



SPEAK OUT

Connecticut Parent Advocacy Center, Inc.

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Getting Started Again

After a break of more than two years, the Connecticut Parent Advocacy Center is happy to resume publication of its newsletter. As its name suggests, SPEAK OUT aims to encourage discussion and advocacy. It is an important tool that the Connecticut Parent Advocacy Center (CPAC) uses to further its mission of providing information and support to families of children with any disability or chronic illness, age birth through twenty-six, and to promote the idea that parents can be the most effective advocates for their children. With a readership of more than 19,000, SPEAK OUT offers us the opportunity to reach a wide audience, to reconnect periodically with parents and professionals who are familiar with our work as well as to introduce our organization to families who are just beginning to learn about disabilities, special education, and parent advocacy. Whether you are a longtime reader of SPEAK OUT and have been wondering if a CPAC newsletter would ever appear again (a few of you did ask) or someone leaving through SPEAK OUT for the first time, we hope these pages are a reader-friendly source of information about the services we provide, current issues in education, and how parents of children with disabilities can get involved and support their children's learning.

Although CPAC has published SPEAK OUT for almost twenty-five years, we have decided to approach this issue as a fresh start, an opportunity to reevaluate our design and content, to try out a new look and some new types of articles. We hope these changes are improvements, and we welcome your comments.

In keeping with the new format and the idea that this issue is a beginning of sorts, many of the topics we explore in these pages relate to the start of some new stage in a child's education. As a child grows and develops, he or she experiences many beginnings, many new stages in the process of learning. At the beginning of each stage, parents often face new issues, unfamiliar terms, and difficult decisions as they try to figure out what is best for their child. With their son's or daughter's education at stake, they may feel confused or even overwhelmed by the challenge.

We believe that by educating themselves, parents can gain the understanding and confidence they need to advocate for an appropriate education for their children.

This issue of SPEAK OUT is devoted to answering some of the questions parents may have when their child is poised to begin something new: Should I enroll my child in kindergarten? What is the significance of my first-grade son's being identified as "at risk" by our school district, which uses a Response-to-Intervention process? How do I prepare to participate in the development of my child's IEP? How can I get my struggling child started in a tutoring program? How can I help my daughter with disabilities adjust during her freshman year at college? Our goal is to provide information that will help parents see these beginnings less as challenges and more as opportunities. We believe that by educating themselves, parents can gain the understanding and confidence they need to advocate for an appropriate education for their children. We hope this issue of SPEAK OUT helps you get started.

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The Connecticut Parent Advocacy Center, Inc.

is a statewide nonprofit organization that offers information and support to parents of children with disabilities and the professionals who work with them. The center is staffed primarily by parents of children with disabilities who assist other parents in understanding how to participate more effectively in their children's education. A range of services is available, including telephone consultation; workshops and in-service presentations for parents, schools, and service providers; a website; and a lending library of books, CDs, videotapes, and DVDs.

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Special Thank You

CPAC would like to extend a very special thank you to the Connecticut Association for Children and Adults with Learning Disabilities, CACLD, which generously donated an assortment of recent books dealing with issues related to parenting children and adults with autism and Asperger's Syndrome. The books are a welcome addition to our lending library and are now available to be borrowed by parents and professionals. Many thanks to our friends at CACLD.

CPAC would also like to thank the Vernon SEPTA for funds donated to support our work. With the constantly increasing price of gas, CPAC will use the funds to supplement our travel budget so that staff can conduct training sessions for local parent groups throughout the state. Thanks to Vernon parents and teachers for helping us remain accessible to parents in every town.



Expressions Art Show 2008

The Lyme–Old Lyme Junior Women's Club has announced that the Connecticut Parent Advocacy Center will be among the beneficiaries of the proceeds of their Expressions Art Show 2008, which will be held on April 25, 26, and 27 at the Lyme Art Association.

The event will kick off on Friday evening with the traditional opening reception and continue on the weekend with a show and sale of artwork by many talented regional artists. An Open Air Market and a Kids Paint Out will also be held.

Some of our readers may recall that CPAC was fortunate to be selected as a beneficiary in 2001. This year, CPAC will use our portion of the proceeds to contribute to the cost of printing and distributing our newsletter, as well as to offset the costs associated with our annual summer Friends and Family Picnic at Camp Harkness. We thank the Junior Women's Club for their generous support of our work with families, and we encourage all art lovers to join us for a wonderful opportunity to enjoy the beauty and art of the Shoreline community.

