FOR THE DAYS BEFORE

Your first IEP meeting: a prep checklist

The email arrives: "IEP Meeting Scheduled." Your stomach drops a little. Should you prepare something? What if they ask questions you can't answer? These are fair questions. The parents and caregivers who feel most confident aren't the ones who memorized special education law. They're the ones who did a few simple things to prepare.

In the days before the meeting

- [ ] **Read the meeting notice.** It should include the date, time and location, the purpose of the meeting, and who will attend (by title, like "special education teacher").
- [ ] **Check the date.** If it doesn't work for you, say so now. You can ask for a different time.
- [ ] **Ask for any draft documents in advance.** Some states, including Virginia and Illinois, require the school to send a draft IEP before the meeting. If yours doesn't, you can still ask.
- [ ] **Read the draft and jot down questions.** Then you can have a conversation instead of reacting in the moment.
- [ ] **Write down 2 or 3 things** you want the team to know about your child at home (page 2).
- [ ] **Pick one question** you want answered before you leave (page 2).
- [ ] **Decide if you want to bring someone.** A friend, family member or advocate gives you an extra set of ears, especially if you're feeling emotional or overwhelmed.

Who's at the table

Sometimes there are three or four people across the table. Sometimes there are seven or eight. Either way, don't let the number rattle you. Everyone there has a specific role.

You	The expert on your child.
Special education teacher	Coordinates services and writes many of the goals.
General education teacher	Shares how your child is doing in the regular classroom.
District representative	Someone with authority to commit district resources.

Each person has one piece of the picture. You have a piece too, and it's one they can't get anywhere else.

What only you can share

If you only do one thing before the meeting, do this. It doesn't take any special knowledge of special education law. Write down 2 or 3 things the team can't see at school. For example:

"Emma loves to read but gets really frustrated when she can't sound out a new word."

"Marcus follows multi-step directions at home much better when I use visual cues."

"Lily uses her words to ask for help at home, but I've noticed she shuts down when she's anxious."

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Share these during the "Present Levels" part of the meeting. They remind the team that your child is a whole person, not a set of test scores.

Your one question

You don't need a list of ten questions. Just one good one that matters to you. Some that work:

"What does success look like for my child by the end of this school year?"

"How will I know if the services are actually working?"

"What can I be doing at home to support these goals?"

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Having one question ready shows the team you're an active participant, not someone there to sign paperwork.

You're the expert on your child. You don't have to figure this out alone.

Want help with this? Book a free 15-minute call at myaccessadvocacy.com.

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