



# Team Building & The IEP Process

As we develop a relationship between the school and the family, it is important to build a partnership that results in an effective team.

As a member of the Individualized Education Program (IEP) team, parents and the school personnel are equal partners. As a team, school personnel and parents need to work together to accomplish the goal of identifying and meeting the child's educational needs. Parents should avoid seeking to gain more control, power, or "say so" than the other team members. In seeking more power, parents risk losing the team's focus on the child and the goal of designing an appropriate program may not be reached. The team's focus should be on the needs of the child.

Some barriers to effective team building include:

- Communication problems
- A lack of understanding of the school system or the IEP process
- Feelings of inferiority
- Not understanding a child's disability
- Not valuing someone's input
- Apathy
- Stereotyping
- Negative attitudes.

Different barriers may exist in different circumstances. Consider the barriers you might be bringing to a team meeting. For example, if a teacher comes to a meeting believing, "all parents are over-emotional and impossible to work with," then that teacher will have difficulty working effectively with parents. If a parent comes to a meeting feeling that, "the school really doesn't care about my child," this too, will create a barrier to an effective partnership. It is important to recognize barriers and then learn strategies for minimizing each barrier.

Occasionally, situations arise in which parents and the school disagree. If you are in a situation where there are already some negative feelings among team members, try to approach your next meeting with a clean slate, putting behind you the negative things that have happened. At the beginning of a meeting, each person should assume the good faith of the others and their joint commitment to one goal: meeting the needs of the child. It can be useful to verbalize the concept of "beginning again" to the other team members if there has been conflict previously.

Teamwork helps to strengthen relationships and to set a positive foundation for future interactions. When everyone is working together to develop individualized education programs for children, exciting things can happen!

The Utah Parent Center provides training and information on several topics that can help parents develop communication and advocacy skills. For more information, please call the Center at 801-272-1051 or visit our website for more resources like this one, [utahparentcenter.org](http://utahparentcenter.org)