

## Ask the Advocate... by Desiree Vandelac

### The ABCs of IEPs - Part 2

Welcome back to "The ABC's of IEP", a multi part series to help you navigate the IEP process more easily. If you have missed previous articles you may retrieve copies from the ASBC website.



**Take notes and listen to what is being said and offered-** It is very easy to get caught up in what you want to say and what you want to have happen and not really hear what other team members are saying. I recommend taking notes on a yellow legal pad using a light pencil. This will help to insure that your notes are private.

**Tape all meetings using a micro cassette recorder-** Before the meeting starts, request to tape the meeting and be sure to place the recorder on the table in plain view of everyone at the table. Recording the meeting allows you to go back and review what happened, what was said and by whom. This is a wonderful tool to assist you in writing a "Thank You" letter after the IEP meeting and allows other critical people, such as your spouse, to participate and understand what took place during the meeting and to provide their input via a letter to the IEP team. I recommend using a micro cassette recorder and keeping all of the tapes just in case the tapes need to be transcribed in the future. In my experience many transcriptionists will only work from micro cassettes.

**Consider having only one parent attend the meetings-** If there is only one parent at the IEP meeting it often leads to more discussion between the parents after the IEP meeting as you listen to the IEP meeting tape together and one parent has the role of "filling in" the other. Furthermore, I have found the less people that are at IEP meetings the more productive the meetings are.

**Provide input when appropriate-** Don't be afraid to speak up. Remember *YOU* are the expert on *YOUR* child! If you have something to say make sure you say it. For example if the team is contemplating strategies to help your child stay on task in the classroom and one of the strategies proposed is for the teacher to place her hand on your child's shoulder and you know your child is very sensitive to unexpected touch be sure to inform the team members that the proposed intervention is inappropriate and why.

**Never write on any documents-** Remember you want a "pristine" copy of all documents for your files. If you feel you absolutely must write on it do it lightly in pencil. When I need to take a note that is referenced to a specific part of a document I lightly number the relevant section then reference that number in my notes. It's minimizes the writing on the document but still allows me an easy and quick reference to the item in question. For example if I have a concern about a specific IEP goal I will write #1 next to the goal in question and then #1 on my note pad and make my notes on the note pad.

**If the school gives you a document make sure you keep it-** Recently I have run into a situation where the school would provide copies of a "draft" IEP to the parents and participants at an IEP meeting and then insist on collecting these documents back at the end of the IEP meeting with the promise to provide the "final" copy to the parents at a future date. Do not let this happen. You want a copy of the "draft" IEP for your records as well as a copy of the "final" IEP. When you get the "final" IEP make sure you compare it to the "draft" IEP as well as your notes as to changes to the "draft" that were agreed upon at the IEP meeting. Insist on keeping everything you are handed. Also keep documents that you feel may no longer be relevant. Years ago, when I attended my first IEP meeting as a parent I threw out the meeting announcement after the IEP meeting. At the time I thought "Well the meeting is over, I don't need this anymore." WRONG! You never know when you will need a document. Recently I was in a situation where I absolutely needed a copy of a meeting announcement to document that the IEP meeting in question was indeed an IEP meeting and not an "informal meeting" as the school asserted.

**After the IEP meeting write a "Thank you" letter to the IEP team-** In this letter express your understanding of what took place during the IEP meeting, issues that were raised, decisions that were made, issues that are unresolved, anything the school agreed to, and any continuing concerns you may have. Make sure these letters (and for that matter all of your letters to the school) are polite and professional. Wrightslaw: *From Emotions to Advocacy 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition* has an entire chapter devoted to letter writing, including sample letters. This book really is a "must have." If you buy only one book to help you navigate through the world of special education this is the book to buy.

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Email your questions to "Ask the Advocate" at [advocate@autismboulder.org](mailto:advocate@autismboulder.org). While I cannot respond directly to you, I will try to answer all of your questions in this column.

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