



Tips for School Meetings

Conferences and meetings at school can be stressful for parents and professionals. Although there can be conflict and views can differ, remember everyone's goal is to meet the student's needs. Clearly conveying the child's strengths and needs, as well as your expectations for the future, is critical for meeting this goal. Below are strategies parents can use to make meetings more productive and less stressful.

- 1. Confirm the Meeting:** Confirm you will attend the meeting. For children with special needs, a conference may include a team of professionals. In most cases, the entire team will be present. However, if you feel a specific person is critical to the meeting, confirm they are attending. Be sure to arrive on time so the meeting starts with the right tone.
- 2. Prepare:** Write a list of your child's accomplishments in the last year. Include areas the professionals have worked on as well as skills you have worked on at home. During the meeting, mention the child's progress since the last meeting. Have a list of skills you feel are critical to your child's development in the next year. Writing information down in advance ensures all critical information is covered and your point of view is expressed. In addition to bringing notes, be sure to take notes during the meeting so you do not miss important information.
- 3. Use Concrete Examples:** Include concrete examples of progress, areas of concern, and expectations for the future in your notes. For example, "John is sitting in his seat for the duration of math and literacy and he is completing his work independently. His behavior was a concern at one time; therefore, he was spending two hours a day with a resource teacher. Since his skills have improved greatly in this area, I think he is ready to be in the regular classroom with support as needed. Are you seeing this progress? Can we provide this support to make him more independent?"
- 4. Listen and Ask Questions:** Although some information may be difficult to hear, be sure to listen to professionals in order to understand their position. If you have questions about information, ask. This is a time when professionals should have work examples and information readily available to answer any of your questions. Test results often can be confusing. Ask professionals to explain the results and what they mean in terms of progress, strengths, needs, and placement. For classroom work and progress, be sure to ask for concrete examples. If there is an area of concern, problem solve to resolve the situation. For example, if there is a recommendation to reduce a child's speech sessions from three to one per week ask why. If the answer makes sense, discuss ways to have appropriate support in place. Ask the therapist or teacher to schedule a phone call or meeting to discuss progress after the first six weeks to make sure your child is doing well and to re-evaluate the schedule. If you believe the service change does not make sense, state your point of view. Ask for two sessions, small group sessions, or one longer session per week. Show you are willing to understand changes, however you want to ensure your child continues to progress.
- 5. Ask What You Can Do:** Show you are committed to working collaboratively by asking for exercises or home activities to develop skills. If you are interested in outside information, this is a good time to ask for resources. Often professionals know about camps, recreational activities, organizations, and other events that may encourage educational or social growth.
- 6. Remain Calm:** If the meeting does not go well, remain calm. Keep in mind everyone wants the same thing – your child to make progress. Ask for a break if you need one. Remember calmly stating your views and ideas is received and understood better than accusations or unkind words.

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