How to walk into an IEP meeting ready.

Esta lección en español

What it is. An **IEP** (Individualized Education Program) is the written plan a public school must follow for a child who qualifies for special education under the federal law called IDEA. The meeting is where the team writes or changes it — and you, the parent, are a full member of that team by law, not a guest.

Why it matters. Most parents get sixty minutes, a stack of pages they have never seen, and a table of professionals. One evening of preparation turns that around: you arrive with the data, the questions and the asks, and the meeting runs on your agenda as much as theirs.

THE METHOD

How to prepare yourself: eight steps, one evening.

1. **Ask for the draft IEP and any evaluation reports at least three days before, in writing.** An email is fine. Many schools will send them; you cannot review at the table what you are seeing for the first time.
2. **Read the present levels first** (often called PLAAFP). Is this your child? Mark anything that does not match what you see at home, with one example each.
3. **Bring your own data.** Two weeks of what you see at home, on one page: the 4-term sheet or a graph. Numbers change a meeting; adjectives do not.
4. **Read each goal with the stranger test.** Next to each one write: measured how? by whom? what is the baseline? If you cannot answer from the page, that is a question for the table.

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5. **Write your top three asks, in order.** One sentence each. “A behavior plan based on a functional behavior assessment.” “Data shared with me monthly.” “Speech twice a week.”
6. **Write your questions.** “How will I know by December that this is working?” “What happens on a bad day?” “Who do I call?”
7. **In the meeting:** you may bring anyone — an advocate, a BCBA, a friend to take notes. You may ask to take the IEP home before agreeing to it; in most states, a signature at the meeting only records that you attended, and consent to changes is a separate step — ask which one you are signing. If the school refuses something you asked for, ask for **prior written notice**: the law requires the refusal, and the reason, in writing.
8. **Within a week, email a thank-you** listing the decisions as you understood them and any open items with a name and a date. That email is your record.

WORKED EXAMPLE

Jordan, age eight.

Made-up example. The names and numbers below are invented to show the method.

Jordan’s parent brought two weeks of home 4-term data showing homework refusal on four of five evenings, and three asks: a functional behavior assessment leading to a behavior plan; homework capped at fifteen minutes while the assessment ran; and a monthly data email.

Ask	Team’s answer	What the parent did
FBA and behavior plan	Agreed; 45 days	Asked who would run it and got a name

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Homework capped at 15 minutes	Declined until the FBA was done	Asked for prior written notice; received it the following week, with the reason
Monthly data email	Agreed	Wrote the first due date on the meeting sheet

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Two of three, one declined in writing with a reason, and a follow-up meeting on the calendar. Nothing was signed at the table; the parent took the draft home, read it that evening, and returned it signed two days later.

MISTAKES TO AVOID

The pressure points.

- Signing at the table because the hour is up. You may take it home.
- Accepting “we don’t do that here” without asking for it in writing.
- Bringing feelings without one example each. “He’s miserable” becomes “he cried before school 7 of the last 10 days; here are the dates.”
- Not asking who collects the data and how often you will see it.
- Going alone when you did not have to.

TRY IT

One question, then the answer.

The school says: “We can’t start a behavior plan until spring.” What do you ask for, in what words?

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▼ Show the answer, and why

Prior written notice. “Please put that refusal in writing, with the reason, as prior written notice.” The law requires the school to state what it is refusing and why. It creates the record, it often changes the answer, and it costs you one sentence. Write the date you asked on your meeting sheet.

Something to keep

One-page meeting sheet.

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Child	Meeting date	Who will be there

What I am seeing at home (with numbers and dates)

Coming up (transitions, evaluations, authorization dates)

My three asks, in order	Answer	In writing? (PWN requested)
1.		
2.		

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3.		

My questions	Answers

Open items	Who	By when

WHERE DRAGEN HELPS

The sheet fills itself in.

The DRAGENfamily hub builds this one-page sheet from what you have logged and counts down the review and authorization dates so none of them sneaks up. The paper version above works tonight.

Free on this page, and yours to keep: the lesson and its printable sheet. No email, no login.

SOURCE

Where this comes from.

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IDEA, 20 U.S.C. §1414(d), makes parents members of the IEP team; 34 C.F.R. §300.503 requires prior written notice when a school proposes or refuses a change. Every state has a federally funded Parent Training and Information Center — find yours at parentcenterhub.org. State rules on signatures and consent differ; your state's center will know them.

Examples on this page are made up. They contain no client, student or family information. This lesson teaches a method; it does not replace your child's care team, your BCBA, or your payer's written rules.

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