PACER CENTER
ACTION
INFORMATION SHEETS

How Can My Child Be Involved in the IEP Process?

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA 2004) states that a child should attend his or her individualized education program (IEP) conference, if appropriate. Each family must decide if the child should attend, based on individual circumstances. Families who include their child in the IEP meetings report that the child's presence puts the focus on the child.

The child must be invited any time transition needs or services are discussed. In Minnesota, transition must be addressed by age 14 or Grade 9. It is essential that adolescents participate in IEP development because this is a major part of their lives, and they need to take charge of it as much as possible.

Children need as much practice in self-advocacy as possible before they turn 18, when parental rights transfer to the special education student, unless guardianship or conservatorship has been established. Self-advocacy skills prepare students for the world and their future beyond high school.

The IEP conference provides an excellent opportunity for self-advocacy and learning important life skills by helping the student:

- practice goal-setting and teamwork
- understand the impact of his or her disability
- learn how to ask for and accept help from others
- understand his or her own strengths and needs
- express his or her own needs and concerns
- participate in a process of resolving differences

Some parents have concerns about involving their children in IEP meetings. Here are some common questions you can ask to help decide how best to involve your child.

I think my child is too young to participate.

Ask your child if she has anything she'd like you to share at the meeting. Afterward, sit down with your child to explain the goals you and the school discussed for the next year. Talk with your child about these goals before you sign the IEP.

I've never taken my child before.

Discuss the meeting process with your child. Would he like to attend or would he like to attend part of the meeting (at the beginning to introduce himself and his interests or at the end to review what the team has proposed)? Would your child be willing to share ideas and opinions at the meeting or on paper? How would your child react if something negative were said about him?

My child chooses not to attend.

Discuss what your child would like you to say to the team on her behalf. Consider taking notes to read at the meeting, or read what your child has written. Ask your child:

- What do you want to learn this year?
- What are your special concerns for this school year?
- How do you learn the best?
- What do you need to be successful?
- What would make learning easier for you?

The meetings are too stressful, too negative for my child.

Talk with your child about what he wants to say. Help him phrase and practice statements before the meeting, or help him write notes or an outline of what to say. Consider inviting your child to only part of the meeting. Ask your child to share his strengths, interests, and accomplishments at the beginning of the meeting. You can also let him invite someone who will help him feel more comfortable. If a meeting becomes too difficult for your child, the meeting can be stopped or the child could be allowed to leave.

My child attended, and it didn't work.

Rethink the circumstances and what happened. Can any of the above suggestions be tried? Don't let one incident determine that the child will never participate again.

For more ideas, contact one of PACER's parent advocates at (952) 838-9000.

PACER CENTER
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