

8 Rules for Productive IEP and 504 Meetings

How to build a collaborative relationship with your child's education team.



1. Dress professionally.

Office attire for both parents (no jeans or t-shirts). “Dressing appropriately puts you on a level with the people you’re meeting,” says Pat Ellis, of Mechanicsburg, Virginia, the mother of an adult with ADHD.

2. Prepare an agenda.

“You can’t be a good listener if you’re always thinking about the next point that you want to make,” says Cindy Post Senning, Ed.D., a former elementary school principal. “An agenda frees you to listen more closely.”

For formal IEP meetings, consider submitting a [Parent Concerns Letter and Present Levels of Performance Letter](#) beforehand (see sample on [additudemag.com](#)). Request a list of attendees in advance and make packets of your child’s profile for each person.

3. Bring your binder.

Collect and organize your child’s report cards, correspondence to and from teachers, and notes about conversations you’ve had with school officials. Include a list of your child’s strengths and weaknesses, and which accommodations you feel will work best. Be specific, and include justifications.

“Slip a picture of your child inside the plastic cover on the front,” suggests Robert Tudisco, a lawyer who advocates for children with ADHD. “This puts a human face on the problems.”

4. Don’t go alone.

Bring along your spouse, another family member, or a friend to take notes and act as a second set of ears and eyes. Consider taping the meeting (to share with your spouse or your child’s doctor). Always ask the others present for permission — though this may make school officials defensive.

If you expect a contentious meeting, you may wish to hire a child advocate or a lawyer to accompany you. To find an advocate or lawyer near you, contact your local chapter of [CHADD](#) or the Council of Parent Attorneys and Advocates ([copaa.org](#)). As a courtesy, let

the school staff know in advance that someone will accompany you to the meeting.

5. Show that you know your rights.

But be subtle. When working to line up accommodations for her daughter, Ellis always brought along the ADHD booklet published by her state. “I just laid it on the table,” she says. “That way, everyone knew I was familiar with my rights. I didn’t need to say anything.”

6. Pack a snack.

“I always bring donuts to special-ed meetings,” Ellis says. “Donuts add to the camaraderie.”

7. Take breaks.

If you become angry or frustrated during the meeting, excuse yourself to collect your thoughts. “Or simply stop the conversation before emotion gets out of control, and politely share your feelings,” Senning says. “Say, ‘Oh, boy, we’re heading into some emotional territory. Can we take a step back?’”

8. Be persistent.

Don’t let the meeting end before you’ve addressed every problem. Senning suggests: “Say something like, ‘We haven’t resolved this and an expert has advised me that my child really needs this accommodation.’ The teacher may say, ‘I have 30 students in the class, and I can’t do that.’ You can reply, ‘I understand that it’s difficult, but we need to find a solution. Is there anyone else who could help us?’” If the person who could resolve the problem — a psychologist, guidance counselor, or a child advocate — is not present, suggest another meeting.

And remember that you don’t need to sign anything right away. If a proposed special-ed plan is incomplete, or fails to reflect what you and school officials discussed, take it home and think about it before deciding whether to sign it. You can request a second meeting. If you and the school cannot agree, request mediation — and always keep your child’s needs on center stage.

By the Experts at [ADDitude](#)