



When You Disagree With a Mental Health or Education Professional About What Your Child Needs

A practical guide for parents/caregivers

Disagreements happen. You know your child best, and professionals bring training and outside perspective. The goal isn't to "win"—it's to make sure your child gets the support that truly fits them.

1) Start With the Shared Goal

Even when you disagree on the *plan*, you likely agree on the *goal*: your child's well-being and learning.

Try saying:

- *"We both want what's best for my child. Let's figure out what that looks like together."*
- *"Help me understand how you arrived at that recommendation."*

This sets a team tone and reduces defensiveness.

2) Ask for the "Why" Behind the Recommendation

Sometimes disagreement comes from missing information, unclear communication, or different interpretations.

Ask:

- *"What specific observations or data led to this conclusion?"*
- *"What options did you consider and why was this one chosen?"*
- *"What benefits are you expecting, and what risks should we watch for?"*
- *"How will we know if it's working?"*

Request examples, not just labels.



3) Share What You See at Home (With Specifics)

Professionals may not see your child across settings. Your input is essential.

Bring concrete details:

- *What behaviors you notice*
- *When/where they happen*
- *What helps or worsens them*
- *How your child describes their experience*
- *Any relevant family or cultural context*

Example:

“At school they seem calm, but at home after homework they melt down 3–4 nights a week. It usually starts after 20 minutes of reading.”

4) Separate Facts, Interpretations, and Values

This helps pinpoint what you’re *actually* disagreeing about.

- *Facts/data: Test results, observations, attendance, work samples*
- *Interpretations: “This behavior means anxiety” vs “This behavior means sensory overload”*
- *Values/goals: “We prioritize minimizing medication” or “We want the least restrictive classroom”*

You can agree on facts but differ on interpretation or values—and that’s okay.

5) Ask About Alternatives

If you’re not comfortable with the recommendation, ask what else is possible.

Say:

- *“What are two or three other options?”*
- *“What’s the least intensive thing we could try first?”*
- *“Can we test this approach for a short period and re-evaluate?”*
- *“How would we adapt this to fit my child better?”*

You’re allowed to request a “trial run” with measurable goals.



6) Request a Clear Plan With Check-In Dates

A good plan includes *what, who, when, and how we'll measure progress.*

Ask for:

- *Specific targets (not vague goals)*
- *A timeline (e.g., 6–8 weeks)*
- *What data will be tracked*
- *When you'll meet again to review*

Example:

"Let's try this for 6 weeks and track frequency of outbursts and homework completion. Then we'll meet to decide next steps."

7) Get a Second Opinion When Needed

A second opinion is not disrespectful. It's common in both education and healthcare.

Consider another perspective if:

- *You feel dismissed or unheard*
- *The recommendation doesn't match how you perceive your child's reality*
- *Progress has stalled*
- *Risks feel high or unclear*

Possible sources:

- *Another psychologist/therapist/psychiatrist*
- *A developmental pediatrician*
- *A school psychologist or special education specialist*
- *Independent educational evaluator*
- *Parent advocacy organization*

Tip: Bring your notes and the professional's report to the second provider.



8) Know Your Rights (Education Settings)

If this disagreement is in school (IEP/504/placement/services), you have rights to:

- *Ask for evaluations*
- *Receive results in writing*
- *Participate in decisions*
- *Disagree formally*
- *Request meetings*
- *Bring an advocate/support person*
- *Seek independent evaluations (rules vary by district/country)*

If you're unsure, ask:

"Can you explain the process for disagreeing and next steps in writing?"

Every state has a federally funded special education parent support centers that are officially called Parent Training and Information Centers (PTIs) and Community Parent Resource Centers (CPRCs), which are part of the national Parent Center Network. They provide free info and training to families of kids with disabilities (birth to 26) to help them navigate education and development.

9) If Communication Breaks Down, Reset the Conversation

If things get tense, pause and reframe:

- *"I'm feeling stuck. Can we slow down and make sure we understand each other?"*
- *"What part of my concerns feels most important for us to address first?"*
- *"Let's summarize where we agree before we tackle what we don't."*

You can also ask to talk with a supervisor or team lead.

10) Watch for Red Flags

It may be time to switch providers or escalate if you notice:

- *You're repeatedly dismissed or blamed*
- *Your child's voice is ignored*
- *The plan relies on shame, punishment, or fear*
- *There's no measurable progress monitoring*
- *You feel pressured into quick decisions*
- *Cultural/family context is belittled*
- *Confidentiality or professionalism concerns arise*

Trust your gut—respect matters.



11) Keep Records

This helps you stay clear and organized, especially across multiple providers.

Save:

- *Reports, emails, notes from meetings*
- *Dates and summaries of conversations*
- *Your observations and home logs*
- *Your child's work samples or behavior trackers*
- *Documents related to IEP/504 plans*

Even a simple notebook or notes app works.

12) Center Your Child

When appropriate, include your child in a voice-level-appropriate way.

Ask your child:

- *"What feels hard right now?"*
- *"What helps you feel better or learn easier?"*
- *"What do you wish adults understood?"*

You know your child well but they are always growing and changing. Check-ins are important to confirm or amend what you believe about your child. And even small input increases buy-in and accuracy.

