

Stephanie:

Hey everyone. My name is Stephanie. I am your host and the founder here at the intentional IEP. And we are here today with my friend, Jessica. And we're gonna be talking all about virtual IEP meetings before we get started, though, Jessica, will you please share about your educational experience and your role at the IEP table?

Jessica K:

Of course. So I feel like I have a unique perspective at the IEP table because I've kind of sat at all seats. Um, I started off as a special needs sibling. So, um, back in the nineties, you know, my parents didn't have babysitters. We, so I would just come to the IEP meeting and, you know, kind of chill there on the floor. So I got to see how that kind of started with my, uh, younger brother. And it was definitely a very eyeopening experience from a young age. Um, after that I became a special needs mom, myself. I have a child with an IEP and I have a child with a 504. I have worked as a provider as a registered behavior technician. And now I'm also a special education teacher working at an autism clinic.

Stephanie:

Oh my goodness. You have all the hats, but I love, I love that because it makes you such a well rounded individual at the IEP table so that you,

Jessica K:

It really does. It's nice to, to tell the parents and to tell anybody else I completely understand where you're coming from, because I really do understand where you're coming from.

Stephanie:

Oh my goodness. Well, I'm so excited that you're here. Let's just dive right in. This is the perfect conversation for us to have then since you wear so many hats, well, why might an IEP team have to hold a virtual IEP meeting aside from pandemic? Why might we need to have a virtual IEP meeting?

Jessica K:

So I really like having the option for virtual IEP meetings because you never know what kind of situ the parent is in. You know, for example, I have a child that is zoned for one school, but he's actually going to a charter school that is like specifically designed for, um, high functioning, autistic children. And it is a drive. And not only is it a drive, but it's also a drive for job. So it's like a 30 minute difference between my job and the school and then a 20 minute drive from the school to my home. Oh, wow. So if I needed to make a meeting time wise, if there is an accident, if there's anything like that going on with my other child, there's no way I'm making an IEP meeting, but having an IEP meeting for that means I can kind of pop in from anywhere from work, from home in my car, wherever it needs to be done, I can do that.

Stephanie:

And virtual IEP meetings were a thing before the pandemic. And I don't know that a lot of special education teachers or IEP team members knew that that was an option before this. And I love, I will not ever pretend to know what teaching during a pandemic is like, I will not, I'm not even gonna try. Um, but I love that one thing that came out of it was the knowledge that we can have virtual IEP meetings.

Jessica K:

Oh yeah. You have children that are medically sensitive or maybe they have parents or siblings that have medical needs. And having that option allows them to still be able to participate. And even the teachers, you know, we have full workloads. If you're having to stop what you're doing in the middle of the day, it's way easier to know. Everyone can pop on the computer at a particular time than waiting for everyone to come from all their different locations to come to one physical location for a meeting,

Stephanie:

I think. And I never thought about it like that. You actually just spark like a light bulb in my head for all of those traveling service providers and tra like I've spoken to teachers who work at two different schools and I have to travel in between. I never thought about it in, in terms of all of that, but that makes so much sense.

Jessica K:

Oh yeah. And then, you know, besides like the pandemic and things like that, it allows those providers who maybe wouldn't be able to join in a meeting because they're going to multiple occasions or maybe their schedules are just that full because everyone is short staffed right now. Yeah. That makes it that much easier for people to be able to collaborate, communicate, share information.

Stephanie:

Oh, I love it. I'm here for virtual IEP meetings like this completely. Yes. Well, how do they work? Are they different than like in person meetings?

Jessica K:

I wouldn't say that they're different. They probably feel very different, uh, for anyone that's participating in them. However, if you have a parent of participating, it actually opens the door for them to be able to feel more comfortable because they can be in their own home if that's necessary, if they have children that they can't find childcare for anything like that. Um, there's definitely some different rules that go along with having the, uh, other meetings online because you have to be aware of, you know, background noise and how those options work with like chatting and stuff like that. But I feel like it's very, very similar. In fact, I think that it condenses the meeting because everyone can come in, everyone can share links to anything. Um, I'm a big like supporter of people you using Google drive for special education purposes. So it's easy to pop in a link and just get going

Stephanie:

And you're, I'm gonna go rogue here. I always, everyone listening knows that I always have a question that is not on the sheet before we go and do this, but for virtual IEP meetings and I lost it. Um, oh, do you record, like, I, I know there's rules and regulations for recording IEP meetings, but how does that work with virtual IEP meetings recording?

Jessica K:

So I always make sure that, especially if I'm helping a parent, that's doing a virtual IEP meeting, you can always ask. Sometimes there's a policy that it's going to be tra uh, be recorded because there might be training or maybe they need that documented for something later. And it makes it a thousand times easier to share something that somebody can watch later if there's somebody that can't participate in the meeting, but the meeting needs to happen. So you really have to know your policies. You have to

know if it's gonna benefit your child. And all of those things can be answered prior to the meeting as well.

Stephanie:

Oh, I'm a big proponent of having conversations prior to the IEP meeting. And I were actually just talking about that.

Jessica K:

Yeah,

Stephanie:

Well that leads us actually perfectly into the next question. How can we, as teachers, help parents prepare for those virtual IEP meetings?

Jessica K:

So I think that a great way to prepare a parent would be just sending them like short little things that they can be made aware of that will make them feel more comfortable. So, you know, telling them your camera does not need to be on. There is no reason why I have to physically see you to be able to have a conversation with you. You know, even if I were to be doing an in-person IEP meeting, there's still the option for the parent to call in, you know, if they can't physically be there. So there's no reason why you physically have to be seen if you're embarrassed because you know, you have other children, you know, they've destroyed the house. You can just turn off your camera. Maybe you don't wanna get outta your pajamas, turn off the camera. Nobody needs to see you. So maybe letting them know, you know, camera is optional.