Additional information about the event is available on the Junior Women's Club website, www.expressionsartshow.org.

Family Involvement: Key to Student Success

A growing body of research indicates that students whose parents are actively involved in supporting their education tend to be more successful in school. Studies show that family involvement benefits children in all age groups and from families of all economic, racial/ethnic, and educational backgrounds. Students with involved parents are more likely to:

- earn higher grades and score better on tests
- pass their classes, earn credits, and be promoted
- enroll in higher-level programs
- attend school regularly
- have better social skills, show improved behavior, and adapt well to school
- graduate and go on to postsecondary education.

Parent training and information centers like CPAC have a long history of preparing parents to be active partners in the education decisions that affect their children. In addition, over the course of the past several years, CPAC has recognized the need to provide additional resources to school districts that may be struggling with how to engage parents in the life of the school.

Training for parents and professionals is one way CPAC can help strengthen the family-school connection. Parent workshops are offered in the community at times that are convenient for families. These workshops cover a wide range of topics, including “Positive Behavior Interventions: What Parents Need to Know,” “Understanding ADHD,” and “Help! My Child Is Struggling in School.”

A complete list of workshops is posted on our website, www.cpacinc.org. For more information, please contact our training coordinator, Melissa Royce, at mroyce@cpacinc.org.

Source:

“A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family, and Community Connections on Student Achievement,” by Anne T. Henderson and Karen L. Mapp, National Center for Family and Community Connections with Schools, www.sedl.org

New Resources

**Wallingford Public Schools has established a partnership with a private provider, High Road Schools, to offer an annual Transition Fair. This evening event is open to parents, guardians, educators, and support personnel seeking resources and advice to help young people with special needs as they prepare for life beyond the school years. It provides a valuable opportunity for families, students, and educators to speak directly with staff from a wide range of programs. Joint sponsorship enables the school district to share the responsibilities involved in publicizing, organizing, and hosting such an event. For more information, contact CPAC at 800-445-2722 or cpac@cpacinc.org.

**Special Education Network (SPED*NET) of Wilton, in collaboration with the Wilton Parent Advisory Council and Wilton Public Schools, has created an online guide entitled A Web Guide to the Special Services Partnership, available at www.spednet.org/wilton/handbook/handbook.pdf. The guide is intended to help parents become equal partners in the education of their children by providing information on all aspects of special education, including the referral process, Planning and Placement Team meetings, Individualized Education Programs, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, and No Child Left Behind. The guide includes tips for parents and numerous links to other websites. In addition, a template is available that allows other school districts to customize the guide by modifying the information provided. For information, contact Eve Kessler, Esq., president of SPED*NET Wilton, at info@spednetwilton.org.



Materials Spotlight

During the past year, CPAC has developed several print resources that we want to share with school districts looking for ways to provide information to families and facilitate parent involvement. Examples of some of these resources include:

- Calendar with helpful contact information and planning tips
- Parent packet for newly identified students
- Sample parent resource library materials
- Publications brochure with a selection of short fact sheets in English and Spanish
- Connecting Connecticut Resource Directory
- Child Find brochure

All these materials can be tailored to suit individual districts and may be replicated for district use. Please don't hesitate to call us if you have questions about any of these products or if you have other needs that we may be able to address.

Transition to

If your son or daughter is approaching kindergarten age, thoughts of the beginning of your child's formal schooling may fill you with excitement, dread, or a bit of both. Whatever your feelings, you most likely have some questions about this new stage of your child's life. You might be wondering when your child can enter kindergarten, if he or she should attend at all, what the benefits are, and how you can help him or her prepare and feel happy and confident about this new experience. To answer some of your questions, the Connecticut State Department of Education has published "What Parents Should Know About Kindergarten Entry, Enrollment and Attendance" and "Getting Your Child Ready for Kindergarten." The following information is adapted from these booklets.



Q: At what age is my child eligible for kindergarten?

A: Under Connecticut law, public schools are required to be open to all children who reach the age of five on or before the first of January of any school year. If your child is five years old on or before January 1 of any year, he or she can enter kindergarten. If your child will turn five after the first of January, the local Board of Education decides whether or not to admit your child.

Q: What benefits does kindergarten offer my child?

