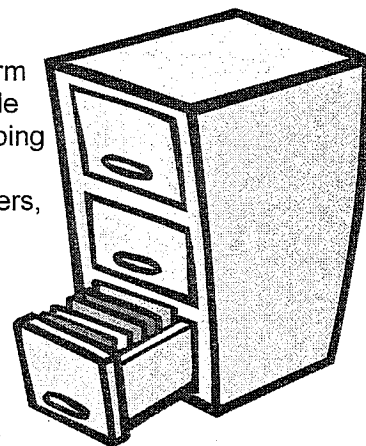


## Everything You Wanted to Know About an IEP Meeting but Were Afraid to Ask

By Joey Colón, M.Ed. and Lindsay Knoblauch, M.Ed., CCC-SLP

An Individualized Education Program (IEP) is a special education term that outlines a set of goals for your child. An IEP meeting is where the people involved in educating your child get together and develop a program for helping your child in school. People who may attend the meeting include regular education teachers, special education teachers, administrators, social workers, medical specialists, and you! This is your chance to have a say in your child's education—so use the following tips to plan ahead, learn the process, and get a head start on paperwork!



### Preparing for an IEP Meeting

An IEP meeting can seem like a long, overwhelming affair but with a few simple tips you can make the process quicker and more manageable.

- Keep a list of every professional that has ever seen your child. Make sure your list is divided into medical doctors, psychologists, physical therapists, etc.
- Keep copies of all medical records. Buy a portable file box to keep paperwork in, so it is always handy.
- Sit down and think about what you want to say before you get to the meeting. It doesn't matter if it ends up sounding like a script. Simply say what is on your mind.
- Make copies of your child's educational records before the meeting. These may include old report cards, behavior reports, progress reports, and testing results. Keep these papers organized in your file box by grade level so they will be easy to access.
- Become familiar with Title 34 of the *Code of Federal Regulations* (<http://www.gpoaccess.gov/ecfr/index.html>). It is not easy to read, but it will help you understand how and why IEP goals are set.
- Be on time. A general rule of thumb is to get there about a half hour before the meeting is supposed to start. This will give you some time to organize your materials and collect your thoughts—leaving you feeling less rushed and anxious.
- If you still feel uncomfortable attending, there are advocates who can represent you in the meeting. A list of advocates is available at <http://www.yellowpagesforkids.com/>

### During an IEP Meeting

So you are finally in the at the meeting. What to do? Follow these tips to make the most of the meeting.

- Remember that you are an equal member of the educational team. This means you will be helping to make decisions, plan interventions, and set goals. You may want to review your child's educational history before the meeting. Stay involved and aware of your child's progress so that you can help support your child and/or suggest changes to the goals.
- Everyone in the room has the best interest of your child in mind. There may be opposing viewpoints

on how to educate, but everyone there wants to help your child do his/her best.

- Ask questions. You are the one who knows your child best. It is essential for you to understand everything said. You may hear unfamiliar jargon and acronyms like LRE, LEP, CCC, SLP, OT, and so forth. Ask what the terms mean, take notes, and write down the unfamiliar terms and definitions. You may also refer to the Acronym Cheat Sheet at the end of this handout.
- Also, you may hear the word "data" during the meeting. Don't be alarmed. Data is only collected because educators are required to keep records to measure your child's progress.
- Don't worry about time. Don't let anyone rush you into finishing an IEP. An IEP is a legal document and you may need to take extra time to make decisions or share the program with your spouse before you sign the document. You can always meet at a later time if there are unresolved issues.

### After an IEP Meeting

You are done. You have helped come up with a good, workable IEP, and you are ready to take on the world. But what to do now that you are done?

- Take your child out for pizza! Explain to him/her what was accomplished and tell them how things will be the same or different.
- Send thank you cards. Relationships don't end with the meeting—at some point in the near future, you will have to work with every single professional that was sitting at that table. Express your appreciation.
- Keep the IEP in a safe place. Don't throw it out, don't give it away, and don't misplace it. Teachers, psychologists, speech-language pathologists, and all others who deal with your child will have to follow this program.
- Keep important dates: Don't forget, like every legal document, an IEP has to be renewed. The IEP due date will be one year from the date it was signed. Mark that date in your calendar. Begin planning for next year's IEP meeting a few months before it is due.
- Relax! You made it. Now you only have to worry about the fun stuff: sports, assemblies, report cards, and dating!



#### Resources

*Ten Tips for Improving Parent Participation in IEP Meetings* and *The Everyday Guide to Special Education Law*. The Legal Center for People with Disabilities and Older People. <http://www.thelegalcenter.org/>

*Tips for a successful IEP meeting*. <http://www.schwablearning.org/>

*Code of Federal Regulations*. <http://www.gpoaccess.gov/ecfr/index.html>