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## Dealing with Professionals and Preparing for Meetings

At some point, all of us are in meetings about our children. It is sometimes difficult attending meetings with different professionals such as your child's DHHS worker, therapist, guardian ad litem or school teachers. It is not easy to remember all the things you want to address, and the questions you might want to ask. It can also be emotionally exhausting trying to prepare for a meeting, especially if you feel there may be some sort of confrontation. Try and consult with a friend prior to your meeting. It is often helpful to tell your concerns to someone you know before talking to a group at a formal meeting. Planning ahead can hopefully alleviate some of your fears.

Here are some suggestions/tips for making those meetings more productive:

1. Figure out what you hope to get out of the meeting. Take a few minutes to write down questions that you want to ask. Think about services you might want provided to your child.
2. Organize your papers in advance. Bring extra copies of reports or other information for all team members attending.
3. Think about what information you want to convey. It is important to make your needs known. Sometimes it is helpful to be the first to talk at the meeting. Getting your concerns aired may ease your anxiety and get some discussion going.
4. Write down what you want to say and then try it out on someone else. Try to stay flexible: you might need to change parts of the general outline in order to get your point across.
5. Bring a support person with you; misunderstandings are less common if two people hear the same information. They can be a "silent" partner to listen and be supportive. A grandparent once confessed: "somebody's pinch could work wonders when you lose your focus, or you go off track!"
6. Although it may be difficult at times, listen when others are talking about your child. You may hear something about your child that you never knew.
7. Request all the information in writing - no matter if it is a school meeting or a DHHS meeting, you can request that somebody take notes.
8. Sometimes people are speaking in jargon. It is your right to understand what they are saying. Ask for an explanation if you do not understand.
9. Before you leave the meeting, make sure that everybody understands the outcomes. Know "who" is going to complete certain tasks and by "when".
10. You may want to keep a record of the meeting with the suggestions for improvement. Make notes as soon as possible afterwards while details are still fresh.

11. Build good relationships, if at all possible, with the professionals who work with your child. Try to use positive direct communication in meetings focusing on the here and now. Do not go back to previous negative incidents unless it is necessary to show a pattern that is a problem now.

Sources used:

Wrights Law- [www.wrightslaw.com](http://www.wrightslaw.com)

Learning Disabilities OnLine- [www.ldonline.com](http://www.ldonline.com)

Maine Parent Federation- [www.mpf.com](http://www.mpf.com)

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