A: Kindergarten instruction promotes the learning of many skills—including early reading skills—that are the foundation of the curriculum through grade 12. In addition, if your child is an English language learner, kindergarten programs are available to help him or her learn English. If your child has a problem that might affect his or her ability to learn, that problem can be identified in kindergarten. The earlier the problem is identified, the sooner your child can receive the support services he or she needs. (See the box on Child Find on page 7.)

Q: Should I keep my child out of kindergarten if he or she is age eligible but perhaps not "ready" yet?

A: Many parents consider withholding their child from kindergarten owing to concerns that the kindergarten program may not be suitable; that their child may be among the youngest in the class; or that he or she may not be "socially mature enough" for the experience. All school districts, however, are responsible for meeting the needs of all kindergarten students, regardless of their age or stage of development. The Connecticut State Department of Education strongly encourages parents to send their children to kindergarten when they are age eligible.

Q: Does my child have to be tested in order to enter kindergarten?

A: There is no state law that requires public schools to test children before they enter kindergarten. The local school district decides if any testing is done at kindergarten entry. But whatever the results of any test given by the school, your child cannot be excluded from school when he or she is age eligible.

Q: If my child is five on or before the first of January of the school year, do I have to send him or her to kindergarten?

A: Parents have the option not to send their child to school until he or she is six or seven years of age. If they choose not to send their child when the child is age eligible, they must go to the school district office and sign an option form.

Q: What can I do to help ensure that my child is ready for kindergarten?

A: As your child's first teacher, you can help your son or daughter develop important thinking and learning skills to prepare for kindergarten. By sharing observations, asking questions, and encouraging interests and exploration, you can use the time you spend with your child to engage him or her in fun, relaxing learning activities.

For additional information on kindergarten, please contact :
Connecticut Department of Education
165 Capitol Avenue, Hartford, CT 06106
860-713-6555 • www.ct.gov/sde

Kindergarten

Parents of young children with disabilities go through several program changes during the preschool years, but the most important—and often the most stressful—is the transition from preschool services to kindergarten. If your child will be leaving the preschool program this year, it is important that you start planning for that transition now.

In most cases, the school system will be starting the process in May. Parents, however, need to begin thinking about the process now. Because this can be a major transition in your lives and the life of your child with a disability, you should take the time to start reflecting on what your dreams are for your child. It is important that you go into the school setting focusing on the “possibilities” not the “problems.” In some ways, this can set the stage for future experiences with the school system.

This can be a very emotional time in your life, and it is important for you to know that other parents have experienced these emotions. Wondering what to do can be scary, but good planning can help lessen the fear and give you tools to manage the emotions. Here are some tips on how to prepare:

- Complete a Positive Student Profile for your child. This planning tool is available from CPAC (800-445-2722) and will help you focus on your child’s strengths, successes, and challenges. It will give you the opportunity to think about and write down your dreams for your child. It will also help you identify what supports may be needed to reach those dreams.
- Review your child’s current IEP and ask the preschool teacher what has been completed and what needs more work. Use that information along with your Positive Student Profile to make a list of goals you think are important for next year. You don’t have to write the goals or need to know special education jargon. It is just important that you know what is, in your opinion, most important for your child to learn (for example, reading, communication skills, or self-help skills such as dressing).
- Write down any questions you have, as well as suggestions for IEP goals. Make a priority list—organize your goals in order of importance to you.

Source:

“Start Preparing for Your Child’s Transition into Kindergarten,” Exceptional Children’s Assistance Center, www.ecac-parentcenter.org



Resources:

Much More Than the ABCs: The Early Stages of Reading and Writing, by Judith A. Schickendanz (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1999) This book examines how literacy learning begins long before children enter school. The author offers concrete suggestions on how parents, caregivers, and preschool teachers can provide young children with interesting and playful experiences that build the foundation for learning to read and write.

“Positive Solutions for Families: Eight Practical Tips for Parents of Young Children with Challenging Behavior,” (Center for Evidence-Based Practice: Young Children with Challenging Behavior, 2006) This brochure provides parents with tips they can use when their young children exhibit challenging behavior. Each tip includes an explanation of a specific strategy and an example of how families can try the approach in an everyday situation. The brochure is available in both English and Spanish. Contact CPAC for a copy, or view it online at www.challengingbehavior.org.

Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning—a resource devoted to strengthening the capacity of child care and Head Start programs to improve the social and emotional outcomes of young children, www.vanderbilt.edu/csefel



Dear Parent Advocate,

A couple of months ago, we were told that our first-grade son was “at risk” for reading failure. His teacher informed us that the school is using a Response-to-Intervention process. She said that our son’s progress would be monitored and that we would be told if interventions were needed. This is all new to us. Please explain what this means. Does our son need special education?

