

A Family's Guide to a Family/Child Focused IEP

Understanding the needs of your child and navigating the process of appropriate support he/she needs is a complex task! It is overwhelming, but take a deep breath, put your shoulders back, head up and get ready for a partnership with your child's school. As your child's most valuable advocate, this guide will help you understand the IEP process and how to communicate and advocate effectively so that your child will receive the appropriate support in the educational setting!

PrePlanning:

- ★ Write your thoughts about your child. What are they good at, what are they struggling with? What are some observations you have made?
- ★ Write down your questions/concerns.
- ★ Educate yourself on the process specific for what you are going to be doing (Initial/ Annual/Addendum/Reevaluation)
- ★ Make a folder of all of your child's evaluations, observations from other providers-doctors/therapists/teachers.
- ★ Access Resources in your community regarding IEP process, parent support, etc.
- ★ Request an agenda for the meeting if it was not given. Ask who will be participating and contact information for those individuals.
- ★ If you plan on bringing anyone, let the school know. Contact that person to make sure you know their role in the meeting.
- ★ Request a draft or data ahead of time so that you can read and process the information and be prepared to have conversation regarding results. Print and make notes or questions to ask.
- ★ Make a list of your goals/ concerns as well as goals you would like your child to work on.
- ★ Communicate with your team your communication preference and style.
- ★ If you are feeling stressed, engage in a calming activity: take a walk, drink some water, notice sounds and sights around you, find a picture on your phone that brings you joy.

During the Meeting

- ★ Some ideas of things to bring :a picture of your child/video of your child to show, water, fidget, gum,draft with your notes, other necessary paperwork, pen and notepad/phone if you are the notetaking kind!
- ★ Break the ICE! Introduce yourself and others you brought with you as support. Make conversations with team members!
- ★ Make sure you know everyone's name and role.

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- ★ After introductions, talk about your goals for the meeting or things you want the team to know(concerns, questions, goals, etc)
- ★ Before they move on to the next thing, ask to pause for a minute so that you can read and make sure you understand what is being presented.
- ★ Ask questions and share your thoughts. Your voice is important!
- ★ Take a break when you feel big emotions or it is going on long. Stepping out is ok! Collect your thoughts and take a sip of water/breathe!
- ★ Postpone the meeting to another day if you need to.
- ★ If what you are wishing for can not be put in the IEP document, make sure to say, "I would like that to be reflected in the minutes."
- ★ Leave the meeting knowing how you will be communicated with and the frequency.

After the meeting:

- ★ Thank everyone in an email or another gesture of appreciation.
- ★ Reread the IEP when you get the documents. If something doesn't make sense or isn't as it was described in the meeting, communicate with the team via email.
- ★ Make sure you are understanding timelines, roles, and supports. If you do not, please reach out to your team.
- ★ Keep a folder of all documents.
- ★ Keep in communication with your practitioners/IEP team.
- ★ Be mindful! Daily text, phone calls, and emails may strain relationships that you have worked to build. Instead, return to the communication plan established with your team.
- ★ If you feel stress, find a calming activity: take a walk, drink some water, notice sounds and sights around you, find a picture on your phone that brings you joy.
- ★ If you feel as if you were not heard, disagreed with decisions made, and/or in review of the documents find errors or inconsistencies, [please refer to this chart](#).

Resources:

- ★ [NC ECAC guide](#)