

Autism IEP Starter Kit for Parents

Print this. Fill it in. Bring it with you.

Your first IEP meeting can feel like walking into a room full of people who already know the process while you're learning it in real time. You have real, legally protected rights in this process, and a small set of questions and preparation steps go a long way toward making sure the plan actually fits your child.

The short version: an IEP is a legally binding plan, you are a required member of the team (not a guest), you don't have to sign anything at the meeting, and you can request changes or dispute the plan if it doesn't fit your child.

Your Core Rights

- **You are a required participant.** Schools must invite you to every IEP meeting and schedule it at a mutually agreeable time — this isn't a courtesy, it's federal law (IDEA).
- **You get written notice before changes.** The school must notify you in writing before evaluating your child, before the initial placement, and before most subsequent changes to services.
- **You can review every record.** You have the right to see all school records related to your child, including evaluations, at any time.
- **You can request an independent evaluation.** If you disagree with the school's evaluation, you can request (and in many cases have the district fund) an independent educational evaluation.
- **You do not have to sign at the meeting.** You can take the draft home, review it, and respond later. Signing typically means you consent to it going into effect.
- **You can dispute a decision.** Mediation and due process are formal routes if you and the school can't agree — your state's Parent Training and Information (PTI) center guides families through this for free.

The 5 Questions to Ask at Every IEP Meeting

1. **What specific, measurable goals are we setting, and how will progress be measured?** "Improve communication" is not measurable. "Use 3-word requests independently in 4 of 5 opportunities" is.
2. **What services and supports is my child actually receiving, in hours per week?** Speech, OT, a 1:1 aide, behavior support — get the real number, not a vague description.
3. **Is this the Least Restrictive Environment for my child right now?** Ask specifically how much time is spent in general education vs. a separate setting, and why.
4. **How and when will I be updated on progress before the next annual review?** You shouldn't have to wait a full year to find out a goal isn't working.

5. **What happens if my child isn't making progress on a goal?** Ask what the school's plan is for adjusting the approach — not just documenting that it isn't working.

Meeting-Prep Checklist

- Request the draft IEP and any new evaluation reports before the meeting, not at the table.
- Write down your top 3 concerns and what specific change you want to see.
- Bring your own notes on what's working and not working at home — schools value real examples.
- Decide whether to bring an advocate, therapist, or support person — you're allowed to.
- Bring a notebook or recorder (check your state's consent-to-record rules first) to track what's agreed.
- Know you can pause the meeting and ask for time before signing anything.

If you disagree with the plan: you don't have to accept it as written. You can request revisions, ask for another meeting, or use your state's mediation or due process procedures. Your state's [Parent Training and Information \(PTI\) center](#) provides this guidance free of charge.

Disclaimer: This guide provides general information about the IEP process under federal law (IDEA), not legal advice. Procedures and timelines vary by state and district. For guidance specific to your situation, contact your state's Parent Training and Information (PTI) center or a special education advocate/attorney.

Related: [ABA Denied? A Step-by-Step Appeal Kit](#) | [Does Insurance Cover ABA? State-by-State Guide](#) | [Resources for Parents](#)