

CHECKLIST FOR PARENTS

A parent's job is the hardest and best job in the world. To help your child achieve success in school, strive to:

- schedule in self care. If you are feeling overwhelmed, save this list. Try to find activities that you enjoy that are just for you. It will enable you to spend more quality time with your child, which is more important than anything else on this list. When you are in a good place, come back to this list.
- ask thoughtful questions that will help you identify quality ABA programming that will benefit your child. We compiled a list of questions for you [here](#).
- develop and maintain positive relationships with the entire IEP staff.
- find out the teacher's preferred mode of communication. It's easier for them to keep you regularly informed if you communicate via their preferred mode.
- offer to help the teacher with something you're good at. Ask if they can use any materials or reinforcers. Offer to volunteer your time during school or to prep things after hours. Teachers appreciate all parent attempts to make a difference in the classroom which will benefit your child in multiple ways.
- communicate any changes at home that may impact the child during school. Let staff know about strategies that have helped your child achieve success at home. Keep the teacher in the loop about what went on at home over the weekend or the night/morning before school or of changes to medication.
- become a member of a parent support group. Start by searching [Parent Training and Information Center](#) or contacting your district's special education supervisor.
- be wary of support from social media groups. They can be a great place to ask for resources but remember that anyone can take screen shots to share with the whole world. Even if your child shares a diagnosis with someone else's child, your experiences are likely to be worlds different.
- join professional organizations for recent research and support. Not sure which ones? Try [Council for Exceptional Children](#), [Autism NJ](#), or [ASAT \(Association for Science in Autism Treatment\)](#). Sometimes local parent support groups like [POAC](#) in New Jersey provide not only parental support and trainings but also events for individuals with autism and their families.
- subscribe to media publications to get up to date information. Podcasts! Books! Blogs! [Autism Spectrum News](#) is a great place to start. Just make sure you always check your source and look for any bias that went into preparing material.
- listen to the IEP team's feedback throughout the year.
- collaborate with the IEP team to get the best possible outcome for your child. Remember the old adage, "you get more bees with honey than you do with vinegar." Arguing will ensure that goals are addressed but collaboration and support will help your child exceed expectations.
- maintain documentation and organize it into categories (ie. year, setting, provider). This will help you easily reference documentation should you need it in the future. A good rule of thumb is to keep all initial evaluations and the most recent three years' worth of documents.

IEP Meeting Tips

- Before:
 - Review the updated documents sent to you. Make notes in the margins. They are your copies.
 - Prepare questions. We even made you a [list!](#)
 - Prioritize which goals are the most important for your child.
 - Decide whether or not you want to sign the IEP at the meeting. We always recommend taking the IEP home to review it before signing.
 - During:
 - Take notes. You also have the right to record it.
 - Listen to the team's feedback.
 - Collaborate to prepare for your child's success.
 - Stick with your signing plan.
 - After:
 - Review notes and documents.
 - Contact any IEP team member for clarification.
 - Prioritize your requests and collaborate.
 - Combine requests into one email so that the team can respond efficiently.
- To sign or not to sign?
How to advocate for your child if you see that they are not making progress:
 - Reach out to the IEP team via email.
 - Give the traditional 24 hour response time when you reach out to school staff.
 - If you still don't get a response, follow the chain of command in order to maintain positive relationships: teacher first then case manager is the typical hierarchy schools follow.
 - If relationships start going south and you feel your child is having a difficult time or not making progress, it's always easier to understand everyone's point of view with an in person meeting or phone conversation. Remember that you can ask for an IEP meeting at any time, it's the law.
 - Reserve reaching out to the principal and special education director or supervisor until after an IEP meeting if the IEP team is unable to address your child's barriers to making adequate progress.