- Concerned Parents

Dear Concerned Parents,

Response to Intervention (RtI) is a process designed to identify and help struggling students, including those with disabilities. It is intended to reduce the time students wait before receiving extra help, increase the number of students who succeed within general education, and identify earlier on those children who have disabilities and are in need of special education services.

The RtI process is a multi-step approach to providing assistance to students within general education. In most models, including those currently under review in Connecticut, a three-step, or three-tier, process is used. At each tier, more intensive interventions (changes in instruction) are provided to improve academic performance. These interventions, as well as the general curriculum, are based on research and have been shown to be effective for most students. The progress of each student is monitored at every stage. Results of this monitoring are then used to gauge each student’s response—to evaluate how effective the interventions have been and to make decisions about how much support a student needs. If a student continues to face difficulties at one tier, he or she is moved to the next tier and receives more intensive support.

If his school is using an RtI process, your son was most likely identified as “at risk” for reading failure based on the results of universal screening. Universal screening refers to the method used to determine which students are “at risk” for not meeting grade-level standards. School personnel review each student’s performance on recent statewide or districtwide tests or administer an academic assessment to all students in a given grade. It sounds like one of these measures showed that your son is having difficulty with some aspect of learning to read.

Ideally, when a child needs extra help with learning, the school involves parents at the earliest stages of RtI. When the school determines that a child needs Tier 2 interventions, best practice directs that school personnel provide the parents with a written intervention plan, fully explain this plan to the parents, and request parental consent before putting it into practice. The plan should include specific information about:

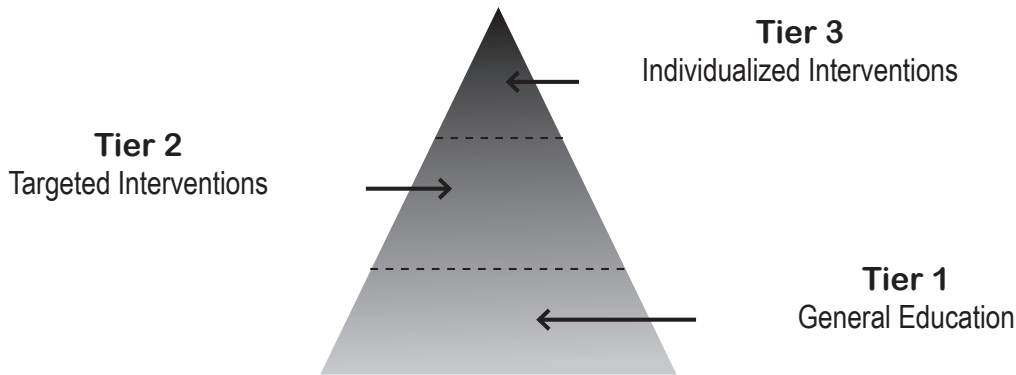
- what the intervention will be
- who will provide the intervention
- how many minutes per day the child will get this help
- how long (number of weeks) the intervention will last
- where the intervention will be provided
- how the child’s progress will be monitored
- how frequently parents will receive progress reports.

If you suspect that your son has a reading disability and if he is not responding to the interventions, you have the right to refer him for a special education evaluation. By law, at any point in the RtI process parents may request a comprehensive evaluation to determine if their child is eligible for special education.

As they hear more and more about Response to Intervention, parents should keep in mind a few important points:

- RtI is only a model, and it is evolving in different ways in different places.
- RtI has generated controversy and calls for further research.
- As school districts around the country consider how to use RtI, teachers, administrators, and other professionals in the field of education have raised concerns, and many of their questions about how—or if—RtI will work have yet to be answered.
- Parents need to learn about how RtI will affect their children and to add their voices to the continuing discussions about this complex issue.

Response-to-Intervention Model



Tier 1: General Education

- All students receive instruction in the core curriculum. Teachers use research-based instructional strategies.
- Results of state or district tests are used to identify students who are “at risk” for not meeting grade-level standards.
- Students identified as “at risk” receive interventions, usually in small groups in the regular classroom.
- Students showing significant progress return to the regular classroom program; students not showing adequate progress move to Tier 2.

Tier 2: Targeted Interventions

- Students receive targeted interventions in addition to instruction in the general curriculum. These interventions generally take place in small groups and are short term (usually not more than a grading period).
- Student progress is closely monitored.
- Students showing significant progress return to Tier 1; students not showing adequate progress move to Tier 3.

