

IEP Tips For Teens

Use Your IEP Meetings to Learn How to Advocate for Yourself

Self-advocacy is a key step in becoming an adult. It means looking out for yourself, telling people what you need, and knowing how to take responsibility. No one is born knowing these skills. Everyone has to learn them. Ready to begin learning?

Here is some great information from teens, for teens, that can start you on your way.

What Is Self-Advocacy?

Self-advocacy means taking the responsibility for telling people what you want and need in a straightforward way.

It is knowing how to:

- Speak up for yourself
- Describe your strengths, disability, needs, and wishes
- Take responsibility for yourself
- Find out about your rights
- Obtain help or know who to ask if you have a question



Where Can I Practice Self-Advocacy?

A great place to practice self-advocacy is in your Individualized Education Program (IEP) meetings.

With the support of your team members, you can learn ways to:

- Explain your disability to others
- Set goals for yourself
- Build teamwork skills
- Share with teachers what works and does not work for you
- Ask for accommodations
- Accept help from others
- Lead all or part of the IEP meeting

BUT I DON'T LIKE GOING TO THESE MEETINGS!

Understandable, but did you know there are still many ways you can be involved and learn self-advocacy skills?

Which of these ideas might work for you?

- Come for just a few minutes, instead of attending the whole meeting.
- Write down your ideas, questions, and concerns before the meeting.
- Practice or role-play ahead of time what you want to say in the meeting.

- Introduce yourself.
- Tell team members about your interests, strengths, and desires for the future.
- Explain to the team what it is like to have your disability.
- Help your special education teacher write the agenda.

Be Prepared!

Most people are more comfortable at meetings if they have had some time to think about what they want to say.

Before your IEP meeting, you could think about these questions:

- What do I want to learn or work on this year?
- What are my special concerns for the school year?
- How do I learn the best?
- What do I need to be successful?
- What would make learning easier for me?
- What positive information about myself can I share at the meeting?



What Does The Law Say About My Attending IEP Meetings?

The federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) says that you must automatically be invited to all of your IEP meetings once you are 16. (You don't have to go, but it's a good idea. After all, no one knows you better than you.) In Utah, transition services begin no later than the first IEP to be in effect when the student turns 16 (such as in an IEP meeting conducted when the student is 15 years old.) You should be invited then and whenever the IEP team is talking about transition services. You may want to discuss attending your IEP meeting with your parents. Transition is about planning for your future.



- Communicate your expectations for academic success to your child.
- Help your child see that the academic skills strengthened in middle school will support success in high school.

Questions?

Do you have questions about the transition from elementary to middle-school or working with your child's middle-school staff? You can call to speak with one of the Utah Parent Center Parent Consultants at 801-272-1051.