# Chapter 9: Successful IFSP, Medical, 504, and IEP Teams

**Introduction:** Many decisions about the service and support needs of children with developmental delays and disabilities will be made by a team of parents and professionals. Whether it is a medical team, a school team, or a team from a county board of developmental disabilities, successful teams are those where all members are engaged in the decisions being made. Engaged professionals are more likely to communicate well and share important information about the child. Engaged parents are more likely to share their child’s strengths and needs and their thoughts about how best to serve their child. Successful teams recognize the value of each team member’s input, prioritize trust, create an environment that is safe to participate and share, and have clear goals and objectives for what they want to accomplish.

## Definitions:

For definitions of the various teams you might encounter as you seek services and support for your child, see Chapter 7: Partnering with your Child’s Team.

**Goal** A goal is an outcome that a team wants to achieve. Goals are usually broad and long-term. For example, most goals on a child’s IEP are for one school year. We might want a child to learn to write a short paragraph with a topic sentence, details, and conclusion over the course of a school year.

**Objectives** are short-term steps or actions that can be taken toward reaching a goal. Objectives often build upon each other. For example, if our goal is for a child to put on and tie their shoes, the objectives might include putting on socks, putting on shoes, crossing the shoelaces into an “X”, making a loop, and so on.

## What Families Should Expect:

* You can get the best results from teams by understanding how to be your best advocate during the team process. Ways to be a good advocate include:
  + fully participating in team meetings,
  + identifying the problem(s) and ways to resolve the problem,
  + knowing the standards that apply to the issue you are trying to address,
  + communicating clearly and respectfully,
  + and asking questions so that you always understand the discussion.
* You can also assess whether your team is communicating well, has the necessary expertise, and is following through on decisions made. If you feel that something is not going well or is missing from the team, speak up and ask for the team to address your concern.

## What Families Want Their Team Members to Know:

* Sometimes I feel like I’m an afterthought and not an equal member of the team. The way you notify me about team meetings, help prepare me for the discussion, and include me in the conversation says a lot about how important I am as a team member. You can make me feel valued by making sure I am well informed about meetings and agendas, and I have adequate time and space to speak at meetings.
* Sometimes meetings can feel like an “us versus them” atmosphere. Where you hold the meeting, how chairs are arranged, and the amount of time allotted for the meeting can affect whether I feel that all team members are working together. You can help me feel supported by having the meeting in a location that is good for me, organizing the seating so that staff are all not on one side of the table, and not limiting the length of the meeting.
* I want to know how my child is doing throughout the year and not just at a yearly meeting. It will support my meaningful participation in meetings if you communicate with me throughout the year about how my child is doing. That way, I will be prepared for meeting discussions and not have to wait to learn about concerns until the meeting. I will also be able to provide feedback that can help you make service and support decisions for my child all year.

## What Team Members Want Families to Know:

* We know it can be difficult for you when we are talking about your child’s needs. It is important to remember that all team members want to do what is right for your child and support your child’s learning and development. Let us know if there is a better way to communicate with you or if you need a break during the meeting process.
* You may have had negative experiences with teams. We understand that this can make it difficult to work in the team process. Focusing on past negative experiences can prevent the team from moving forward. We can get the best outcomes at meetings if all team members focus on the present and work to ensure that the negative experiences of the past do not recur.
* You can help us get the best meeting outcomes by fully participating in your child’s education. This includes communicating with the team about your child’s needs, responding to the team’s requests for information, attending meetings and coming to meetings on time, and participating in classroom activities as appropriate.

## Family Checklist:

* Do I know my child’s team members and how to reach them?
* Do I participate in all team meetings about my child?
* Am I prepared to provide important information about my child at meetings?
* Do I come to meetings prepared?
* Do I show up to meetings on time or let the team know if I can’t make the meeting?
* Do I participate in my child’s education in as many ways as possible?
* Do I focus on the present and ways to move my child forward?

## Team Member Checklist:

* Do we include parents in their child’s program in as many ways as possible?
* Do we explain the purpose of the meeting ahead of time?
* Do we identify specific meeting goals?
* Do we ask for parent input throughout the year?
* Do we organize the meeting table in an inclusive way?
* Do we really include the parent’s point of view?
* Do we talk about the child’s strengths as well as needs?
* Do we balance positive and negative information?
* Do we schedule meetings in a way that prevents parental participation?

## Resources:

[Disability Rights Ohio](https://www.disabilityrightsohio.org/)

[Negotiation Skills for Parents](https://www.disabilityrightsohio.org/negotiation-skills-for-parents)

[CADRE: Collaborative Advocacy Guiding Principles](https://www.cadreworks.org/sites/default/files/resources/Collaborative%20Advocacy-Final%20Accessible.pdf)

[The Council for Exceptional Children: Six Tips for Successful IEP Meetings](https://education.fcps.org/specialeducation/sites/specialeducation/files/Six%20Tips%20for%20Successful%20IEP%20Meetings_0.pdf)

[Wrightslaw: 5 Tips for Incredibly Successful IEP Meetings](https://www.wrightslaw.com/info/iep.mtg.5rules.htm)

[New York State Department of Health: The IFSP Meeting](https://earlyinterventionot.weebly.com/the-ifsp-meeting.html)

[Pacer: Individualized Family Service Plan](https://www.pacer.org/ec/early-intervention/ifsp.asp)

[Parent Center Hub: Writing the IFSP for Your Child](https://www.parentcenterhub.org/ifsp/)

[Pacer: What is the Difference Between an IFSP and an IEP?](https://www.ocecd.org/Downloads/IFSP%20vs%20IEP2.pdf)

[i3 Iowa IDEA Information: Individualized Family Service Plan Teams](https://iowaideainformation.org/early-intervention/individualized-family-service-plans/individualized-family-service-plan-teams/)

[OCECD letter: Requesting an IEP or 504 Meeting](https://www.ocecd.org/Downloads/Requesting%20an%20IEP%20or%20Section%20504%20Meeting.pdf)

[US Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights: Protecting Students with Disabilities: FAQ on 504s](https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/504faq.html)

[Nationwide Children’s Hospital: Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) and 504 Plans](file:///C:/Users/angel/Downloads/Individualized%20Education%20Plans%20and%20504%20Plans%20(1).pdf)

[Understood: 7 Tips for a productive 504 meeting](https://www.understood.org/en/articles/7-tips-for-a-successful-504-meeting)