

PREPARING FOR SCHOOL MEETINGS



1. Determine type of meeting and its purpose.

Examples of Meeting Types:

Reevaluation determination, IEP renewal, Parent-Teacher Conference, Student-Led Conference, etc.



2. Ask for interpreter (if needed) and/or a pre-meeting with relevant school personnel to prepare.



3. Find out who is attending the meeting and their role.

If all relevant people are not able to attend the meeting, you can excuse them or ask to reschedule. Don't feel bad if you want to reschedule.



4. Find someone to go with you such as a family member, friend, or advocate. This person DOES NOT need to be an expert in special education.

Discuss what support you need at the meeting; agree on a game-plan. Support might include taking notes, asking questions, being another set of eyes/ears, or just being present.

Tell the school that s/he will be joining you.

DRAFT



5. Get a draft of all documentation ahead of time.

(e.g. evaluation, IEP, etc.)

Read everything and make a list of questions or concerns.



6. Identify the top 3-5 topics, questions, or concerns you want to discuss at the meeting. Remember, all questions are good questions!

Think of possible solutions to your concerns.



Discuss with the friend/family member going to the meeting with you.



7. Send your topics (and possible solutions) to the school a few days before the meeting.

Ask them to include your list in the agenda

Request the agenda be shared with you before the meeting.



8. Organize all your school documents in a binder or other filing device that is easy to carry.

Bring it to the meeting.



9. If possible, visit the school ahead of time, to see your child in the school environment. Children often behave differently at school compared to home.

BRING TO SCHOOL MEETINGS



1. Bring a snack to share; food often relaxes people.



2. Bring a picture or info sheet about your child; remind the team your child is a human being.



3. Bring a pen and notebook.



4. Bring all your notes, questions, drafts, binder or organizer with old documents.



5. Bring a friend, family member, or advocate.
This person does not have to be an expert in special education.

DURING SCHOOL MEETINGS

REMEMBER

- You are an EQUAL member of the team
- You know your child the best



1. Identify a note taker

Make sure this person sends a summary of the meeting to all members afterwards.



2. Don't excuse team members from meeting until you get the information you need from them.



3. Focus on one speaker

Don't allow side conversations



4. ASK QUESTIONS! All questions are good questions.

Remember: School staff think about this stuff all day, it's easy to forget that families do not.

EXAMPLE

5. Ask for examples. Especially when you don't understand something.

Examples could include work samples and data.



6. Make sure your questions are answered.

**See separate sheet "Strategies to Help Get Your Questions Answered"*



7. Keep an open mind and be kind; try not to become defensive or make assumptions.



8. Negotiate

"No" doesn't have to be the final answer.



9. Be clear about the next steps the timeline for follow up.

Remember, decisions are made as a TEAM, not just parents and not just school.



IDENTIFY WHO WILL DO WHAT AND WHEN



10. Say "Thank You"

AFTER SCHOOL MEETINGS



1. Send an email or letter that includes:

“Thank You”

Summary of the conversation including decisions, difference of opinion, and next steps.

Save a copy for your records.



2. Implement the next steps and timeline agreed upon; remind individuals or team as needed.



3. Continue regular activities that build positive relationships with the school.

Strategies to Help Get Your Questions Answered

1. UNDERSTAND the discussion

Professionals are used to talking in complex terms and often forget families don't know all the terminology and acronyms. Whenever you are uncertain about ANYTHING it is okay to say:

"Can you explain what you mean when you say _____?"

OR

**"Wait, I didn't quite understand that;
let's talk more about this before we move on."**

2. Understand WHY

Make sure you understand the reason you were given a specific answer. For example, you may have been told "no" because you were ineligible for a program.

"Can you explain why this is your answer?"

3. CLARIFY contradictions

When you are told something that doesn't make sense to you or it contradicts the information you have:

"Oh, that's different than what I've heard before, can you explain more about what you mean?"

OR

Repeat back what you think you were just told,
"Just to make sure I understand correctly, are you telling me that....."
When they give an answer: **"Ok, let me write that down so I don't forget."**

OR

"Can you show me where this rule is written so I can make sure I understand?"

IF NEEDED:

Discuss your situation with an advocacy organization.



4. EXPECT an answer

When the profession says “I will have to look into it”, “I don’t know”, or is unable to answer your request

“When should I expect to hear from you?”

Then: Write down the information you are waiting for, person responsible to get back to you, and the date you expect to hear from them. If you do not get a response, ask again (in writing). OR

“If you can’t help/answer my question, who can?”

5. DON’T TAKE “NO” for an answer

If you’ve asked for the same thing three times and still get “No” or no answer without a reasonable explanation of why:

Talk to the next person in charge such as the supervisor or program director.

OR

“If I can’t get _____, is there something else that might help us?”

OR

“If I can’t get _____ here, WHERE can I get it?”

STILL NO SOLUTION, THEN:

Discuss your situation with an advocacy organization.

6. Get ALL THE INFORMATION

It’s always good to ask:

“Is there anything else I should know?”

7. DOCUMENT - Get it in writing

When a decision is made to add or change a service:

“Can you please email (or mail) me the details so I don’t forget?”

8. FOLLOW UP

At the end of every meeting ask:

“Who should I talk to if I have any questions?”

Make sure to write down their name and contact information.