive attitude.
- Be proud of his or her commitment and desire to discover and act in the best interests of the child
- Treat all involved as advocates with the child’s best interest at heart
- Work as member of a team to discover effective solutions

### **The parent will get copies of all assessment results at the IEP meeting. The parent or advocate should also consider bringing the following:**

- All notes, including copy of original referral and list of concerns the parent or advocate want addressed at the meeting
- Journal (for personal reference only)
- Paper or notebook to take notes at the meeting
- Copies of prior assessments/information that might be relevant, i.e., health records/attendance records, medication history, etc.
- Contact log
- Copy of current laws/this publication