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KIDS TOGETHER, Inc.

Tips for Getting What Your Child Needs

Prepare for meetings - AVOID "SURPRISES"

- ✍ Find out who will be attending. Make sure key people (ex: regular and special ed. teachers, therapist, etc.) are attending.
- ✍ Ask for a person trained on inclusion and adaptations to facilitate the meeting.
- ✍ It is legally required that parents receive a written invitation to IEP meetings and that they are held at mutually convenient (a/k/a mutually inconvenient) times.
- ✍ Ask exactly what the meeting will cover. "Get to know you" meetings can end up being CER's and IEP's.
- ✍ Make sure enough time is allotted. Be sure there are start and finish times, and that key people will be attend entire time. Some IEP's are broken up into several shorter meetings. For a child with significant needs, planning can take 16 hours or longer. Total time should not belimited, keep rescheduling if not finished in the session's time limits.
- ✍ Get copies of any reports or evaluations that will be discussed, prior to the meeting. Nothing can throw off you ability to think clearly then having people over-analyze your child.
- ✍ Many professionals have not shifted to using strength-based evaluations. Listening to reports that describe what is wrong with your child, what he or she can't do, and how that compares to others can be very emotionally overwhelming.
- ✍ Plan to make the meeting festive, bring food, color and music (You're not planning a funeral. You're planning for your child's success, make it fun!)
- ✍ Prepare a vision statement for your child's future refer to the vision during all of your planning.
- ✍ Write a draft version of the IEP plan on collaborating with the team.
- ✍ Include family, friends and others who know your child to help you prepare.
- ✍ Write priorities.
- ✍ Decide what services, or supports etc. you feel you must get for your child, and which areas you may be willing to compromise if needed.
- ✍ Organize copies of laws, information and resources that address your child's needs. Include State and Federal laws covering special education services, interpretations of the laws ex: BEC's or Basic Education Circulars, resources and information on assistive technology that may help your child succeed information on inclusion, adaptations and training phone numbers ex: Education Law Center, Consult Line, advocates etc.

At the meetings

- ✍ Never go to a meeting alone! Take an advocate, an informed parent, family member, friend or neighbor.
- ✍ Sometimes meetings can end up emotional, unclear or even out of compliance It's good to have others on your side to help listen, clarify and support you.
- ✍ If possible spouses should always attend together.
- ✍ The child should always attend when appropriate.

- ✂ Reschedule if the key people are not present or there are other surprises.
- ✂ Let everyone know you asked ahead of time for this information.
- ✂ To be productive you need the right people and information to plan.
- ✂ Simply pick up your things and tell them to reschedule when it can be done right. [You don't have to sign the IEP if you don't like it, except to indicate that you were at the meeting. -- Jim]
- ✂ Begin IEP meetings by reading your child's vision statement. Hand out copies of your vision, if possible include a photo. This helps everyone get on the same page.
- ✂ Goals need to be based on achieving this vision, not deficits nor life skills.
- ✂ Have the facilitator write notes on large flip chart paper. This way everything discussed is clear and visible to all participants.
- ✂ Begin with one sheet for each area, ex: reading, math, social, self-help, behavioral. Draw a vertical line and begin by listing strengths on the left. Needs and goals can be listed on the right, use as many sheets as needed. Be clear in describing what you want and why. You can expect more collaboration when others understand exactly what it is you are asking of them and why.
- ✂ Don't just describe a service or device, tell how it will help your child learn and progress. Give a clear visual picture of what you think a situation will look like with your child having this.
- ✂ Be a good listener. Allow others to finish what they are saying, even if you disagree. Repeat back a summary of what they said to avoid miscommunication. Once they agree that you understand them, then go ahead and state your views.
- ✂ Get issues out in the open. Don't play mind games, get anything and everything that concerns you out on the table. Most people can't read minds, be up-front, confront the issues and be proactive. If you think that a teacher or school doesn't want your child in the regular class, tell the team this. You'll be surprised how much relief you'll feel by getting the issues out.
- ✂ Begin your statements with "I feel", "I think" etc. to help open up lines of communication.
- ✂ Avoid arguing over issues that are not leading to planning your child's success. Don't get drawn into other issues such as funding, training, etc. First write an appropriate IEP.
- ✂ Jot a note to place in front of you at the meeting. "Does this topic lead toward my child's success." Glance at this note throughout the meeting and if you find a topic isn't appropriate interrupt and ask to get back to planning for your individual child's success.
- ✂ Take a break. If information is overwhelming, emotional or confusing take a ten minute break. Use this time to reorganize, refresh, energize, make phone calls, collaborate with others helping you attend the meeting. Decide if you can go on, or need to reschedule.
- ✂ Insist on positive language used to describe your child. Parents are team members and have a right. Reports need to state what your child can do and then what is expected.
- ✂ IEP's are for individuals, comparative information to others is not needed.
- ✂ If you can't get the language rephrased positively, file a dissenting opinion.
- ✂ Every service and support needed for your child must be written in the IEP. IEP's are legally binding contracts. If its not in there they don't have to provide it.
- ✂ If told something doesn't have to be in writing, explain, you are protecting your child's rights. IEP's must be implemented with 10 days, including providing assistive technology that is listed.
- ✂ You could allow flexibility to show that you are willing to work with the team, but don't get taken advantage of.
- ✂ Have periodic planning meetings written into the IEP. Plan on the front line

- staff, those working directly with your child, to meet regularly. Start out with weekly meetings and if all is going well move to biweekly, then monthly.
- ✂ Behavior plans must be a part of the IEP. If a child's behavior interferes with his or her learning, a behavior plan is required.
 - ✂ Have training and supports for staff included in the IEP.
 - ✂ Review the IEP before accepting it. Be sure the goals are realistic, achievable, objective, measurable and academic in nature. Make sure all areas are addressed, including extended school year, transition and supports. Check that if assistive technology needed there is full time access and it is written into the goals.
 - ✂ The system never determines your child's program. What your child needs is not determined by what is available, its based only on your child. You don't have to accept statements like, we don't have the funding, training, or staff for that.
 - ✂ Special education is a service, not a place. Services follow the child. It doesn't matter what is being done for any other child, you are only planning for you own.
 - ✂ If the team will not write down something your child needs, you must be given a NORA.
 - ✂ Get it in writing, who is responsible for implementing each part.
 - ✂ Who is going to coordinate all team members in addressing your child's goals? Who will be making adaptations and modifications, scheduling trainings, ordering devices?
 - ✂ Who will be looking at daily class activities and determining what it will look like for your child?
 - ✂ Before people leave schedule any necessary follow-up meetings. When all goes well, (It can happen!) give positive reinforcement to team members. Thank everyone for attending, and working toward your child's success.

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This is still a rough draft, and will be updated with more ideas.