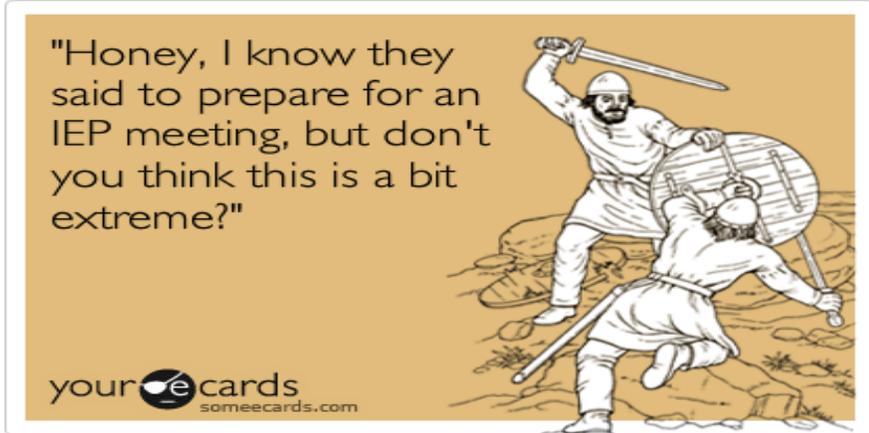


# My First IEP Experience

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Since I am not a parent but a sister to a brother with Down Syndrome, I was not really aware of IEP's until a couple of years ago. I think the reason I did not know much about it was because unfortunately, my parents did not really understand everything themselves due to their language barrier. They would tell me about the meetings, but it was always the same thing. They said the teachers would often tell them it was a mandatory meeting with very boring and repetitive information and they did not need to go over everything. The basics were; he has Down Syndrome, he will remain in SPED, he is mild, he is non verbal. Blah, blah, blah. Literally... blah, blah, blah.

The first IEP meeting I attended with my mother, for my brother, was last year because I was out of work and I finally had a flexible class schedule. His teacher was very nice and friendly, I had met her several times before. My mother also really liked her and mentioned a couple times how she wished more of his teachers were like her.

I did not know what to expect, especially because my mother did not give me much information. It did not take long for me to become uneasy and make me just want to hop over the table and slap her back into reality. She was completely missing the point of the meeting. It was so unprofessional and lacked so much information.

She started the meeting by complementing us and my brother, which was nice. She then expressed how much she dislikes her job and is hoping to leave soon. This upset my mom a little because my mom really liked her as his teacher. When I translated this to the teacher, she simply said that the job did not interest her anymore. She thought she liked working with kids with special needs, but now that she has lived it, she does not like it. It felt like sharing this information was rude, unnecessary, and worrisome. I want to know that his teachers are committed and put love into the work, not this.



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Various times throughout the meeting, she pulled out her phone and started side conversations about her personal life, which we have no interest in. We came to the meeting to talk about my brother, not her! I kept it cool, I humored her at first with simple one word replies and changing the subject. She handed us paper after paper without any explanation and asked us to read it, while she was talking about her personal life as well. Then she pulled out her phone, but this time to show us pictures of a wedding she recently attended. I didn't respond. I just gave her a blank stare and asked what some of the papers were about, I did not know what to do. Was this normal?

Since I asked, she pulled out one sheet that had to do with my brother's work interest and she laughed. She actually laughed. She pointed to a line where my brother expressed that he would like to work with the fire department. She said it was not possible but she humors him. Now, I know he'll probably never be a fire fighter, but that does not mean he can't do something else within the fire department. Her job should be to encourage and find a way, not laugh and brush it off.

At one point in the meeting, she got up and said I'll let you read that and walked out of the room. She was gone for a good ten minutes before she returned with.... Nothing! I assumed she had left the room to get something pertaining to the meeting or an explanation of why she left; but nothing. All she asked when she returned was, "Did you finish reading?"

