

Preparing for the First Month of School for Children with Disabilities

Checklist for Parents

As parents, you will need to be very involved in your child's school in order to reinforce the work done by the teacher and the school staff. Active participation and preparation provides a very positive message to your child and helps insure a better school year. We strongly suggest that you cover the following suggestions which should keep you informed, help your child, and assist the educational staff in working with you son or daughter.

- 1.) You may want to meet with the classroom teacher before school begins if his or her schedule allows this to happen. By meeting with the teacher first, you may be able communicate information that may assist the teacher in planning for your child or to defuse any and all concerns.
- 2.) Clear define your parental roles and responsibilities with the teacher.
- 3.) Discuss your expectations for your child.
- 4.) Discuss with the teacher your involvement with homework.
- 5.) Discuss the procedures concerning communication between home and school and between school and home.
- 6.) Communicate any fears that you might have concerning workload, class chemistry, social issues etc.
- 7.) Discuss, if necessary, what you see as possible triggers that your child has that may lead to some behavioral reactions and anything you have tried that has worked.
- 8.) Discuss your child's strength areas, hobbies, areas of interest, and favorite things.
- 9.) Discuss, if applicable, any athletic abilities that your child may have.
- 10.) Inform the teacher if there is a pet at home especially if your child is very responsible in taking care of the pet.
- 11.) Provide the teacher with the best hours to contact you as well as a phone number (home and cell) and an email address.
- 12.) Gather the names and contact information for any related service provider that will work with your child (further explanation to follow). Also gather the number of times per week for the service and the length of each session.

Friend (2002) provides the following series of questions which might also serve as a structure for your communication with teachers:

- 1.) What is your child's favorite class activity?
- 2.) Does your child have any worries about class activities? If so what are they?
- 3.) What are your priorities for your child's education this year?
- 4.) What questions do you have about your child's education in class this year?
- 5.) How could the teacher or school make this the most successful year ever for your child?
- 6.) Are there any topics you want to discuss which may require a future conference? If so please let the teacher know.
- 7.) If a conference is requested, would you like other individuals to participate? If so please give the teacher a list of their names so that he/she can invite them.
- 8.) If a conference is requested would you like the teacher to have particular school information available? If so please let him/her know.

Besides the classroom teacher you will also want to have a meeting with any related service provider that will be involved with your child. When your child was classified as having a disability, his/her IEP may have contained a recommendation for related services. These are the professionals who will provide related services to your child on a regular basis throughout the school year.

In general, the final regulations for IDEA 2004 define the term related services as "transportation and such developmental, corrective, and other supportive services as are required to assist a child with a disability to benefit from special education..." [Section 300.24(a)]. The following are included within the definition of related services:

- speech-language pathology and audiology services
- psychological services
- physical and occupational therapy
- recreation, including therapeutic recreation
- early identification and assessment of disabilities in children
- counseling services, including rehabilitation counseling
- orientation and mobility services
- medical services for diagnostic or evaluation purposes
- school health services
- social work services in schools
- parent counseling and training
- transportation. [Section 300.24(a)].

You will want to maintain the most up-to-date information from the related service provider and in order to set up these lines of communication initiate the following:

Send out a letter to each related service providers for your child introducing yourself and asking for a time to get together. An example of this type of letter follows.

Letter to Related Service Provider from a Parent

Dear _____ :

My son _____ will be assigned to you as a related service provider for the school year _____ to _____. It is noted on _____ (child's name) IEP that he is to receive _____ (related service) _____ (frequency i.e. 1 x a week) from you beginning on _____ (date to begin services). In order to coordinate these services, I am suggesting that we get together for a meeting to discuss schedules, communication with the home and teachers, modifications and accommodations and any other matters that may assist _____ (child's name) this year.

I will try to contact you to see what times and days are convenient for you or if you prefer I can be reached at _____ (phone and extension) between the hours of _____. I look forward to meeting with you.

Sincerely yours,

After the letter is sent, seek out the related service provider and set up a meeting. At this meeting with the related service provider, discuss schedules, goals of the service, expectations, communication to home, and a schedule of meetings or communication to discuss the child's progress. It is also important that you discuss your child's specific problem, etiology (cause) and prognosis (outcome) from the service provider.

Following these suggestions will definitely improve communication between home and school and help your child have a better more productive school year.