Tier 3: Individualized Interventions

- Students receive individualized, intensive interventions, perhaps on a daily basis.
- Student progress is more frequently monitored.
- Students who do not respond to these interventions are considered for a formal evaluation. This evaluation, which includes data collected during Tiers 1, 2, and 3, determines eligibility for special education as required by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

Sources:

“A Parent’s Guide to Response-to-Intervention,” National Center for Learning Disabilities, www.nclld.org; “CEC’s Position on Response to Intervention (RTI): The Unique Role of Special Education and Special Educators,” Council for Exceptional Children, www.cec.sped.org; “Responsiveness to Intervention and Learning Disabilities,” National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities, www.ldonline.org; “RTI and Reading: Response to Intervention in a Nutshell,” by G. Emerson Dickman, Reading Rockets, www.readingrockets.org

Child Find

Parents are often the first to suspect that their child may require special education. Persistent developmental delays, failure to attend school regularly, repeated suspensions, and difficulty with homework are just some of the signs that something isn’t going right with a child’s education. Parents need to know that under federal special education law, they have the right to meet with school personnel to discuss possible evaluations to determine if their child has a disability that requires special education services.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act mandates that local school districts locate, identify, and evaluate all children with disabilities from birth through age twenty-one. This critical component of the federal special education law, known as Child Find, applies to children in the Birth to Three System as well as children of preschool or school age, including those who attend private school or are highly mobile or migrant, homeless, or wards of the state.

Child Find also requires each state to develop a comprehensive system to ensure that all referral sources, including parents, know their rights and responsibilities regarding the referral of children who may need services. CPAC is part of Connecticut’s efforts to provide information, outreach, and resources so that all children who are eligible for special education services are identified and served.

If you have questions about the referral or eligibility processes, feel free to call CPAC at 800-445-2722 or review the information on Child Find on our website, www.cpacinc.org.

Asking Questions:

Individualized Education Programs

If your child has had a comprehensive evaluation and is eligible for special education services, you need to prepare for the part you can play in the special education process. The first step in this process is the development of a plan for your child's education. This plan, called the Individualized Education Program (IEP), is based on your child's specific needs and lists the special education services he or she will receive.

Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, parents are considered equal partners with school personnel in making decisions regarding their child's IEP. Your meeting at the school to develop the IEP should be an exchange—that is, you need to be able both to provide and to gather information. To be an effective member of the IEP team, you should be able to describe your child and his or her needs, express your concerns, and ask about the services your child will receive. Before the meeting, write down what you want to discuss. Use these two lists of questions as guides as you prepare to be an active participant:

Before the meeting, ask yourself:

- What are my child's strengths? What were his/her successes this year?
- What areas of weakness have I noticed? What are my child's greatest challenges?
- What helps my child learn?
- What goals do I hope my child will reach in the year ahead?
- What accommodations or services do I think would help my child?

At the meeting, ask school personnel:

- What are the specific goals for my child? Are they measurable? How often will they be reviewed?
- What modifications, accommodations, and other supports will my child receive?
- Who will provide the services and where will they be provided?
- Will my child participate in the general curriculum all or part of the day?
- Given my child's abilities and skills, is the school expecting the kind of progress I think my child should make?



Sources:

"Parent IEP Input Form," CPAC; "Questions for Parents and Professionals to Consider When Reviewing the IEP," CPAC; "Developing Your Child's IEP," National Dissemination Center for Children and Youth with Disabilities, www.nichcy.org

Supplemental Education Services

Under the No Child Left Behind Act, some children qualify for free Supplemental Education Services (SES)—tutoring by trained instructors or Internet-based instruction that students can access through a computer. Your child is eligible for SES if he or she qualifies for free or reduced-price lunch and attends a Title I school that has not made adequate yearly progress for at least three years.

SES programs are open to school-age children in any grade. Children who do not speak English or are in a bilingual program, as well as those in special education, can qualify. Tutoring takes place before or after school, on weekends, or during summer vacation. Services are provided in a variety of settings, including schools, public libraries, community centers, places of worship, or families' homes. School districts are not required to offer transportation for children to attend an SES program, but some providers offer transportation.

