

# IEP Conflict vs Collaboration

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## INTRODUCTION

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The IEP can be a stressful event for any family. IEP collaboration strategies can help your meeting go smoothly while fostering a positive relationship with your school district.

## CONFLICT

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Conflict usually occurs when the process is not well understood; the perception is that the school district is against you; or there is a lack of structure or time. IDEA mandates that the parent be an active member of the IEP team and that the creation of the IEP result from efforts of both the parents and the school district. If you choose not to participate in your child's IEP you are giving up both your voice and the voice of your child.

If you have experienced conflict in the past, jot down reasons why you feel the conflict occurred. Chances are you experienced hurt feelings, betrayal, anger, or injustice. If you are feeling this way now, it is best to put your feelings on the table. It is difficult for the IEP team to reach agreement and to move from conflict to collaboration unless your feelings are heard. For most of us sharing personal feelings is not easy especially when those feelings involve your child.

## COMPONENTS OF IEP COLLABORATION

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IEP collaboration is promoted by the following events:

1. Remember that you have a common purpose which is your child's education.
2. Everyone on the IEP team has a voice.
3. Communicate openly and with respect.
4. Value the team and members.
5. Trust the process.
6. Practice effective listening skills.
7. Use "I messages" when sharing your point of view and listen to others.
8. Practice and Rehears what you are going to say prior to the meeting. Rehearsal helps us to relax and be comfortable with our voice and our opinion.

## COLLABORATION TECHNIQUES

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1. Focus on the problem, not the people.
2. Be open to new ideas.
3. Ask clarifying questions if you need more information.
4. Find common ground.
5. It is ok to decide that an issue cannot be solved.
6. Pick solutions that both sides agree upon.
7. Verbally agree to the next steps.



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## PARENT TIPS FOR SUCCESSFUL IEP MEETINGS

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1. Be prepared at the IEP meeting.
2. Ask for more time or information if needed.
3. Ask questions to clarify understanding.
4. Leave your emotions at home. If you become emotional during the meeting ask for a short break.
5. Know who the team members are by name and their respective team membership role.
6. Refer to members by their name. It makes it personal and shows that you are paying attention.
7. Refer to your child by their name during the meeting.
8. Make sure you understand the who, what, where, when, and why. If you don't ask clarifying questions.
9. Keep notes and refer to them as necessary.
10. Be polite. Manners can go a long way.

## IF YOU DON'T AGREE

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If the meeting does not go well or you are not in agreement with the recommendations made by the IEP team the following are IEP dispute resolutions options:

1. Reconvene the IEP meeting at a later date. This allows time to research and bring new ears or eyes to the table.

Invite others to join the IEP team with specific knowledge, power or expertise to help resolve the disagreement.

Educational systems are based on a hierarchy usually consisting of the following:

- a. Board of Education Members
  - b. Superintendent
  - c. Directors of Departments (Special Education)
  - d. Program Specialist (Assigned to specific schools or regions)
  - e. Principals
  - f. Assistant Principals
  - g. Special Education and Regular Education Teachers, Counselors, and Specialists.
2. Procedural Safeguards of IDEA further provides for dispute resolution methods including Mediation, State Complaints, and Due Process.

## APEC CAN HELP

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APEC provides free training, information, and consultation to families. Visit our training calendar for more information about learning opportunities at [www.alabamaparentcenter.com](http://www.alabamaparentcenter.com) or call our center.

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