

A Practitioners Guide to a Family/Child Focused IEP

Planning an Individualized Education Plan should include all of your data and include a pause to recognize the process through the eyes of the family. Many families are coming to the table for the first time while others are no strangers to the process. As a practitioner, when you are preparing for the IEP meeting, you can use this guide to help you and your team connect to the child and family in an authentic, practical, and professional way!

PrePlanning:

★ ***What is your relationship with this family?*** Introduce yourself and explain your role. Some ideas include: put a face with a name (add your photo to your email signature line/meet in person at carpool/etc.); Connect with family and child prior to the meeting.

★ ***What are the family dynamics and needs? What do you know about the family that will help you connect and understand their circumstances? (Education level? Cultural values? Native Language? What situations have they been going through lately?)*** Understanding this will allow you to see this process through their eyes and how you may adjust your tone and pace while interacting.

★ ***Is this the first time that the family has experienced the IEP process?***

***YES!** Someone on your team should reach out to the family and before all the checklists and info dumping to say something along the lines of:

“ Hi Mr./Mrs./Miss _____! This is _____ from _____. I just wanted to let you know that although this is a lengthy process, you can trust us to listen to your concerns and answer your questions with empathy and professionalism. We know that this is overwhelming and we are here every step of the way to make sure _____ gets the support he/she needs. (Person on the IEP team) will be contacting you soon to schedule/go over necessary paperwork we will need from you! *Pause and listen*

No. “Hi Mr./Mrs./Miss _____. This is _____ from _____. I know that we have a meeting scheduled for _____. I wanted you to know that we are looking forward to having a great conversation regarding _____! Each time that we come together _____ is the focus of our meeting and the decisions that we make. Is there anything I can help answer before we meet?

★ ***Education: Does the family understand the process? Is the family clear of the agenda of the meeting? Do they have anyone else they are bringing to the meeting that you need to connect with?***

* Resources/Visuals for guiding them through the process in enough time prior to the meeting so that the family can process the information.

*Provide them with agenda

*Call and send assessment information in enough time for the family to read through/talk through with you/ask questions.

(organize this with other team members as all of it at one time may be a lot to unpack and process)

*Send a draft if possible so that the parent's can see what will be discussed.

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*If others are invited to the meeting or have provided information for the meeting, particularly other outside professionals, get a release signed and begin communication with those professionals

During the Meeting:

★ ***Before the meeting, individually practice a grounding activity.***
(link)

★ ***How would you like to walk into a meeting with a lot of people sitting at a table?***

*Be mindful of positioning, timing, and body language as the family enters. Make the space as inviting and comfortable as possible. Remember, through the eyes of the family. Use information you have already gathered. Name cards and role written displayed in front of each person will help families know the team without having to remember everyone's name. When at all possible, enter the room with the family.

★ ***Break the ICE!***

*Make conversation either about their child, something you know about them to help make them more comfortable because they are coming with many emotions!

★ ***Designate roles in the meeting and go over the agenda and answer any questions regarding the agenda or roles. Address by name.***

★ ***Communication is KEY!***

* Monitor your tone, inflection, pace, volume, choice of words and body language. Everything that you are saying is important; however, be mindful of how it is being received. If you have done some behind the scenes prepping, this shouldn't be difficult! Be respectful. Listen to understand. Active listening requires you to reflect back on what you think they are saying.

*As families communicate concern, it requires action on your part to validate and address adequately in the meeting. Not addressing the concern shows lack of empathy and can be perceived as professionals who are more concerned with completing the process.

*The meeting is a conversation and should flow in that manner. ***This is not professional presentation of information.***

★ ***Read the cues. Take breaks if you need to.***

★ ***Before moving on, pause. Clarify any confusion. Remember this may not be verbal. Read the cues.***

★ ***Leave the meeting with the family.***

* It is intimidating for families to know that professionals are continuing to talk around the table. To know that the meeting has ended and everyone is moving on. Talk at another time.

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After the meeting:

- ★ ***Follow up with an email/phone call letting the family know that you are available if they have any other questions.***
- ★ ***Follow up with other professionals.***
 - *Communicate what needs to be done to make sure that the child will have the supports ready when he/she needs them. Timelines are important to keep as best you can. Make sure roles are clear to all team members.
- ★ Return to parental concerns to ensure that all concerns were somehow addressed. If not, develop a plan of action to address concerns/questions. Refer to [this chart](#).

Resources:

- ★ **[One district's efforts to support families understanding the IEP process](#)**