

Advocating for Your Student with Mental Health Needs at School

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Objectives

- Develop strategies for before, during and after an IEP meeting.
- Determine and prioritize your child's mental health needs.
- Learn the principles of strength-based language.
- Develop a collaborative team approach.
- Learn about mental health supports in Wisconsin.

Strategies for improving communication and collaboration

- Before the IEP meeting
- During the IEP meeting
- After the IEP meeting

Before the IEP meeting

- Preparation is the key to a successful IEP meeting.
- Request materials to be reviewed at the meeting beforehand.
- Organize any documents that you would like to be reviewed at the meeting.
- Create your own draft for the PLOP, goals, and services.

Before the IEP meeting

- Invite someone to attend with you that knows your child.
- Create a “Getting to Know You” or Positive Student Profile for you child or youth.
- Talk to your child or youth about what is important for them to share, if they can’t be there.

Preparing Youth to Participate in the Meeting

Foreshadow expectations and format of the meeting.

Talk about different ways to share about their needs and strengths.

Review and discuss constructive ways to communicate with staff.

Discuss the purpose of having an IEP, and how it can help them be successful at school.

Positive Student Profile

- Describe your child's like or dislikes.
- Describe what your child does well.
- Describe what strategies help your child to be successful at school/home.
- Describe your child's learning style.
- Share your hopes for your child.
- Share your child's successes.
- Share what is challenging for your child.
- Share three positive traits about your child.

During the IEP meeting

- Bring a small snack or treat to the meeting.
- If you brought someone to the meeting, let them take notes for you.
- If you are feeling overwhelmed or dysregulated, ask to take a break.
- Ask questions for clarification or to deepen the conversation. Why or why not?
- Be an active listener.

During the IEP meeting

- Make sure that you understand the language staff is using or ask for different words.
- Reframe language, so it's strength-based vs. deficit-based.
- Assume good intentions of staff or providers.
- Stay focused on the present.
- Suggest ending the meeting after 2 hours and resume at a different time.

After the IEP meeting

- Take a breath.
- Be kind to yourself and your child.
- Review notes and materials, and then put them in a file or binder.
- If there are unresolved issues, send an email outlining your concerns or questions.
- Send an email to the IEP team thanking them for their time and effort.

What Do Mental Health Needs Look Like in Youth

- Unexpected behaviors to typical situations.
- Shutting down or ramping up during the school day.
- Withdrawal from all or some activities.
- Fear of failure or perfectionistic tendencies.
- Emotional lability.
- Chronic somatic symptoms (ie. headaches)
- Decrease in attendance due to fear of separation.

How to Advocate for Your Youth



Barriers to Active Listening

- Thinking about what you are going to say next in the conversation.
- Making assumptions about what the individual is implying with their words.
- Check your assumptions. “What I hear you saying is that....?”
- Feeling overwhelmed.
- Using other devices during the discussion.

Advocacy Tips

Prioritize your concerns using data or examples.

Know your rights as parent or caregiver under state and federal law, including Act 125.

Familiarize yourself with your child's Behavior Intervention Plan and Safety plan.

Learn about your district's Student Code of Conduct.

Strength-Based Practices and Language

Typical Problem-Solving Approaches

- Identify what is wrong
- Analyze possible causes
- Create goals to fix what is wrong
- Create and implement plan to reach goals or fix problem
- Evaluate whether it works or doesn't work

Resiliency Initiatives (2010), *"Principles of Strength-Based Practice"*, page 3

Strength-Based Paradigm

- Our children and youth that face complex and complicated circumstances, including disability, are resilient, and have the potential to thrive with appropriate supports and relationships, despite labels and adversity.
- A strength-based approach holds the belief that all children, youth and families have strengths, resources and abilities.

Core Principles that Support Strength-Based Language

- Every child has potential due to their unique strengths that drives their outcomes in life.
- The way we talk about our children can create other people's perception of them and their abilities.
- Positive and healthy change requires strong, healthy and reciprocal relationships.
- Effective change is inclusive and collaborative.

Developing a Collaborative Team Approach

- Have open communication with staff including ongoing updates from outside providers.
- Set guidelines and meeting norms that allow equal participation from all group members.
- Family and youth centered.
 - Make sure that confidentiality is a priority.
- Have an open and inclusive mindset.

Resources

Wisconsin Facets

<https://wifacets.org>

NAMI

<https://namiwisconsin.org>

Disability Rights Wisconsin

www.disabilityrightswi.org

Wisconsin Family Ties

<https://www.wifamilyties.org>

**Thank you for being
here!**