

*Question: What are the most important things parents should do to prepare for an IEP meeting?*

**Carolyn Fiume's Answer:**

Great question! Entire books have been written on this subject, so I am going to try and hit the highlights. My first suggestion is that if a parent has a question about any part of the process or would like assistance in preparing for a meeting, please feel free to call me at 410-991-2863 or e-mail me at [cfiume@thearcctr.org](mailto:cfiume@thearcctr.org).

- A few weeks or a month before the meeting think about what you want your child to achieve this year, what your goals are for the child and what are your child's strengths and weaknesses. Make some notes as you discuss this.
- Gather documents relating to your child in a file or three ring binder. Include all reports by outside evaluators or service providers. Read this over before the meeting- it will give you a sense of the big picture and may remind you of strategies that worked with your child.
- If you have any outside providers or evaluators (developmental pediatrician, psychologist, speech , OT, PT) discuss your child's upcoming IEP and any suggestions they might have as to goals, measurable outcomes .
- Review the draft IEP sent home by the school. Put together a list of questions and concerns to bring to the meeting.
- As one well known advocate states IEPs should be "SMART : specific, measurable, use action words, realistic and relevant and time-limited." Here is what that means:
  - Specific- Your IEP should have specific goals and objectives which "target areas of academic achievement and functional performance. They should include a clear description of knowledge and skills that will be taught and how the child will be measured."
  - Measurable- You should be able to count or observe it. This helps determine when a child achieves the goal and how much progress has been made since it was last measured.
  - Action words-these words should include the direction the behavior will go, the area it impacts and what level will be reached. For example, John will be able to increase study skills by using reference materials in social studies class without assistance.
  - Realistic and relevant- do these goals address the child unique needs and are the relevant to the skills she needs?
  - Time-limited: measure monthly, quarterly or some end point

Some parents take the concepts above and draft goals that are SMART to take to the meeting. If that is tough for you, write up a statement of your child's strengths and weakness so you can bring this knowledge to the team.

- At the meeting, listen and ask questions (Who, What, Why, Where, When, How and Explain). This will help team members report observations and facts rather than

opinions. I find that it helps to try to restate what was said or say “I’m confused...I hear that to mean XYZ.” I find that positive and respectful communication on both sides is the key. Be specific as possible about your child’s abilities and needs.

- Remember that you are negotiating for special education services and supports. To that end:
  - a. Try to prepare solutions that may resolve a problem,
  - b. Stick to the facts-blaming and criticizing usually backfire
  - c. Try to separate the personal relationship from the issue
  - d. Try to step into the shoes of the school personnel-what are their perceptions and interests?
  - e. Consider that a compromise solution may be a win-win for everyone
- Bring food if it is going to be a long meeting. I bring breakfast or lunch to share. It relaxes people and lets them know you understand they will be in meetings likely all day.
- Remember you have the right to bring anyone you wish to the meeting. Sometimes it is helpful to bring a friend or relative who is not the parent of the child to help ask questions and take in information. I am also available to attend meetings or I can refer you to some excellent advocates that work well with the school system.

