

Meetings at Your Child's School

Whenever you are invited to attend a meeting at your child's school, it's important to find out what is going to be discussed, who else is invited, and if it is to be a regular meeting. If you discover that you are the only parent or parents invited, you may like to think about asking a friend or a professional who knows you and your child to accompany you and provide moral support or be an advocate for you.

General school meetings

There are many types of meetings at schools to which parents may be invited to attend. These could be:

- decision making meetings about school policy, for example, deciding to change the design of uniforms or to raise fees
- specific meetings for a particular level in the school, such as 'parents and teachers from all the Prep classes', 'Middle Primary' or 'Grade 6'
- committee meetings such as School Council or Parent's Club meetings
- about organising particular celebrations and excursions, planning functions together with the community or co-ordinating events of various types in which parents are often involved.

General Parent/Teacher meetings

Parent/teacher meetings are held for every student in most schools. They are held to discuss the student's progress, program, behaviour, needs, or a variety of other matters which the school wishes to speak to the parents/guardians about.

Special meetings for students with disabilities

Most States in Australia require schools to have regular meetings for all students with disabilities within their school. This includes schools for the deaf, mainstream or facilities/units for deaf students and specialist schools. These meetings are very important as they are planning meetings to decide on future academic and social aims for each student. They allow parents to have a say in how the school is managing, or will manage, their child's educational progress. The name of these meetings vary from State to State.

For further information about Deaf Children Australia visit our website,
www.deafchildrenaustralia.org.au

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Rights and responsibilities in meetings

Personnel from the school who may be present in a meeting

Teachers and teacher/integration aides who are directly involved with your deaf child often attend meetings. Principals may attend or they may delegate another teacher to act on their behalf. Any specialist professionals who have worked with your child may attend, including teacher of the deaf, speech pathologist, psychologist, audiologist or physiotherapist. It depends on the reason for the meeting. In some special situations, a teacher or principal from another school may attend.

Advocates and support people for the family attending a meeting

You are entitled to bring to a meeting with you any person whose support you value. It is important that this person understands your child's needs well and can communicate this to the school. This person may be:

- a friend or relative
- another professional who works with the child
- a person whose role is advocating for parents of deaf children
- another parent of a deaf child or child with a disability
- a counselor or family worker involved with your family.

The student's right to attend a meeting

A parent has the right to bring their child to a meeting where their program or performance is being discussed. The wisdom and potential benefit of involving the student should be discussed beforehand with the school.

It must be clear that the student has the capacity to understand and benefit from such a meeting.

Records of the meeting

It is a good idea for Minutes of the Meeting to be made during meetings, with recommendations, goals, outcomes, responsibilities and long range plans being recorded. Everyone who attends such a meeting should automatically receive a copy of the Minutes. In fact, you are entitled to receive copies of any information which may be recorded regarding your child. Many parents make their own notes as well.

Arranging for a meeting at your child's school

You are entitled to request a meeting at your child's school to discuss anything that concerns you about your child's progress. It is best to approach the Principal or class teacher and tell them you would like to hold a meeting and the reason for this. Ask for the appropriate people to be at the meeting and for an Agenda to be

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written. The Agenda should include the reasons for the meeting and should be available to everyone who will attend the meeting a couple of days before the meeting is to be held.

Goal setting and Measuring Achievement

All schools in Australia are responsible for each student's educational achievement. The school has an obligation to relate the learning program to the curriculum outcomes and standards for the particular state or education authority (in the case of independent schools). Parents should have a copy of the particular education authority's standards and school staff should be setting and reporting on goals/outcomes in relation to these standards.

At each meeting, the school should refer to the learning program and set long and short term goals. The school should be reviewing the student's achievement against previously set goals and adapt the learning and support program based on feedback from all involved in the education of the child.

Follow-up

The outcome of a meeting can involve some changes and recommendations for your child's program. It is a good idea to check progress towards achieving these goals, so ask for a follow-up meeting in a few months time. Discuss what evidence you would like to see at the next meeting to show that these recommendations and changes are being implemented effectively.

When the notes from a meeting do not match your memory of the meeting

Occasionally, you may feel that the Minutes of the Meeting have missed some points which are important to you. You can approach your child's teacher or the principal and suggest that your memory of the meeting differs from the Minutes of the Meeting you received. Try to remain calm and reasonable about this. Bring the person who attended the meeting with you for support if appropriate or you feel you need the support.

You may prefer to write a brief and friendly note. Try to be clear about how you understand the recommendations and point out how that differs from the Minutes you received.

Remember that your child's well-being is most important, and that open and friendly communication between yourself and the school is one of the best ways to achieve this.

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Resources

I.E.P (Individual Education Plan)

<http://www.nclid.unco.edu/HVoriginals/Advocacy/Popup/popup.html>

This is an American site and uses American terminology. It lists responses given to parents by schools and suggests how parents may respond in order to receive better support for their child.

The law which supports these suggestions is the American Disability Legislation. The equivalent Australian legislation is the Disability Discrimination Act and can be found at

<http://scaleplus.law.gov.au/html/pasteact/0/311/top.htm>

Also of relevance is the Disability Standards for Education which can be found at:

<http://members.ozemail.com.au/~ddasp/DDAStandards2.htm>

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