



## Individualized Education Program (IEP) Tips for Teens

### Use Your IEP Meetings to Learn How to Advocate for Yourself

Self-advocacy is a key step in becoming an adult. It means looking out for yourself, telling people what you need, and knowing how to take responsibility. No one is born knowing these skills. Everyone has to learn them. Ready to begin learning?



Here is some great information from teens, for teens, that can start you on your way.

**What Is Self-Advocacy?** Self-advocacy means taking the responsibility for telling people what you want and need in a straightforward way.

*It is knowing how to:*

- Speak up for yourself
- Describe your strengths, disability, needs, and wishes
- Take responsibility for yourself
- Find out about your rights
- Obtain help or know who to ask if you have a question

### Do I Have to Attend My IEP Meetings?

The federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) says that you **must** be invited to all of your IEP meetings once you are 14. **You don't have to go, but it's a good idea!** After all, no one knows you better than you. Your IEP is like a road map that shows the best ways for you to make progress and thrive in school. In Ohio, transition services begin no later than the first IEP to be in effect when you turn 14. You should be invited then and whenever the IEP team is talking about transition services. You may want to discuss attending your IEP meeting with your family. Transition is about planning for your future.



### Where Can I Practice Self-Advocacy?

A great place to practice self-advocacy is in your Individualized Education Program (IEP) meetings.



*With the support of your team members, you can learn ways to:*

- Explain your disability to others
- Set goals for yourself
- Build teamwork skills
- Share with teachers what works and does not work for you
- Ask for accommodations
- Accept help from others
- Lead all or part of the IEP meeting



**Be Prepared!** Most people are more comfortable at meetings if they have had some time to think about what they want to say.

### **BUT I DON'T LIKE GOING TO THESE MEETINGS!**



Understandable, but there are still many ways you can be involved and learn self-advocacy skills? **“Nothing about me without me!”**

*Before your IEP meeting, you could think about these questions:*

- What do I want to learn or work on this year?
- What are my special concerns for the school year?
- How do I learn the best?
- What do I need to be successful?
- What would make learning easier for me?
- What positive information about myself can I share at the meeting?

*Which of these ideas might work for you?*

- Come for just a few minutes, instead of attending the whole meeting.
- Write down your ideas, questions, and concerns before the meeting.
- Practice or role-play ahead of time what you want to say in the meeting.
- Introduce yourself.
- Tell team members about your interests, strengths, and desires for the future.
- Explain to the team what it is like to have your disability.
- Help your special education teacher write the agenda.

**Questions?** Do you want to learn more about self-advocacy? We provide group or individual It's My Turn (IMT) and Goals Planning Success (GPS) trainings for youth. Contact our staff at: 844-382-5452 to learn more. Also check out [OCECD's Self Advocacy Website](#)

Resources excerpted from Utah Parent Center  
[www.utahparentcenter.org](http://www.utahparentcenter.org)



Ohio Coalition for the Education of Children with Disabilities  
125 Executive Dr. Suite 200 Marion, OH 43302  
[ocecd@ocecd.org](mailto:ocecd@ocecd.org) | 844-382-5452

