

# Questions to Ask at an IEP Meeting for Autism

## The Complete Parent Advocacy Checklist

51 questions organized by category -- from IEP goals and autism accommodations to culturally specific advocacy for Black families. Print it, bring it, check it off.

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**The Kisha Project**

[thekishaproject.com](http://thekishaproject.com)

*Empowering Black Motherhood: Navigating Autism, Culture, and Parenthood*

## A Note From Kisha

As a parent, you are the strongest advocate your child will ever have. And one of the most powerful places to use that voice is inside an IEP meeting.

When our son was first diagnosed, I felt like I had been dropped into a foreign country without a map. The language was different -- PLAAFP, LRE, FAPE, BIP -- and everyone in that room seemed to already know the rules except me. I sat through that first meeting nodding along, signing things I did not fully understand, and crying in the car afterward because I was not sure I had done enough for him.

What I know now -- and what I wish someone had told me then -- is that the most powerful thing you can bring to an IEP meeting is a list of the right questions. Not because questions make you difficult. Because questions make you heard.

This guide gives you exactly that: the specific questions to ask at an IEP meeting for autism, organized by category so you can walk in prepared, confident, and clear about what your child needs.

You do not have to ask every single question at every meeting. But having them in front of you means you will not leave anything critical on the table.

Print this. Highlight it. Bring it with you. And remember -- you belong in that room.

**-- Kisha**

### Know Your Rights

- Request an IEP meeting at any time -- not just annually
- Bring anyone you want: partner, family member, advocate, or attorney
- Request an Independent Educational Evaluation (IEE) at school district expense
- Receive all documents in your native language
- Refuse to sign on the spot -- take the document home and review it
- Request a copy of Procedural Safeguards at every meeting

## Preparation Checklist

Walk into every IEP meeting prepared. Complete these steps before you sit down at that table.

1. Review the current IEP -- note goals met, partially met, or not addressed
2. Pull the most recent evaluation reports and assessment data
3. Write down your home observations: what is hard, what has improved
4. Document any incidents, behaviors, or concerns with dates
5. List your child's current strengths and what motivates them
6. Write down the services you believe your child needs (even if unsure)
7. Confirm who will be present at the meeting (request a list in advance)
8. Arrange a support person to attend and take notes
9. Print and bring this question list
10. Know your rights: request a copy of Procedural Safeguards if you don't have one

## Questions About Current Performance

*These questions establish the baseline. If you don't know exactly where your child is right now, every goal and service discussion that follows is built on guesswork.*

1. Can you walk me through my child's current performance in each subject -- specifically where they are relative to grade-level standards?
2. What specific strengths has my child demonstrated this year, academically and socially?
3. How does autism affect my child's learning in the general education classroom day to day?
4. What assessments were used to determine these performance levels, and when were they given?
5. Has my child's performance changed since the last IEP? What do you attribute that to?
6. Are there areas where you have seen regression or plateau that concern you?

## Questions About IEP Goals

*IEP goals should be ambitious enough to move your child forward and specific enough to measure. Vague goals are easy to let slide.*

1. How was each goal developed, and what data informed it?
2. Are these goals specific and measurable? How will we know when they have been met?
3. Which goals are carried over from last year, and why were they not fully achieved?
4. Who is responsible for working on each goal -- which staff member, in which setting?
5. How do these goals connect to my child's long-term needs, not just this school year?
6. Can we add a goal for [specific area you have identified at home]?

## Questions About Services and Supports

*This is where you find out what the school is actually committing to provide -- and for how long, how often, and with whom.*

- 1. What special education services will my child receive, and how many minutes per week for each?
- 2. Will my child receive speech therapy, occupational therapy, or other related services? If not, why not?
- 3. Who will be providing each service -- and what is their experience specifically with autism?
- 4. Will services be delivered in a pull-out setting, push-in, or both? What is the reasoning?
- 5. How will services be coordinated so my child is not missing the same class repeatedly?
- 6. If a therapist or aide is absent, will those sessions be made up?

## Autism-Specific Accommodations

*Accommodations are not extras -- they are the conditions your child needs to access their education. Do not let this section get glossed over.*

1. [Sensory] How is my child's sensory environment being managed in the classroom?
2. [Sensory] Does my child have access to sensory breaks? How are they structured?
3. [Sensory] Are there unaddressed sensory triggers in the environment (lighting, noise, crowds)?
4. [Communication] What communication supports are in place -- visual schedules, AAC, social stories?
5. [Communication] If my child uses or might benefit from AAC, how is the school supporting that?
6. [Communication] How are communication strategies shared with ALL of my child's teachers?
7. [Behavior] Does my child have a Behavioral Intervention Plan (BIP)? If not, should they?
8. [Behavior] What proactive strategies are in place -- not just responses after a behavior occurs?
9. [Behavior] How is the school distinguishing disability-related behavior from other behavior?
10. [Behavior] What does de-escalation look like, and who is trained to do it?

## Placement and Least Restrictive Environment

*The law requires education alongside non-disabled peers to the maximum extent appropriate. Ask directly about how this applies to your child.*

1. How much of the school day will my child spend in the general education classroom?
2. If my child is pulled out for a significant portion of the day, what is the educational justification?
3. What supports would need to be in place for more time in the general education setting?
4. How is my child included in non-academic activities -- lunch, specials, recess, field trips?