If you have ever been to an IEP meeting, you very well know that there is no way you can possibly read through every single page during the meeting. Let alone within fifteen minutes with no explanation or briefing. After responding with an obvious no to her question. She went on to explain that this meeting is filled with very boring technical talk which is very repetitive and it is not necessary to go through every little thing in detail.

Needless to say, this IEP meeting was a disaster. There were many things that went wrong, but I am grateful for this experience because it gave me a push to search for help and to prevent this from happening again. This experience motivated me to train myself on how an IEP meeting should look like and what to ask for or do in case I am not seeing professionalism, or if I simply need more information. Now my brother's IEP meetings have gotten better because I have become more knowledgeable in order to make sure we are doing what is best for him. I encourage parents and/or siblings to educate themselves on how to have an effective IEP meeting.

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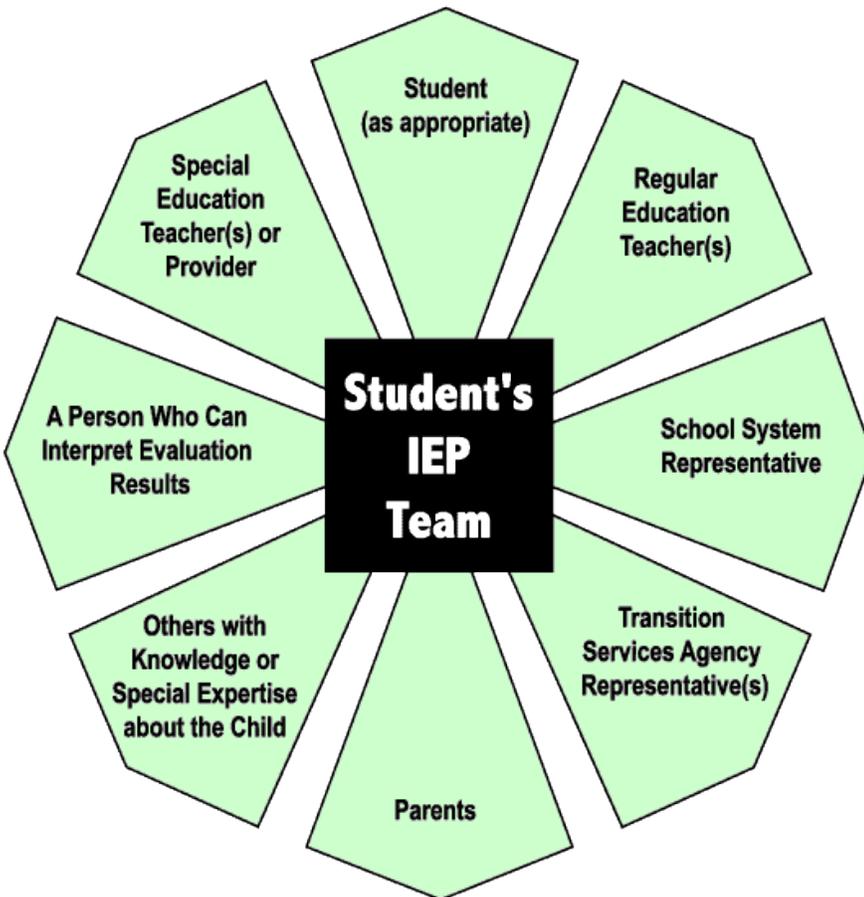
Families Helping Families of Jefferson offers some great on-line e-learning mini modules to help you prepare for your next IEP meeting. You can review this and the other mini modules at <http://fhfjefferson.org/whats-going-on/self-guided-trainings>.

Additionally, Families Helping Families of Jefferson offers monthly webinars on special education basic rights to prepare you for your IEP meeting. For a list of upcoming webinars, you can go to <http://fhfjefferson.org/whats-going-on>.

For additional tips and advice on IEP meetings please follow these links:

<http://www.kidstogether.org/IEP/iepd-10-mistakes.htm>

<http://www.greatschools.org/gk/articles/tips-for-a-successful-iep-meeting/>



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