Your school district is required to let you know at the beginning of the school year if your child can receive these services. The school will give you a registration form and tell you when to hand it in. The school will also give you a list of providers approved by the Connecticut State Department of Education. When choosing an SES provider from this list—which may include schools, after-school programs, community organizations, and commercial companies—make sure you are well informed. Ask questions not only about scheduling, location, and transportation but also about providers' qualifications, the student-to-teacher ratio, the focus of the tutoring, coordination with your child's classroom teacher, and feedback. A list of specific questions is included in "A Parent's Guide to Choosing Supplemental Education Service Providers," prepared by the National Education Association and the National Parent Teacher Association. You may request a copy of the guide from CPAC (800-445-2722) or view it online at www.nea.org/parents.

For additional information about Supplemental Education Services in your district, contact the central office and ask to speak with the person in charge of SES under No Child Left Behind. You may also contact Michelle Rosado, education consultant at the Connecticut State Department of Education, at 860-713-6748 or michelle.rosado@ct.gov.

Sources:

"Supplemental Educational Services: Quick Reference for Parents," U.S. Department of Education, www.ed.gov; "Questions for Families to Ask SES Providers," SESQ Center, www.tutorsforkids.org

A Good Way to Start

Tutoring Services

According to his first-grade teacher, your son is having trouble learning letters and sounds. Or maybe your tenth-grade daughter struggles to complete writing assignments on time and seems more and more frustrated with school. Or your middle school child is moved to tears by algebra or science labs or history exams. So you are thinking of finding a tutor who can give your child some extra help he or she needs.

But how can you get your child started? How do you find someone to help? Some children qualify for free tutoring under the No Child Left Behind Act. Your school district can give you information about this program. (See the article on Supplemental Education Services on page 8.) If you are looking to hire a professional or locate a qualified volunteer, begin by making a list of potential tutors in your area. Ask teachers and administrators at your child's school for referrals. Get recommendations from friends, neighbors, and parents of your child's classmates. Check with local organizations that offer tutoring services, such as Literacy Volunteers, the YMCA/YWCA, and your Regional Educational Service Center. Some colleges with teacher-training programs also provide tutoring.

Once you have some names, you should take the time to assess the qualifications and personal style of each prospective tutor. Here is a series of questions to ask someone you are considering as a tutor for your child:

1 Credentials: What degrees and certification do you have? What expertise do you have in the subject(s) being taught? Are you trained to use instructional techniques that will address our child's special needs? How long have you been a tutor? Do you have experience working with students at our child's grade level? Can you provide references from families, schools, or other professionals?

2 Tutoring plan: What information do you need from us and from the school to develop a plan for instruction? How will you link the goals of the tutoring sessions to our child's schoolwork? Will you

assist our child with daily homework and long-term assignments? Will you help our child study for tests?

3 Coordinating with school: Are you willing to consult with our child's teachers and other specialists? Will you attend school conferences?

4 Feedback: How frequently will we receive progress reports? How often should we touch base by phone, and when should we schedule longer, face-to-face conferences? Should our child attend these meetings?

5 Scheduling: How many tutoring sessions per week do you recommend? How long will each session be? Will you be able to schedule sessions for the time of day that we think would work best for our child?

6 Payment: How much do you charge for each tutoring session? Is payment expected for the initial consultation? What is the fee for parent meetings and for school conferences?

Much of this information can be gathered during a telephone conversation. But you should also arrange a meeting to see if you think a prospective tutor will be a good match—for you and for your child. During this initial consultation, ask yourselves if you and your child will feel comfortable working with this individual. And be sure to include your child in this process. Explain what a tutor does and how you think one can help. If you feel it is appropriate, let your child participate in the interview. Having a say in the selection of his or her tutor may make your child more open to accepting help.

Sources: "Tips for Choosing a Tutor for Your Child," National Center for Learning Disabilities, www.ncld.org; "How to Find and Select an Academic Therapist," The International Dyslexia Association, www.interdys.org

Resources:

Parenting a Struggling Reader: A Guide to Diagnosing and Finding Help for Your Child's Reading Difficulties, by Susan L. Hall and Louisa C. Moats, Ed.D. (Broadway Books, 2002) This book presents a detailed, realistic program for getting parents actively involved in their children's reading lives. The authors provide information on how children learn to read and what goes wrong for those who have difficulty with reading. They offer practical advice on how parents can get their struggling children the help they need. The question and answer format is easy to use.

