Family Friendly Meetings

Individualized Education Program (IEP) and Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) meetings may feel overwhelming for families. Caregivers should feel welcomed, respected, and supported throughout these meetings. Simple steps like greeting families warmly, using clear and kind language, and giving time for questions can set a positive tone. Making sure caregivers feel heard and valued encourages open communication and teamwork. A supportive environment helps families feel more comfortable and confident as they work with professionals to best plan for their child.

Before the meeting:

- Provide scheduling options and let the family know how long the meeting will last.
- Offer meeting locations that are a neutral place, such as at the public library.
- If the family does not have transportation, meet at a location they can access. For example, choose a community center on a bus route.
- Provide materials in advance in the family's home language. Caregivers can prepare questions ahead of time and feel more confident participating.
- Send several meeting reminders that are timely and in different formats. Emails, paper notes, text messages, and phone calls are good options.

During the meeting:

- Arrive early or on time. However, if in a meeting room, wait until the family arrives and enter the room together. If in a home, ask the family where they want to meet.
- Welcome the family warmly.
- Sit in a welcoming way, such as in a circle.
- Show the team something positive about the child to start the meeting. Examples include:
  - A video of them walking
  - A picture of them with their new augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) device
  - A recording of them talking or signing
  - A writing sample or piece of artwork
- Focus on the positives and frequently share the child's strengths.
- Speak using language that is easy to understand, delivered with a kind tone.
- Pause frequently to give the family time to share, comment, and ask questions.
- Take a break if the meeting is lasting a long time or if the caregivers appear overwhelmed.
- Describe next steps such as upcoming meetings or assessments.
- Thank the family for their time and encourage ongoing communication.

After the meeting:

- Promptly send meeting documents in the family's preferred format and language.
- Follow up a few days or a week later to address new comments, questions, or concerns.

Any opinions, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this tip sheet are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Illinois State Board of Education.

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9/25