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ALABAMA DISABILITIES ADVOCACY PROGRAM
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Just in Time for Spring IEP Season: Tips for Parents

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Are you getting ready for your child's IEP meeting?

ADAP has collected IEP meeting tips from advocates at some of Alabama's best known family support groups:

[Alabama Family Ties](#)

If you have a child with emotional or behavior challenges, get to know [Alabama Family Ties](#) (AFT). AFT can support you by connecting you with other families and by providing training and advocacy help. AFT wants to end the stigma too often associated with having mental, emotional or behavioral disorders and advocates every day for families to have access to high quality mental health services for their children.

AFT board president Lisa King offers this tip from the advocacy trenches: "Take someone with you to your child's IEP meeting. That person can be a friend, family member, or advocate. Your support person can help you take notes, remind you of your priority concerns, and offer you a confidence boost. Attending an IEP for your own child is very stressful, even for parents who have a lot of experience and training!"

Lisa also urges parents to not be shy when it comes to asking about their children's evaluation results (intelligence, achievement, behavior analyses, assistive technology assessments, state or classroom-based assessments, etc.).

"Sometimes, professionals breeze through an explanation of testing results," says Lisa. School officials should translate any confusing testing jargon into laymen's terms so you can understand what testing reveals about your child's school needs. This is important if you are going to understand the special education and related services your child requires.

Contact Lisa King at 334-287-3119 or 334-327-6728 or via email at jmlaking@bellsouth.net or admin@alfamilyties.org.

[Disability Rights and Resources](#)

Gwen Brown is a peer advocate with [Disability Rights & Resources](#) (DRR). DRR's mission is to empower people with disabilities to fully participate in the community. Gwen is the mother of three children; one has autism and one has sickle cell disease.

Gwen recommends you provide the team with positive information about your child to be included on the profile page of your child's IEP. "The IEP is a great opportunity for teachers and other school staff to learn about the ABILITIES of your child."

Thoroughly review the IEP before signing it to make sure it reflects your understanding of the services to be provided to your child. Gwen also recommends leaving the meeting with a signed copy of the IEP rather than having it delivered to you later.

Gwen works at DRR's Alabaster office. She can be reached at 205-685-0570 or via email at Gwen.Brown@drradvocates.org.

[Full Life Ahead Foundation](#)

Tammy Moore is the executive director of the [Full Life Ahead Foundation](#) (FLA). Tammy is the mother of a recent high school graduate for whom she attended countless IEP meetings.

Tammy recommends asking the school for a draft of your child's IEP so you can review it before the meeting. This will allow you to better prepare questions and to frame your priority concerns. Remember though: a draft is just that—a draft. When you go to your child's IEP meeting, you should actively review and revise that draft as needed. You don't have to accept it as written.

Another suggestion from Tammy: attend one of FLA's Family Weekend Camps for a special mix of fun, learning, advocacy, and sharing for parents and their teens/young adults. The next CAMP will be held on June 12-15 at Children's Harbor on Lake Martin. For more information, click [here](#).

FLA provides support, education, and connections for families who have a teen or young adult with a dis**Ability**. You can reach Tammy at 205-439-6534 or via email at TammyMoore@FullLifeAhead.org.

[People First of Alabama](#)

Susan Ellis is the state coordinator for [People First of Alabama](#) (PFA). PFA is a group of people with developmental disabilities living in Alabama communities who are dedicated to making their

dreams happen by having choices and control over their lives.

Susan urges parents to actively involve their children in their own IEP planning process.

“Literally, no matter your child's age, explain what the IEP is—on whatever level your child can relate. Get some idea of what your child wants to achieve and experience during the upcoming school year.” Susan suggests using your cell phone to video your child talking about his or her hopes and dreams and to share that video at the IEP meeting.

Older children can try a hand at directing their own meeting; there are many resources available to help older youth learn how to actively participate and/or lead their IEP meetings.

“Remember,” says Susan, “it is **their** lives and we are their **support**.”

Contact Susan at 205-422-5006 or via email at pf.susan.200@gmail.com.

[Alabama Parent Education Center](#)

Spring IEP season is a busy time of year for the [Alabama Parent Education Center](#) (APEC).

APEC is Alabama's parent training and information center (PTI) for families of children with special needs. It provides services and supports to empower families to work collaboratively with schools to improve services for their children. Jeana Winter, APEC's executive director, encourages parents to prepare for IEP meetings by reviewing the agency's "[IEP Tips for a Successful Meeting](#).”

On Friday, June 12, APEC is hosting a conference, “Improving Outcomes for Children with Disabilities Parents and Teachers Together.” Among other things, the conference will help families better understand Alabama's state educational content standards—what the state expects all public school children to be taught, including children with special needs. Conference sessions will be transmitted live via video conferencing in Montgomery, Mobile, and Madison. To register for the free conference, click [here](#).

To contact APEC, call 334.567.2252 or via email at apec@alabamaparentcenter.com.

For more meeting tips, check out [page 110](#) of ADAP's special education manual, [Special Education: A Right Not a Favor](#).

Contact one of these groups or [ADAP](#) if you want more information or advocacy assistance; we're here to help!



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