

Chapter 3

Strategies, Tips, and Language to Support Parent and Educators Through the IEP Process

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ABSTRACT

This chapter provides strategies, tips, and language through the IEP process from the first person perspective of a parent turned parent-advocate. This chapter shares with educators what the experience is like from a parent side of the table and the emotions involved. It also is meant to help build a knowledge base for parents and encouragement from the author's perspective as a parent. Lastly, this chapter shows that there are ways to bring the student's voice into their IEP regardless of their communication ability.

INTRODUCTION

I have a BA in Organizational Studies, but my real education didn't start until I started attending IEP meetings in 2013 when my ASD, Level 1 son was 3. This learning has been all self-directed from finding resources to the "practicum" of attending meetings. There is so much more at stake than just a grade...it is your child's future. There were times when the meetings with school were so contentious and felt so high stakes for me, that I would get sick in the 24 hours leading up to the meeting and because of the behavioral challenges my son was having, the IEP

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meetings were monthly. When you are in this on-the-job training and you need help, there is no advisor to help guide you... but it doesn't mean it has to be that way. It's time to change this for parents. IEP meetings can be overwhelming and intimidating, especially in the beginning of the process. The three most important things a parent can do are get familiar with the system, prepare for meetings and don't ever attend meetings alone.

Creating and updating IEPs in IEP meetings parents need specific strategies, tips and language to support positive outcomes. The following chapter will outline specific strategies, tips and language that I have learned as a parent and later as an Individual Education Plan Consultant. It is my hope that this information will help other parents effectively collaborate with educators to enrich their child's learning experiences.

FIGURE OUT THE LINGO

The first thing I advise parents to do is familiarize themselves with the alphabet soup of the special ed world- all of the acronyms there are about 150 of them out there. A great resource is www.iephelpstl.com. If there is a term which is unfamiliar, ask or look it up before the meeting.

I don't remember much about my first IEP Meeting. It went so fast, and we knew my son qualified for services. After all, at the ripe age of 3, he had already been expelled from 3 preschools and reduced to 90 minutes attendance for another and he had major behavioral challenges. There were so many abbreviations and acronyms, I just nodded, completely lost but not wanting to admit it.

NEXT, LEARN YOUR RIGHTS!

There are three ways to learn about rights. One, take the time to search and read free IDEA law, some case information and weed through lawyer talk. This is minimal financial cost but expensive time cost. Second, take a "Wrightslaw" training course (<https://www.wrightslaw.com/>). This includes on demand lectures, books and newsletter. There is a financial cost and a time cost.

However, the benefit of self-advocating is unparalleled. Lastly, you can hire your own advocate. This is high in financial cost and much lower in time cost.

I believe a child's best advocate is the parents, so I advise Wrightslaw training, books and resources along with advocates when you need them, as sounding board,

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