**What is an IEP?**
IEP stands for Individualized Education Program and is the legal document that lays out a student’s special education program.

**How do I know what my child’s rights are?** The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) guarantees students with disabilities a free appropriate public education (FAPE). You can find the text of the law at [http://idea.ed.gov/download/statute.html](http://idea.ed.gov/download/statute.html).

**What is on the IEP?** The IEP includes information such as the student’s current performance, annual goals, services to be provided, accommodations, and anything else related to how your student will be taught at his or her school.

**How does my child get an IEP?** Make a request in writing to the school principal and your child’s teacher, outlining your concerns. The school has 10 days to respond and 60 days to determine eligibility and evaluate your child. Following that, the initial IEP meeting must take place within 30 days. The school is required to send a copy of the draft IEP to the parent at least 5 days prior to the meeting date.

**How can they deny services if my child has a disability?** The school system is required to give your child a free appropriate public education. This means that they only have to address issues that affect your child’s ability to access the school curriculum. When preparing for an IEP meeting, be sure to consider how his or her issues affect her at school.

**What is the difference between an IEP and a 504 Plan?** An IEP typically provides services for students with disabilities while 504 provide accommodations. Think of it this way: Will it cost the school money in terms of staffing or materials? It is likely to be a service.

**Who is on the IEP team?** The IEP team includes a special educator as well as a general educator if your student spends any time in an inclusion setting. It must include someone qualified to interpret evaluations, such as a psychologist or specialized therapist. It must include someone with the authority to allocate resources. This could be a principal or it could be an individual from the school district. Most importantly, the team includes the parent and the student.

**Should my child attend the IEP meeting?** Once your child is old enough to participate, he or she should definitely attend meetings and have a say in how his or her education will be planned. After all, who has better insight on what would help your child than your child?

**My student has an IEP. Am I done?** No. Just because the school has created an IEP doesn’t mean they will follow it. Be sure to stay in contact with the school and your child’s teacher to ensure that the IEP is being implemented. Remember, the school is required by law to hold an IEP meeting at least once per calendar year to update the IEP, but you can request a periodic IEP meeting at any time, after which the school will have 30 days to hold a meeting.
How can I prepare for an IEP meeting?

• **Understand that you have to prepare.** You are an essential part of the team. Make sure that when you walk into the meeting, you have ideas about what your child needs and that you have the documentation to back up those ideas.

• **Get organized.** Make sure that you have all the documentation you need, including private evaluations, communication logs, and reports from the school at your fingertips so you can access them if need be.

• **Know the law.** Make sure you are familiar with IDEA and what it entitles your child to. It is not unheard of for school staff to intentionally or accidentally misinterpret the law. Don’t be afraid to challenge statements that don’t seem right.

• **Read up about special education.** There are many excellent books to help prepare you for an IEP meeting. From Emotions to Advocacy by Pete and Pam Wright is one of the best.

• **Know what you want.** Before the meeting, make sure you know what you think your child needs. Your opinion might change at the meeting, but if you know what you want, it is easier to ask questions and create an appropriate IEP.

• **Know that you are part of the IEP team.** You are not at the meeting to listen to what the school wants to do for your child. You are there to help craft the document. You are no less important than any other member of the team. You are also entitled to bring other people to the meeting, be they a partner, a friend to take notes, or an attorney or advocate. Just inform the IEP team at least 24 hours in advance.

• **Help the team see your child as a person instead of just a stack of documents.** Consider creating a document about your child to present at the meeting, listing his strengths, weaknesses, likes, dislikes, and needs. Include quotes from reports and evaluations that support your position.

• **Don’t forget about the goals.** It is important that they are specific and measurable. There are many online resources to help you come up with goals.

• **Document everything.** Make sure everything from services you requested but didn’t get to notes detailing telephone calls from the school are written down. There is a saying regarding IEP proceedings: If it isn’t in writing, it didn’t happen.

Resources for IEP meetings:

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<td>Wrightslaw - <a href="http://www.wrightslaw.com">www.wrightslaw.com</a></td>
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<td>Council of Parent Attorneys and Advocates - <a href="http://www.copaa.org">www.copaa.org</a></td>
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<td>US Department of Education - idea.ed.gov</td>
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**RESOURCES:**

 autisticadvocacy.org

autismacceptancemonth.org