Jessica K:

Just please make sure that we're able to, um, get your input when necessary, letting them know if, um, they have somebody that they feel comfortable with asking questions so that they know how to present it to the team. They can utilize the chat box. They don't have to ask everyone out front. If they feel uncomfortable doing that, they could ask a teacher, they could ask, um, someone from administration, whoever they feel most comfortable with. So there's a lot of different things that can be used to make them feel a little bit more at ease. I feel like versus, Hey, we're gonna bring you to a right random room in the school that you've probably never seen before. And we're just all gonna sit down and have like a pow loud

Stephanie:

And it's usually stagnant and it doesn't have a good smell and there's nothing on the walls. And yes, like why are IEP meeting rooms? So uninviting.

Jessica K:

Yes.

Stephanie:

Um, I had another question for you and I lost it about virtual IEP meetings. Oh, I remember signatures. How do you go about getting virtual signatures?

Jessica K:

So something that I always tell parents too, is I never recommend signing any paperwork during the IEP meeting, just because I feel like you need that time to kind of retain the information, understand the information and ask any questions that may come up later because I'm one of those people, especially that will look at something and feel like, okay, this is great. And then like an hour later, I'm like, wait a second.

Stephanie:

Same. I think

Jessica K:

I'll have a question. And it's like super random. I'm normally not even thinking about it when it pops into my head. So, you know, I, I always tell the parent, you know, just hold onto that paperwork. So the school can send a copy home with your child, um, for you to look over again before signing it and then just send it back to school with your child.

Stephanie:

I love that idea actually like all in all. Cause it gives them time to process.

Jessica K:

Yes.

Stephanie:

And then not having

Jessica K:

Just have information, even if you're having those conversations beforehand, it's a lot to kind of digest mentally.

Stephanie:

Do you think I'm still going rogue? Do you think that, do you think that most parents know that if they don't have to sign the IEP at the actual meeting?

Jessica K:

Actually, I don't think so. I feel like they just think it's like the natural progression of the meeting. They're like, okay, everyone's signing. I'm just gonna go ahead and sign and be done with it. Um, you know, which I completely understand. It probably is easier when you have someone physically there, however, there's just so many different ways to go about doing it. And even if the school wanted to try out electronic ways of obtaining signatures, lots of, you know, companies are doing it nowadays that could even cut out the, the middle man or your, your child of taking the paperwork back and forth. Yes,

Stephanie:

That's true. Put many IEPs and backpacks to go home. Um, How, how can we then as teacher, is this something like, we can have a conversations with the family prior, like you don't have to sign the IEP

meeting or IEP at the IEP meeting. Like how do you recommend approaching that conversation with parents prior or at the meeting?

Jessica K:

I would definitely recommend, um, you know, there's always that little bit of communication beforehand, you know, um, with making sure, especially if there's gonna be anything that needs to be discussed, that's really important. So, um, you can even send it in that email when you're sending the link for the virtual IEP and say, you know, we understand that, you know, this is a little bit different doing the virtual IEP. Please take your time, understanding what it is we're discussing today. Um, and it kind of depends, I guess, on which option is gonna be used to obtain that signature. If it, if the IEPs getting sent home with the child, let them know, Hey, make sure to look over everything. If you have any questions, please send the, a team, an email, or maybe they're wanting to collect an electronic signature. And you can say, you know, you can access this electronic signature at any point in time. Please don't feel like you need to sign it right away. You know, I like that wording wanna make sure your questions are answered prior to you signing.

Stephanie:

So for those of you listening, know that you have the transcripts of this training, so you can go borrow Jessica's wording for both of those instances to use for yourself as well. So please put that in your teacher toolbox well, what is your best piece of advice for when it comes to virtual IEP meetings?

Jessica K:

My best advice is definitely making contact with the parent at least 10 days prior to the meeting. And that would be 10 school days. So, you know, if you have breaks or anything like that, make sure it's school days. So that way it's gonna be a time when you're checking your mail, your email, anything like that, and also contacting and asking for parent input, you know, ask them a couple questions. How do you feel like your child's doing in these such and such areas? Because then you're kind of aware if there's any issues that need to be discussed and you can touch base with the rest of the team and nobody is shocked, scared, or, you know, um, just blindsided by, oh, I didn't know this was a thing. And just making sure that the lines of communication are very open those 10 days prior to the meeting.

Stephanie:

I think that's very important and is, has been a, the same conversation we've ended up at. And many of these chats with other educators, um, communication is key. Like that will fix many, many things. So I love that you brought that up and that that's your best piece of advice, cuz it truly will do and work wonders. Well, thank you so much, Jessica, for being here today and sharing your knowledge about virtual IEP meetings and thank you for letting me go rogue so many times and answer all of my questions. Where can we find you online? Whether that's a website or social media and like all of the other videos y'all, I'll link all of Jessica's things below this video for you to click and go.

Jessica K:

So you can find me @jessicaannekong.com. That's J E S S I C a a N N K O N g.com. You can find me on Instagram and Facebook, Jessica Anne Kong. And, um, I'm pretty sure I have like YouTube and stuff like that set up, but I'll be honest. I have not been updating that. So probably, Well,

Stephanie:

I will link your website and Instagram and Facebook and all of that below this and then I'm sure they can find it, all the other things from there. They're all linked within websites usually. Um, well thank you again so much for being here and sharing all of your knowledge. Thank y'all for being here to learn more about virtual IEP meetings. I appreciate you taking the time out of your day, especially during summer to learn more about how you can best serve your students and the families that you service. So thank y'all so much for being here. Thank you, Jessica. And we will see y'all in the next chat.