



How to Deal With Intimidation in an IEP Meeting

For many persons, dealing with teachers and school administrators in the IEP meeting can be intimidating. You don't want to (but may) hear:

- I'm sorry, Mrs Jones, but you're wrong.
- I'm sorry, Ms. Johnson, the law doesn't say that.
- Your evaluation report is incorrect
- Our policy precludes that
- Maybe they do that in another school district, but we don't
- I will not agree to that.
- That's enough on that subject
- That's not the way it works.

In most cases, you can ignore these kinds of comments or make a simple response. Try to determine whether the comment is anything more than just an impolite or negative remark. If it is unimportant, say your piece and move on.

"I don't appreciate your tone of voice, Mrs Smith. I have treated you with respect and expect the same from you. Even if we disagree, we can do it in a civil way. More important, your statement is not correct (or reasonable (or productive or conducive to a positive IEP meeting))."

If the comment seems important, you may need to be more assertive.

"Mrs. Jones, I resent your comment and believe you are undermining this IEP meeting. Please understand, I will do what is necessary to ensure my child receives the program she needs and bring your behavior to the attention of the appropriate individuals."

If you don't feel calm and your voice is shaky, that's okay, too. Just don't yell or get overly aggressive. If necessary, you may want to raise the possibility of filing a formal complaint regarding something that seems illegal - for example, if the district won't allow you to discuss your independent assessment. But don't make a threat without first thinking it through. Do you really have the grounds to file a formal complaint? Is there any validity to school representative's comment? Know the difference between an opposing point of view or even bad style and a patently intimidating statement or action. Is it worth alienating the school district and changing the atmosphere of the IEP meeting? In most cases, you can make your point without threatening to file a formal complaint.

Challenge Blanket Assertions

If an assertion seems illegal or illogical, ask what it's based on. If the administrator says something vague like "It's our policy," "It's the law," "it's our best judgment," or "It's the way things are," keep asking why. Request a copy of the law or policy.

If possible, refer to your documentation. For example, the district administrator says that, as a general rule, the district doesn't provide more than two hours of a related service per week. An evaluation states that your child needs three hours. Point out and ask how the district's rule complies with IDEA, which requires that the specifics of a service be documented by the IEP team.

The administrator may say something like "Mrs. Peterson, that is just the way it is and I won't respond any further to that question. You'll want to follow up with something like "I'm sorry you won't answer my question. It is a fair and important question and I plan to ask your superintendent or school board to answer it." If the issue is critical to your child's education, you may want to file a complaint.

The school district may not agree with you on an important IEP component. For example, you feel there is clear support for a specific placement, but the administrator disagrees. Ask for a detailed explanation (Prior Written Notice) of the school district's reasoning, supported by appropriate materials.