Wrightslaw—a resource for parents, educators, advocates, and attorneys that provides information on special education law, education law, and advocacy for children with disabilities, www.wrightslaw.com

Passing the Torch: Advocacy

In recent years, federal legislation has brought about changes in educational policy and curriculum that affect students with disabilities at all stages of schooling, including the postsecondary years. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (2004) and the No Child Left Behind Act (2002) aim to support and improve the academic achievement of students with disabilities in grades K-12. Although they have no jurisdiction once a student leaves the K-12 school system, these laws also seek to increase opportunities for students with disabilities to move on to postsecondary education by enabling more students to graduate with a regular high school diploma and make a successful transition to college or a training program. The Americans with Disabilities Act (1990) requires all postsecondary institutions to make "any reasonable accommodation that may be necessary" to ensure that people with disabilities have equal access to their courses, programs, and activities.

Studies show that there have been some positive developments in the postsecondary education of people with disabilities. The percentage of high school graduates with disabilities enrolling at postsecondary institutions has increased, and nearly all public postsecondary institutions enroll students with disabilities.

Yet not all the news is good, and much of the progress that has been made is in the area of access to postsecondary programs

rather than success once enrolled. Institutions have considerable leeway in interpreting what is a "reasonable accommodation," and services and support are often inadequate. Young adults with disabilities are still less likely to complete a degree or certificate program than their peers without disabilities.



What can parents do to help ensure the success of their child with disabilities at a postsecondary institution? More specifically, how can they support their son or daughter during the difficult transition of freshman year? While parent involvement in the education of elementary and secondary school students has received much attention and encouragement, information on how parents can help their child

with disabilities succeed in postsecondary education is difficult to find. In fact, according to a Parent Brief published by the National Center on Secondary Education and Transition and the PACER Center, "an emphasis in recent transition literature on overprotective parenting and learned helplessness has given some parents and educators the mistaken impression that parent involvement is wholly undesirable at the postsecondary level.... [Yet] a handful of recent studies confirm the value of the supports parents provide at the postsecondary level and indicate that active parent involvement can foster, rather than hinder, self-determination."*

Whether their young adult son or daughter decides to live at home or go away to school, parents can expect a shift in the part they play in their child's education. Although no longer acting as parent advocates, they can continue to perform an important role as mentors, offering guidance and encouraging self-advocacy. This new phase can bring new challenges, but the old lessons about the benefits of knowing your rights, staying informed, and discussing the issues still apply. Parents can help their child understand his or her rights and responsibilities, learn when and where to go for support, locate resources and information, and communicate clearly about expectations and complications. By passing on what they have learned about effective advocacy, parents have the opportunity to make the start of their child's postsecondary education an empowering experience.

Sources:

Learning How to Learn: Getting Into and Surviving College When You Have a Learning Disability, by Joyanne Cobb (Child & Family Press, 2003); "The First Year: The Transition," in *Just for Parents*, Landmark College, www.landmark.edu; "Transition to College: Strategic Planning to Ensure Success for Students with Learning Disabilities," National Center for Learning Disabilities, www.nclcd.org; * "Parenting Postsecondary Students with Disabilities: Becoming the Mentor, Advocate, and Guide Your Young Adult Needs," National Center on Secondary Education and Transition, www.ncset.org; "People with Disabilities and Postsecondary Education," National Council on Disability, www.ncd.gov

Parent Tips for Promoting Self-Advocacy

- Discuss with your child his or her legal rights and the responsibilities that go along with them. Young adults of legal age are responsible for making their own decisions and solving their own problems, unless parents are their legal guardians. Postsecondary professionals are not legally permitted to share information with parents without a student's written permission.
- Prepare your child to describe in detail the nature of his or her disability. To gain access to accommodations and services, students must present documentation of their disability that is no more than three years old and must ask for the assistance they need.
- Make sure your child knows what accommodations to request. Help make a list of various aspects of learning that may be affected by his or her disability, including class size and type (lectures, labs, web-based), communication skills (speaking, listening, using phones and email), attendance (class, required activities, residential living requirements), types of assignments (reading, writing, research), evaluations (tests, papers, oral reports, group presentations, projects), and time constraints (timed tests, deadlines, assignment due dates).

For a list of additional suggestions on how to help your child make a smooth transition to postsecondary education, please contact CPAC at 800-445-2722 or cpac@cpacinc.org.

