**Back to School Time!**

**Tips on Having a Successful IEP Meeting.**

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It seems like just yesterday that the last school year ended and kids were looking forward to the lazy days of summer. However, the “Back to School” sales have begun signaling that school is just around the corner. As part of the preparation for the upcoming school year many parents will participate in Individualized Education Plan (IEP) team meetings to discuss their child’s special education program. Unfortunately, IEP meetings strike fear into the heart of many parents. Certainly IEP meetings can have the potential to be overwhelming and perhaps contentious. However, successful IEP meetings can occur if parents do their homework (yes parents have homework too!) and remember a few simple points.

First, parents do need to do their homework. Prior to having an IEP meeting parents should establish a positive relationship with one or more of the members or the team. It is certainly more comforting to sit at a table with friends rather than strangers or, worse, enemies. Parents should also review the latest IEP, evaluation reports, and progress reports prior to the meeting. This information will be helpful in determining the current needs of the child. Finally, parents should prepare a list of items for discussion at the IEP meeting and should consider sharing the list with the team in advance so that the IEP team members can be prepared to address the concerns.

During the meeting, parents should give their undivided attention to the team members. It may be helpful to bring along a family member or friend to take notes so that the parent can focus on what the members are saying rather than attempting to write everything down. In addition, respecting the position of all team members is important. Parents are likely to be respected if they show respect. Thus, parents should refrain from confrontation and argumentative language. If a parent disagrees with a recommendation of a team member the parent should request any data, assessments or evaluations which support the recommendation of the team member. Disagreements are likely to occur among team members. Parents should be prepared to accept a team member’s position and take comfort in knowing that they can utilize their procedural safeguards to settle disputes. Finally, during the meeting, it is imperative for the team members to focus on the present needs of the child and what services the child needs in order to reach goals. Any past issues or disagreements about placement or services should not be the focus of the team. The past can be addressed through other means, such as mediation or due process. Dwelling on the past may inhibit the team from having meaningful discussions about the present and future.

As the conclusion of the meeting, parents should request to take the IEP to review it prior to signing their agreement or disagreement. This will allow parents time to review the IEP to ensure that all services, goals, etc. that were agreed upon were actually written into the IEP. This will also provide time for parents to reflect on the meeting itself and decide whether they want to address disagreements in the appropriate forum.

IEP meetings are about the needs of child. They can be truly productive and beneficial if parents follow these simple guidelines.

Enjoy the remaining lazy days of summer and happy “Bach to School” shopping!