

# The Mindful IEP Table: Strengthening School-Based Advocacy Through the 7 Attitudes of Mindfulness

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## Pre-Session Reflection

1. When you hear the word *mindfulness*, what is the first thing that comes to your mind?
2. On a scale of 1 to 5, how regulated do you typically feel walking into an IEP meeting?
3. What is one word that describes how you currently show up at the IEP table?

## The 7 Mindfulness Attitudes for IEP Meetings (Kabat-Zinn, 2013)

### 1. Non-Judgement

- **Definition:** Observing your thoughts and experiences with curiosity and openness, rather than labeling them as good or bad.
- **IEP Application:** When a team member exhibits frustration, wonder about what underlying factors or past experiences might be driving that reaction. Actively self-monitor for personal biases regarding the student, parent, or other staff members. Be aware of internal triggers that make you want to immediately offer contrary examples to what a team member is saying.

### 2. Patience

- **Definition:** Accepting the present moment as it is, without rushing toward a particular outcome.
- **IEP Application:** When a hard question is followed by silence, resist the urge to fill the void and give the person room to respond in their own time. If a collaborative discussion is generating meaningful updates to the IEP, do not rush the conversation just to check off the next box "for the sake of time". Offer to schedule a follow-up meeting instead of constantly tracking and calling out how many minutes are remaining.

### 3. Beginner's Mind

- **Definition:** Approaching each moment with fresh eyes and genuine curiosity, as if experiencing it for the very first time.
- **IEP Application:** Release preconceived notions and assumptions before walking into the room regarding how a team member or parent will react, how the meeting will progress, or

what the definitive outcome should be. Consciously let go of negative energy from previous encounters, openly acknowledge past tensions to the team, and verbally offer an intention to start fresh out loud.

#### 4. Trust

- **Definition:** Having confidence in your own intuitions and area expertise, or your knowledge regarding your own child.
- **IEP Application:** Express your experience and professional expertise clearly using declarative language, keeping in mind that "clear is kind". Avoid using ambiguity just for the sake of politeness, as it does not serve the purpose of the meeting. Trust that while you can only ever see part of the picture of a parent's full experience, family advocacy is fundamentally rooted in love.

#### 5. Non-Striving

- **Definition:** Focusing on being fully present in the ongoing process rather than being rigidly fixed on reaching a specific goal.
- **IEP Application:** Stay anchored in the current conversation instead of mentally jumping ahead to remaining tasks, packed schedules, or how new accommodations might impact your to-do list. Arrive at the table open to genuine discussion and collaboration rather than pushing a predetermined plan onto other team members to get them to agree.

#### 6. Acceptance

- **Definition:** Acknowledging and embracing your present experience with honesty and self-compassion.
- **IEP Application:** If a meeting feels hard, name what occurred clearly and express gratitude or pride in the team for engaging in difficult discussions. Accept that IEP documents are inherently fluid and subject to change at any time, and accept that the accompanying documentation is a necessary component for the student to receive their Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE).

#### 7. Letting Go

- **Definition:** Releasing attachment to specific thoughts and outcomes, allowing them to pass without holding on tightly.
- **IEP Application:** If a final team decision diverges from your clinical recommendation, properly document your clinical opinion and move forward. For parents navigating a reduction in support, faded minutes, or termination of services, acknowledge why the shift feels like a "loss" while actively resisting decisions driven by fear or frustration. Remember that letting go can sometimes mean pausing and choosing to reconvene if things get

tense.



## Daily Sustainable Practices & Micro-Routines

Incorporate these quick adjustments into your everyday school-based schedule to build long-term resilience against chronic occupational burnout:

- **60-Second Pre-Meeting Reset:** Spend one minute grounding your breathing and clearing your mind before walking into the IEP room to reset your nervous system.
- **One-Word Intention Practice:** Choose a single word describing how you want to physically and emotionally show up at the table before the meeting begins.
- **The Pause Before the Reply:** Consciously build a brief pause into conversations to respond mindfully rather than reacting defensively to conversational triggers.



## Featured Podcasts

- **UNFILTERED IEPs:** Colleen hosts the Unfiltered IEPs podcast with the purpose of facilitating conversations between parents and professionals that are authentic and honest. Her mission is to help listeners better understand the special education system and confidence advocating for students with IEPs.
- **CHILL, SLP (Co-hosted by Angelyn Franks):** Focusing on burnout recovery, sustainable workflows, and values-driven career alignments for SLPs.



## Post-Session Reflection

Revisit your pre-session assumptions and evaluate your takeaways with these closing questions:

1. Has your definition of mindfulness shifted at all after today's presentation?
2. On a scale of 1 to 5, how confident do you feel that you could use at least one of these attitudes at your next IEP meeting?
3. What is one word that describes how you want to show up at the IEP table going forward?



## References

Kabat-Zinn, J. (2003). Mindfulness-based interventions in context: Past, present, and future. *Clinical Psychology: Science and Practice*, 10(2), 144–156.  
<https://doi.org/10.1093/clipsy.bpg016>

Kabat-Zinn, J. (2013). *Full catastrophe living* (Revised ed.): *Using the wisdom of your body and mind to face stress, pain, and illness*. Bantam Books.