

Your First IEP: A Simple Guide for Overwhelmed Parents

If you're feeling overwhelmed... start here!

You Are Not Alone

If you've found yourself here, chances are you're feeling confused, emotional, or unsure of what comes next.

Maybe someone mentioned an IEP and now you're thinking:

- *What does that even mean?*
- *Where do I start?*
- *Am I already behind?*

Take a breath.

You are not behind.

You are not expected to know all of this.

And you are not alone.

This process can feel overwhelming, but with the right guidance, it becomes much more manageable. This guide will walk you through the basics so you can feel more confident and prepared.

What is an IEP?

An IEP stands for Individualized Education Program.

It is a legal document that outlines how the school will support your child's unique learning needs.

It includes:

- Where your child is currently performing
- Goals your child will work toward
- The services and support the school will provide
- How progress will be measured

Most importantly:

You are a required and important member of the IEP team! You are not just "included" your voice matters in every decision.

The 5 Things That Actually Matter Most

IEP meetings can feel like a lot. Instead of trying to understand everything, focus on these five key areas:

1. Present Levels

This is where your child is right now—academically, socially, behaviorally.

This section drives everything else in the IEP.

2. Goals

These should be specific, measurable, and meaningful.

If a goal is vague, it will be hard to track real progress. If you don't understand any of the goals, speak up and ask for clarification!

3. Services

What support is your child receiving? (Speech, OT, PT etc.)

Pay attention to how often, how long, and where these services happen.

4. Supports & Accommodations

These are the tools that help your child access learning (visual supports, breaks, modified work, etc.).

5. Progress Monitoring

How will you know if your child is improving?

You should receive clear, regular updates—not just at report card time.

What to Do Before Your First IEP Meeting

You do not need to be an expert to walk into this meeting prepared.

Here are a few simple steps:

✓ **Review any reports**

✓ **Write down concerns**

Look over evaluations you've been given

Note what you're noticing at home

✓ **Think about strengths**

✓ **Bring notes**

Not just challenges—what does your child do well?

It's hard to remember everything in the moment

✓ **Bring support if needed**

You are allowed to bring someone with you

Just Remember...

You are allowed to ask questions.

You are allowed to take your time.

You are allowed to not agree right away.

3 Common Mistakes to Avoid

Most parents aren't told this, but these are important:

1. Feeling like you have to agree to everything in the meeting

You don't. You can take the document home, review it, and follow up.

2. Not asking how progress will be measured

If progress isn't clearly defined, it's very hard to know if the plan is working.

3. Accepting vague goals or supports

Clarity matters. The more specific the plan, the better it will serve your child.

You Don't Have to Do This Alone

This process can feel like a lot, especially when you're also navigating the emotions that come with it.

I've spent over 15 years supporting families through the IEP process, including those just getting started and those navigating more complex needs.

My goal is always the same:

To help you feel clear, confident, and supported every step of the way.

Ready for Support?

If you're feeling unsure, overwhelmed, or just want someone in your corner... You don't have to figure this out on your own!

You can schedule a 1:1 consultation where we walk through your child's situation together and create a clear plan for next steps.

Final Note

You are your child's greatest advocate.

And the fact that you're here learning, asking questions, and seeking support, already means you are doing an incredible job.

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