## Progress Monitoring

*Goals that are not tracked do not get met. Make sure there is a concrete, specific system -- not a vague promise to 'check in.'*

1. How often will progress toward each goal be formally measured?
2. What does that measurement look like -- observation, data collection, assessments?
3. How frequently will I receive written progress reports, and in what format?
4. At what point will the team contact me if a goal is off track?
5. If my child is not making expected progress by mid-year, what happens next?

## Questions for Black Parents and Families of Color

*Black children are disproportionately affected by implicit bias in special education -- from misidentification to punitive discipline to lower expectations. These questions are not optional extras. They are essential advocacy.*

1. How does the school ensure cultural competence in how staff interact with my child and our family?
2. What training have my child's teachers and aides received on implicit bias and its effect on Black students?
3. Are there Black educators, mentors, or support staff my child can have consistent relationships with?
4. How does the school ensure equitable access to enrichment programs and extracurriculars for Black students with IEPs?
5. Does the curriculum include culturally responsive materials that reflect my child's background and identity?
6. Can you walk me through the discipline policy and how it applies to students with disabilities? What does the data show by race?
7. What anti-bullying protections are in place specifically around race and disability?
8. How does the school actively engage Black families in the IEP process -- not just notify them?
9. Can you connect us with advocacy organizations that serve Black families in special education?

## Transition Planning Questions

*Start asking these questions earlier than you think you need to. Transition planning for post-secondary life begins at 14 (or 16 in some states) -- but building toward it starts now.*

1. How is the current IEP building skills my child will need at the next grade level?
2. What does the school's transition planning process look like, and when does it formally begin?
3. For students 14+: Has a transition plan been developed? Does it reflect my child's own goals?
4. What vocational, life skills, or community-based instruction is available?
5. What post-secondary outcomes is the school working toward with my child?

## What Should Be in Your Child's IEP for Autism

Use this checklist when reviewing a draft IEP. Every item below should be present, specific, and data-driven -- not vague.

1. Present Levels (PLAAFP) -- specific, data-based, describes how autism affects learning
2. Measurable Annual Goals -- observable outcomes with a clear measurement method
3. Special Education Services -- type, frequency, duration, and provider named
4. Supplementary Aids and Supports -- visual supports, assistive technology, aides
5. Accommodations and Modifications -- specific adjustments to instruction and assessment
6. Behavioral Intervention Plan (BIP) -- proactive, function-based, if behaviors are present
7. Communication Plan -- supports for expressive and receptive communication
8. Social Skills Goals -- explicit instruction and peer interaction opportunities
9. Least Restrictive Environment Statement -- clear explanation of placement decision
10. Transition Plan -- required at 14 (or 16), includes student's own stated goals
11. Progress Reporting Schedule -- when and how parents receive updates
12. Parent Input -- your observations and priorities documented in the IEP itself

## Follow-Up Checklist

*The meeting is not the finish line -- it is the starting gun. What you do in the days that follow matters just as much.*

1. Send a follow-up email summarizing what was discussed and agreed to (within 48 hours)
2. File the signed IEP somewhere you can find it quickly
3. Note the date of the next annual review in your calendar
4. Schedule a mid-year check-in (do not wait until something goes wrong)
5. Reach out to the classroom teacher to introduce yourself and establish communication
6. Share any home strategies that work well with the school team
7. If anything was agreed verbally but is not in the document, request a written correction
8. If you did not sign -- follow up in writing with your specific concerns
9. Connect with a parent advocacy group or PTI center if you need support

## If You Disagree With the IEP

### **Do not sign on the spot.**

You can take the document home, review it, consult with an advocate, and sign later. The school cannot withhold services because you have not signed -- services continue under the previous IEP.

### **Request an Independent Educational Evaluation (IEE).**

If you disagree with the school's assessment, you can request one at public expense. The district must either fund it or explain in writing why they believe their evaluation is appropriate.

### **Put everything in writing.**

Requests, disagreements, and follow-up questions should go by email or certified letter -- not verbal conversation. A paper trail protects you.

### **Bring a parent advocate or educational attorney.**

If you are in repeated conflict with the district, consider it. Parent Training and Information (PTI) centers in every state are federally funded to support families like yours -- often at no cost.

### **File a state complaint or request mediation.**

If the school is not following the IEP or violating your rights, you can file a complaint with your state education agency or request mediation. These are free processes guaranteed under IDEA.

## Helpful Resources for Autism Parents

### **Wrightslaw ([wrightslaw.com](http://wrightslaw.com))**

The most comprehensive free resource on special education law and advocacy. Look up your specific rights, IDEA regulations, and real case examples.

### **Parent Training and Information (PTI) Centers**

Federally funded centers in every state that provide free training and information to help families participate in their child's education. Find yours at [parentcenterhub.org](http://parentcenterhub.org)

### **Autism Society of America ([autism-society.org](http://autism-society.org))**

Local chapters, advocacy resources, and connections to community support.

### **The Arc ([thearc.org](http://thearc.org))**

Advocates for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Strong resources on IEP rights and self-advocacy.

### **Understood.org**

Plain-language guides on IEPs, learning differences, and advocacy -- especially useful for first-time IEP parents.

### **The Kisha Project ([thekishaproject.com](http://thekishaproject.com))**

Resources, guides, and community for Black mothers navigating autism, special education, and parenting.

***You are not just invited to your child's IEP meeting.***

***You are a required member of the team.***

*Advocacy begins with asking the right questions. You have them now. Use them.*

**-- Kisha**