

# How to be Your Child's Best Advocate

27 OCTOBER 2021 / 5PM-7PM / Zoom Platform

## Attendees

Wendy Keen, Elizabeth Proffitt, Rene Averitt-Sanzone, Audri Levering, Tamyra Dupree-Jones, Kenny Smith, Aimee Boumiea, Jaime Orndorff, Joe Goetz, Nicole In den Bosch,

## About Parents' Place of Maryland

PPMD empower families as advocates and partners in improving education and health outcomes for their children with disabilities and special health care needs. PPMD was established in 1990, governed by parents. 94% of the PPMD team has children with disabilities or special health needs.

Parents' Place of Maryland offers:

- One-on-one assistance to families
- Resource sharing
- Leadership training
- Military outreach

PPMS helps families to understand their children's disabilities, education, and health care needs. They also help families communicate more effectively with schools, doctors, professionals and agencies. With schools, they help families understand their rights and responsibilities under special education law and regulations. They will also help resolve disagreements with the schools and other agencies. PPMD will help you connect with other community resources and obtain appropriate services for your children.

## Advocating for your child

A term we often hear is COMAR (Code of Maryland Regulations) but at the end of the day what is stated in every single piece of legislation and our code is that we, as parents, are an equal member of the team and it is important that we must believe that first and foremost.

We must lay down some foundation in our time together on our journey to being out child's best advocate. There is a vision tool to identify your visions and the visions for your child. The vision for a good life and also what you don't want for your child. Depending on the age of your child it can vary when they are little it is more about what we want for our child and then as they progress in age, it's more on what they want and need in order to be successful. [Life-Trajectory-Worksheet-updated-february-2017\\_1.jpg](#)

Parents/caregivers, no matter their age, that is our baby! However, we have to handle our emotions before we head into an IFSP or IEP meeting! Writing questions and concerns down, communicating ahead of time so you can come into the meeting grounded. There are benefits to having a friend go with you. This can be your second set of ears. Just make sure you let the case manager know ahead of time.

## Tips and Strategies

When folks are talking all around us in that educationise lingo, it is our job to ask Why? And please help me understand. So take a deep breath and ask questions. Why? Help me understand? Don't take no for an answer! Show me where it is written!

Document EVERYTHING. There are a lot of moving parts in an IEP meeting or any meeting. So by documenting this is another strategy to make sure everyone is on the same page. Keep an organized binder of all dates of contact, appointments, medical records of diagnoses, assessments, and evaluations. If you need help in organizing a binder, contact the FSRC office today!

Familiarize yourself with what the policies and procedures are as it relates to special education. There are a wealth of resources on MSDE's website, and sometimes the site can be hard to navigate so PPMD has made it easy to locate some important information. If you need printable or additional assistance, please contact the FSRC office. [IEP Timeline](#)

"Disability is a natural part of human experience and in no way diminishes the right of individuals to participate in or contribute to society. Improving educational results for children with disabilities is an essential element of our national policy of ensuring equality of opportunity, full participation, independent living, and economic self- sufficiency for individuals with disabilities."

In 1975, America passed an important federal law. This law said that all children with disabilities had the right to go to public schools. It also said that children with disabilities had the right to an appropriate education. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is the name of this law.

## IEP Process

### Where to begin:

IDEA requires that a written plan must specify how special education, related services and support will be provided to a student eligible to receive those services. That written plan is called an Individualized Education Program (IEP).

First step is requesting an initial evaluation for special education services. You can do this by writing a letter to the principal or special education administrator stating your concerns. A teacher may also have concerns about your child's academic impacts as well. If a child has been

identified as having a disability by professionals outside the school system, send a copy of the reports explaining the child's conditions. Parents should give this information to the team at least several days before the team is scheduled to meet.

Once all assessments and evaluations have been completed, a notice of IEP team meeting will be sent to you. This will highlight the purpose of the meeting, who is expected to attend and also the date and time and location of the meeting.

#### **Before the meeting:**

- Think about the goals you have for your child's future.
- Make a list of what your child can do, likes to do, and needs to learn.
- Make a list of types of help your child needs, including what has worked and not worked before.
- Talk with your child about the IEP/504 process and what they want from it.
- Request written updates from all private service providers.
- Confirm who will attend the meeting and their roles.
- Make your own notes about what you would like to discuss.
- Prioritize the key issues to discuss.

#### **What to bring to the meeting:**

- Binder or IEP portfolio (contact FSRC for a binder and help in organizing)
- Organize the binder by sections with tabs:
  - Assessments / evaluations
  - Old IEPs/504s and current IEP/504
  - Writing samples/homework samples you want to discuss
  - Medical reports
- Be sure to provide new reports to the team ahead of time - there should be no surprises for the team.
- Prepare your PARENT INPUT!

#### **During the IEP meeting:**

- Find out how your child will participate in the regular classroom, non academic activities with peers, and assessments.
- Ask for interpretation of test results and clarification or new terms or programs.
- Get answers to ALL of your questions
  - Don't be afraid to ask questions if you don't understand a specific term or if you're confused about anything stated in the IEP. You can always ask to speak to an individual after the meeting to get clarity on their report.
- Take notes and consider recording the meeting.
- You are part of the team (it shouldn't be you against them)
- Believe in yourself
- Refer to your notes during the meeting to make sure your concerns are addressed.
- Watch your emotions. Ask for a break if you need to calm yourself.

## **Conflict is Natural!**

Conflict is a natural part of group dynamics. Respect individual differences and avoid getting entrenched in a fixed position.

- Keep an open mind
- Use “I” statements, not “you” statements
- Ask questions! Who? What? When? Why?
- Stay on topic
- If needed, TAKE A BREAK!

Listen first, talk second. Understand where the other person is coming from. Try to manage your emotions and focus on the issues, not the people. It’s okay to agree to disagree!

### **After the meeting:**

Once the IEP has been signed off, stay in contact with teachers and therapists to monitor your child’s progress. Ask the school what you can do to help reinforce skills at home. Working together, you can ensure your child meets his or her IEP goals.

- Thank the IEP team.

For more information, please contact Parents’ Place of Maryland at:

802 Cromwell Park Drive, ste. H

Glen Burnie, MD 21061

410-768-9100 or [www.ppmmd.org](http://www.ppmmd.org)

Eastern Shore Contact:

Audri Levering at [audri@ppmd.org](mailto:audri@ppmd.org)

Slideshow of tonight’s presentation: [How to be your child's best advocate slide show!](#)

## **Next Meeting Agenda**

NAMI will be presenting “Student Mental Health - Risk Factors and Resilience. To register:

<https://forms.gle/fwQTWGW6MtZzHBET6>