

# Tip Sheet: Empowering Parents

**A. SCHOOL TEAM:** Tip sheet for creating an effective meeting with families for a student with exceptionalities

**B. PARENTS:** Tip sheet for creating an effective meeting for your child with exceptionalities with the school

A. School team encouragement for a meeting about inclusive education with families	B. Parental encouragement before heading into a meeting about your child's education with the school
1) Create the space for a welcoming meeting. Inclusive education is serious business but setting the stage for everyone to feel comfortable is important.	1) Create the space for a professional meeting. Getting what you think is best for your child's inclusive education is serious business.
2) Be clear on the process. Encourage the family to write an agenda. Everyone should have the opportunity to suggest additions to the agenda if they have any.	2) Be clear on the process. Ask ahead of time if need be and have an agenda. Ensure that everyone on the team has an opportunity to add something to the agenda.
3) Attend the meeting with a mindset that the family is the expert of their family member AND you, the educator(s), are the experts on education. It will require BOTH of your expertise to optimize the student's inclusive education.	3) Walk in with a mindset that you are the expert of your child, AND they, the educators, are the experts on education. It will require BOTH of your expertise to optimize your child's inclusive education.
4) Make sure the agenda reflects both the strengths and challenges the student faces, and that the meeting sticks to the agenda items. Avoid side-sweeping the family by introducing a new agenda during the meeting.	4) Make sure the agenda reflects both the strengths and challenges your child faces and that the meeting sticks to the agenda items.

<p>5) The student needs to be a valued member of this discussion and planning meeting. It is important to keep in mind the reason everyone is meeting. The student as a part of the meeting will help everyone keep a face to the name during the meeting. When the student is young, they may attend for only a few minutes. But as the student grows older, it is important to identify the ways that they will be involved and consulted. Are there activities and groups they are interested in taking part of? Electives? Sports?</p>	<p>5) Your child is a valued member of this discussion and planning meeting. It is important to keep in mind the reason everyone is meeting. Your child being in the room will help everyone remember their face during the meeting instead of treating them like a file number. If your child cannot attend the meeting, perhaps bring a photo of them and place it in the middle of the table. When your child is young, they may attend for only a few minutes. But as they grow older, it is important to identify the ways that they will be involved and consulted. Are there activities and groups they are interested in taking part in? Electives? Sports?</p>
<p>6) Encourage the parent/caregiver to come with someone who supports them. This might be a person who will take notes, a family member, a friend/colleague, a representative from a local Inclusion Association, or someone who provides support in another way. Having someone attend with them is comforting and can be less intimidating for them. Suggest to the family to share their main talking points with those that they invite. They may help with ideas or be able to speak to the family's talking points if emotions elevate....and they often do. This person can take the torch and say, "what I think they want to say is....". That will give the parent/caregiver a moment to breathe and find their voice again. If the parent/caregiver chooses to bring their own minute-taker, not just one from the school staff, be open to this. Make sure if something strikes any team member as important that they repeat it out loud and request that the scribe gets that down in the minutes.</p>	<p>6) Never go alone. Always have someone with you! It can be a person who will take notes, a family member, a friend/colleague, a representative from a local Inclusion Association, or someone who provides support in another way. Let them know your talking points before the meeting so they can help keep you on track when emotions elevate...and they often do. This person can take the torch and say "what I think they want to say is....". That will give you a moment to breathe and find your inner advocate. If you choose to have a minute taker, bring someone other than yourself. Make sure if something strikes you as very important that you repeat it out loud and request that the scribe gets that down in the minutes.</p>
<p>7) Be kind. The student comes first. It is hard to ask for help and empathy is necessary for collaboration. Finding solutions is extremely important for the student. People come with a history of misunderstanding about the school system, with conflict, and when others understand, it is easier to move on to collaborate.</p>	<p>7) Be kind to yourself. Your child comes first. It is hard to ask for help and empathy is necessary for collaboration. Finding solutions is extremely important for your child. When there is understanding, it is easier to move on to collaborate.</p>

<p>8) Have a plan. Everyone needs to commit to sticking to the plan and agree to rules of communication beforehand to prevent some tension—you have a responsibility to educate all of your students well. If things go sideways, take a break. Getting it right takes time and lots of practice. Cutting everyone some slack is the quickest way to get back to the reason you are all there.</p>	<p>8) Get everyone to commit to sticking to the plan and agree to rules of communication beforehand to prevent some tension. If things go sideways, take a break. Getting it right takes time and lots of practice. Cutting yourself some slack is the quickest way to get back to the reason you are all there.</p>
<p>9) Be honest and be clear. When discussing a student's challenges, it doesn't help to sugar coat. The family needs clarity about the educational direction needed in order to best help the student. Be clear about what you need for the student to be successful and be clear about what the family can do to assist. When discussing possible solutions, don't promise what you can't deliver. This begins to break down the trust between the family and the school that is so necessary for success.</p>	<p>9) Be honest and be clear. When discussing your child's needs, don't sugar coat what is challenging. The school team needs to know in order to help your child. When discussing possible solutions, be upfront with what you think is realistic while keeping an open mind. Building trust with the school team is a necessary factor in creating success for your child.</p>
<p>10) Ask to make copies of any supporting documents that the family is willing to share from the student's history. Offer copies of any school assessments or documents. Provide the family with a copy of the minutes taken by the school staff.</p>	<p>10) Request a copy of the school's minutes and any other written reports or supporting documents</p>
<p>11. Keep reaching out for assistance. None of us that have traveled this journey were completely successful without some support. Help is out there.</p>	<p>11. Keep reaching out for assistance. None of us that have traveled this journey were completely successful without some support. Help is out there.</p>