

The Birthday Party

Imagine being a small child and hearing your parents talk about your birthday party. You hear the excitement in their voices as they talk and plan, starting with a theme for the party, deciding whom they will invite, and then figuring out who will do each job. As the time draws closer, you hear more and more conversations about your birthday party, and so you know it is coming soon. And then your birthday comes and goes, but no one ever invites you to your party. Maybe they just forgot to invite me, you think.

The Next Year...

The next year, you again hear your parents discuss your birthday party. Once again, you hear the excitement in their voices as they talk and plan, choose a new theme for the party, decide whom they will invite, and then finally, appoint someone to be in charge of each job. Again, as time draws closer, you hear more and more conversations about your birthday party and so you know it is coming soon. And again your birthday comes and goes, but no one ever invites you to your party. It must not be important for me to be there, you think.

The Following Year...

The following year, you once again hear your parents talk about your birthday party. You barely notice the excited tone in their voices as they decide on another new theme, make the invitation list, and divide the jobs. As the time draws closer, you barely listen to the increased conversations about your party. Again your birthday comes and goes, but no one ever invites you. Now you think that birthday parties are not important at all.

Several Years Later...

Several years later, when you become a teenager, you barely catch a snippet of a conversation about your birthday party. But since you have never been invited to your parties, you know that your presence there is not important. You believe that birthday parties are not important at all, so you do not pay any attention to the birthday plans.

But this time, you receive an invitation to your party! You are surprised, confused, and even scared. You ask your parents why you received an invitation this year. They say,

Well, you are a teenager now, and you are old enough to help with everything that a birthday party involves. Each year, we start with a theme for your party and decide the best ways to represent that theme. Then we make the invitation list and decide who will do the different jobs. Now that you are a teenager, we thought that you would like to become involved!

But you respond by saying,

Why would I want to become involved now? If these birthday parties were supposed to be my birthday parties, why wasn't I invited all along? Why didn't I have a chance to select themes that interest me? Why didn't I get to help decide whom to invite? And why didn't I get to help choose who would do the different jobs?

"We thought that you were not old enough to help."

"Now I am so old that I do not know how to help with any of it; you have been doing it for me for all these years. Just keep on doing it without me."

Now . . .

Imagine this scenario again, only this time, insert individualized education program (IEP) meetings in place of birthday parties.

The IEP Meeting

Students with disabilities hear their teachers and parents talk about their IEP meetings, they hear about goals, and they hear about what they are doing wrong and the problems that they are having. They hear about plans and services and who will work on each job. They hear about who will attend the IEP meeting. But students rarely receive invitations to attend when they first begin to hear about these meetings. At first, students may believe that someone just forgot to invite them. In the years that follow, when they still do not receive invitations, students may think that attending their own IEP meetings is not important since no one shares any information about the meeting. They may decide that an IEP meeting is an opportunity for adults to talk negatively about all the problems that students are having in school and divide up the necessary jobs.

Why Is This Cake on Fire? Inviting Students Into the IEP Process *Jamie L Van Dycke, James E Martin, David L Lovett.* **Teaching Exceptional Children.** Reston: Jan/Feb 2006. Vol.38, Iss. 3; pg. 42, 6 pgs