



*California's protection & advocacy system*

# 16 Tips for Getting Quality Regional Center Services for Yourself or Your Child

---

*October 2003, Pub. #5413.01*

## **BEFORE THE MEETING**

### **Plan what you will ask for.**

Use the IPP Planner in Appendix G to help you figure out what services and supports you want and need from the regional center. Talk to family, friends, and advocates to help you fill out the planner or make your own list.

### **Send a letter asking for an IPP meeting within 30 days.**

It is important to let the regional center know before the meeting what you will ask for. That way, the regional center can be ready to decide at the meeting whether it will give you the services and supports you ask for. Use the sample letter in Appendix F to help you write your own. Once you ask for a meeting, the regional center must hold one within 30 days of when it receives your letter.

### **Request and confirm that a decision maker be there.**

The law says that decisions about your services and supports must be made at the meeting by the planning team. This means that someone from the regional center who has authority to say “yes” or “no” to your requests (a “decision maker”) must be at the meeting. A decision maker may not attend unless you ask for it.

## **AT THE MEETING**

### **Bring a friend, advocate, or someone who knows you.**

You can invite anyone you want to your IPP. It is a good idea to have someone with you who can help you advocate. You can invite someone from your living arrangement, your day program, your child's school or any other service provider. Some people start "buddy" programs where they each agree to go to the other's IPP meeting for support.

### **Make sure a "decision maker" is present. If not, you have a right to reschedule the meeting.**

Sometimes, a planning team may only "recommend funding" for services and supports, or the regional center may say that the right people are not at the meeting to make a decision. Or, the regional center may say that its "POS committee" or another committee has to approve your request. This is against the law and may mean that you will not get the services and supports that your team agrees you should get. As soon as the meeting begins, make sure that one of the people from the regional center is a "decision maker" and that you can come to a final decision about the services and supports you request at the meeting.

### **Make sure the meeting is "person-centered."**

Person-centered means that you are an active participant in the meeting and that it is your choices, preferences and needs which drive the discussion and planning -- not what services happen to be available or are the ones "usually" provided for people. There should be a discussion of your likes and dislikes, support needs and non-negotiable items to be included in the IPP. Everyone should speak in words that you understand. It is often good to have the notes taken on big pieces of paper that are put up on the walls so everyone can follow the discussion. The people at the meeting should work as a team to come up with creative ways of meeting your goals and dreams. Don't be afraid to ask questions -- no question is too simple.

**Make sure you understand what is being said, even if you don't speak English.**

The IPP meeting is about you (or your child). It is very important that you understand what is being said. If you do not speak English very well, the regional center must have an interpreter there and should translate important documents for you.

**Take notes to document the agreements (and disagreements).**

Before the meeting ends, you will want to go over the things you have agreed and disagreed on. So that you do not forget, you or someone you bring with you should take notes. At the end of the meeting, you should read the list to the team and make sure that everyone agrees with what you have written.

**Complete the IPP document.**

Make sure to write down: (1) what services and supports will be provided (the type and amount); (2) who is going to provide the services; and (3) when the services will start. If the services cannot start right away because there are additional steps needed (for example, there is no available provider) the IPP must state what steps will be taken, who is responsible to do each step and the timelines for completing each step and then providing the support required by the IPP. The law says that these must be included in the IPP.

**Sign the IPP (or a list of the agreements reached) at the meeting.**

DO NOT SIGN A PAPER THAT JUST INDICATES AGREEMENT WITH A "PROPOSED PLAN." The IPP you sign should list the specific goals and objectives and the services to be provided. If the regional center will not write the entire IPP at the meeting, make a handwritten list of the agreements so that everyone can sign and take a copy home. The regional center can then type up the document on the form it uses and send it to you. Remember that you can agree to part of the IPP while still noting that you do not agree with other parts of the IPP document or with a refusal to put requested services in the IPP.

If a final decision cannot be reached on any issue(s), you can schedule another meeting within 15 days or file an appeal.

The law says that if the team cannot come to a final agreement at the meeting, you must schedule another meeting within 15 days. This means that, at the end of the meeting, the service coordinator cannot say that he or she will go to a committee or supervisor and let you know the decision. You should be able to speak to the decision maker face to face at the second meeting. If the answer at the first meeting is “no,” then you do not have to go to a second meeting, but you can ask for a written notice and how to appeal.

### **Get a written notice of any denial.**

If the regional center says “no” to any new service request, the law says that you must get a written notice of the denial within 5 days. If the regional center says it wants to change or end a service you are already getting, it must give you written notice 30 days in advance of the change or cut-off.

You will need to say very clearly that you disagree with the decision and that you want a written notice. The notice should also include an appeal form that you can fill out if you choose to appeal.

### **IF THINGS DON'T WORK OUT**

- If there is disagreement, promptly file an appeal if you choose to challenge the denial of services. You must file the appeal within 10 days if you want current services to be continued during the appeal process. This is called “aid paid pending.” If it is a denial of a new service or you do not need aid paid pending then you have 30 days to appeal.
- If you do not receive a denial letter, contact the case manager. If you still do not receive it, file an administrative complaint (a “4731 complaint”) and a letter of appeal, if you choose to appeal.
- If agreed-upon services are not provided, file an administrative complaint.

- If the regional center delays making a decision, insist on a decision or treat the delay as a denial and file an appeal.

*Disability Rights California is funded by a variety of sources, for a complete list of funders, go to <http://www.disabilityrightsca.org/Documents/ListofGrantsAndContracts.html>.*