

# IEP Meeting Preparation Checklist

*You know your child better than anyone at that table. This checklist will help you walk into your IEP meeting feeling prepared, confident, and ready to advocate for what your child needs.*

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## 2-3 Weeks Before: Gather & Reflect

### Review What You Have

- ☐ Read through the current IEP (yes, the whole thing—I know it's dense)
- ☐ Look at recent progress reports and report cards
- ☐ Collect any evaluations: psychological, educational, speech, OT, etc.
- ☐ Gather behavior logs, incident reports, or communication from teachers
- ☐ Pull out anything that shows your child's **strengths** (we'll need those too!)
- ☐ **Request copies of any new reports or evaluations in advance** so you have time to review them

### Get Expert Help If You Need It

- ☐ If there's psychological testing or complex evaluations, **ask an advocate or psychologist to help you understand them before the meeting**
- ☐ Don't walk in confused—get clarity ahead of time so you can participate fully
- ☐ Request an interpreter if you need one (the school must provide this—ask early!)

### Notice What's Really Happening

- ☐ What's going well at home? At school? (Start here—seriously)
- ☐ What's harder than it should be? Be specific: homework? transitions? friendships?
- ☐ Are there patterns? (Meltdowns on Mondays? Anxiety before tests?)
- ☐ What's changed since the last IEP? Growth? New challenges? Different needs?

### Get Clear on What Matters Most

- ☐ Write down your top 3 priorities for this meeting (what would make the biggest difference?)
- ☐ What accommodations or services do you want to add, change, or keep?
- ☐ What questions are keeping you up at night?
- ☐ What does success look like for your child this year?

## 1 Week Before: Prepare Your Story

### Organize Your Thoughts

- ☐ Complete the IEP Meeting Preparation Worksheet

### Connect with the Team

- ☐ Confirm the meeting details: date, time, location (or Zoom link)
- ☐ Ask who's attending (and invite anyone you want there)
- ☐ **Request draft documents and any new evaluation reports ahead of time** (it's okay to ask!)
- ☐ Share your main concerns in advance—no surprises helps everyone
- ☐ Bring a support person if that feels right (a friend, advocate, or partner)
- ☐ If you need an interpreter, confirm the school has arranged one
- ☐ If you want to record the meeting, ask the IEP team about it in advance

### Handle the Logistics

- ☐ Arrange childcare if you need it
  - ☐ **Block off up to 3 hours**—meetings can run long, especially for initial IEPs, complex situations, or if there are disagreements
  - ☐ Plan to arrive 10 minutes early (or log in early for virtual meetings)
  - ☐ Pack water, snacks, tissues, phone charger—whatever helps you stay grounded
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## The Night Before: Ground Yourself

### Final Prep

- ☐ Review your notes and your top priorities
- ☐ Practice saying your main concern out loud (it helps, I promise)
- ☐ Pack your materials: documents, notebook, pen, questions
- ☐ Get some rest—you've got this

### Emotional Check-In

- ☐ Remind yourself: **You are the expert on your child**

- ☐ Plan something kind for yourself after the meeting (a walk, a call with a friend, your favorite coffee)
- ☐ Identify who you'll debrief with afterward
- ☐ Set an intention: "I'm going to stay calm, curious, and focused on solutions"

## During the Meeting: You Belong at This Table

### Stay Present & Engaged

- ☐ Take notes (or ask someone to take them for you)
- ☐ Ask for clarification whenever something's unclear—this is your right
- ☐ Request a break if you need one (bathrooms exist for a reason, and these meetings can be long)
- ☐ Keep the focus on your child's needs, not blame or defensiveness
- ☐ Push for goals that are **specific and measurable** (vague goals don't help anyone)

### Questions That Matter

- ☐ "How will we know if this is working? What does progress look like?"
- ☐ "Who's responsible for implementing this, and when does it start?"
- ☐ "How often will we check in on progress?"
- ☐ "What happens if this plan isn't working? What's our backup?"
- ☐ "Can you help me understand what this means in practice?"

### Before You Leave—Know Your Rights

- ☐ Confirm next steps and who's doing what
- ☐ Ask when you'll get the final IEP document
- ☐ Clarify who to contact with questions (and get their email/phone)
- ☐ Thank the team—collaboration matters, even when it's hard

### You Don't Have to Sign Today

- ☐ **You are NOT required to sign a document you don't agree with**
- ☐ If something doesn't feel right, you can say: "I need time to think about this. Can we schedule another meeting to continue?"
- ☐ You have the right to end the meeting and reconvene after you've had time to gather more information, consult with an advocate or attorney, or just process

- ☐ The IEP often won't go into effect until you sign, but **it's more important to feel confident in what you're agreeing to**
- ☐ Taking time is not being difficult—it's being thorough

## After the Meeting: Follow Through

### Right Away

- ☐ Review your notes while they're fresh
- ☐ Write down your action items (and the school's commitments)
- ☐ Check in with yourself: How are you feeling? What do you need?
- ☐ Debrief with your support person

### Within a Week

- ☐ Send a brief thank-you email that summarizes key decisions (creates a paper trail)
- ☐ Request the finalized IEP if you haven't received it
- ☐ Read the IEP document carefully—does it match what was agreed?
- ☐ Mark your calendar for progress reports and the next annual review

### Keep the Momentum Going

- ☐ Set reminders to check in on how things are going
- ☐ Keep a simple log: What's working? What's not?
- ☐ Document concerns as they come up (dates, details, who you talked to)
- ☐ Stay in touch with the team—don't wait for problems to communicate

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## Real Talk: Tips from the Trenches

### Lead with Strengths

Start every concern with something your child does well. “Maya’s incredibly creative, and she thrives with visual supports. I’m noticing she’s struggling with written assignments—could we try...?”

### Use Specific Examples

“Last Tuesday, he needed 45 minutes and three reminders to start his math homework” is more powerful than “He never does his homework.”

### **Know Your Rights (But Don't Lead with Them)**

You have rights under IDEA. You can disagree. You can request changes. But collaboration usually gets you further than confrontation.

### **You Don't Have to Decide Everything Today**

If something doesn't feel right, it's okay to say, "I need to think about this. Can we reconvene?" You're allowed to take your time.

### **Get Help Understanding Complex Reports**

Psychological testing, educational assessments, and medical evaluations can be confusing. Ask an advocate, psychologist, or trusted professional to help you understand them before the meeting so you can advocate effectively.

### **Bring Backup When You Need It**

If meetings feel overwhelming, bring someone who can help you stay focused: a friend, an advocate, a therapist who knows your child.

### **This Is Hard—Be Kind to Yourself**

IEP meetings are emotionally exhausting. Plan something restorative afterward. You're doing important work.

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*You know your child's laugh, their fears, their brilliance, and their struggles. That knowledge matters. Your voice matters. And you don't have to do this alone.*

**Need support preparing for your IEP meeting?** I offer IEP consultation and advocacy support for families navigating special education. Visit **drrosso.org** or email **Stephanie@DrRosso.org** to learn more.