Beyond the High School Years

A Recent College Graduate Speaks Out

My name is Dan Lennon, and I grew up in Milford, Connecticut, where I attended Foran High School. Throughout my entire childhood, my mother was very involved as an advocate for my education. I was lucky to have a parent who was willing to go above and beyond to ensure I received the accommodations I deserved. As a student with ADHD, I was always pushed to work harder than everyone else. My work ethic has proved beneficial in all facets of my life. After high school, I attended Boston College, where I received a degree in communications and theology. Throughout high school and college, I was involved in several athletics and community service opportunities. My experiences led me to apply for Teach For America, a program dedicated to teaching in under-resourced public schools. I currently teach fifth-grade mathematics and science at CIS 166 in the Bronx, New York.



Entering campus life at Boston College was a relatively smooth transition. The ADC (Academic Development Center) needed to have all my information concerning my services. In hindsight, ensuring that the ADC received all the necessary information from my high school should have been a priority during the summer prior to freshman year. The beginning of freshman year is full of added pressures and can be very hectic for all students. This added piece could have helped make that first month less overwhelming.

Once Boston College had the necessary forms, the process of receiving accommodations went smoothly. Regardless of which office handles your child's services (at Boston College it was the ADC), never underestimate how helpful a good student-professor relationship can be. I had several professors who were very helpful and reassuring when it came to getting what I deserved.

I required extra time on my tests in college, and Boston College was always willing to meet my needs. It was necessary, however, to do most of the set-up work on my own. Early in the semester, I needed to give professors notice that when exams came around I would be receiving extra time. Prior to these exams, I would need to alert the ADC. It was never a hassle, but it was an added responsibility.

My parents were very involved in my education. At an early age they instilled in me strong discipline. When I got to college I was prepared to keep a regimented schedule. Even so, there are many (many) distractions on college campus. These distractions can be very appealing to an outgoing ADHD young man (like me). Supportive phone calls from home, as well as periodic visits from my parents, helped me stay focused.

I was fortunate enough to have several other people on campus as part of a support network. My older brother was a junior at Boston College and was always willing to sit and chat. I was involved in athletics, and my coaches kept me on a strict schedule. I became close with the professor of a freshman advising course I enrolled in and had several other campus advisors I could turn to for help. It can never hurt to have another person to turn to in a time of need.

Resources:

Learning How to Learn: Getting Into and Surviving College When You Have a Learning Disability, by Joyanne Cobb (Child & Family Press, 2003) This manual offers students with learning disabilities concrete, step-by-step advice on preparing for college, choosing the right school, advocating for their rights under the Americans with Disabilities Act, and taking advantage of supports and services. By drawing on her own experiences, the author sends the simple yet powerful message that high school and college students with learning disabilities can succeed academically.

HEATH Resource Center on Postsecondary Education for Individuals with Disabilities—a valuable resource for students with disabilities; includes a Guidance and Career Counselor Toolkit for Advising Students with Disabilities, www.heath.gwu.edu

Connect-ability—a statewide resource to bring together individuals with disabilities and employers, www.connect-ability.com

Association of Higher Education and Disability—an international resource devoted to universally accessible postsecondary education for students with disabilities; includes sections on parent and student Frequently Asked Questions, www.ahead.org

University of Connecticut's Center on Postsecondary Education and Disability—a comprehensive resource on postsecondary education for Connecticut students, parents, and educators, www.cped.uconn.edu

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Please contact CPAC at 800-445-2722 or cpac@cpacinc.org if you would like to receive this newsletter via email, need to change your address, or wish to be deleted from our mailing list.

To Whom It May Concern,

I am the parent of two children with special needs. My youngest son was born with spina bifida and my older son has been diagnosed with an autism spectrum disorder. I also facilitate a support group for parents and families of children who have been diagnosed with an autism spectrum disorder. I am writing to express my support for the Connecticut Parent Advocacy Center (CPAC). They have provided me with guidance both personally with my own children, as well as educating others in the support group I facilitate.

Personally, I have called on CPAC for assistance regarding my children's educational programs. My youngest child with spina bifida follows a 504 plan. I had some questions regarding the availability of a handicapped bathroom in his elementary school. I called CPAC and they educated me as to what my rights were and the best way to approach the school.

Many other parents of children with special needs have also found CPAC to be helpful. CPAC has spoken on a variety of issues for the group including effective communication, Individualized Education Programs, Planning and Placement Team meetings, and the No Child Left Behind Act. The group found the workshops to be very helpful and informative. The speakers are often parents of children with special needs themselves, which only makes the workshops more valuable. CPAC also offers a parent advocacy training series called NEXT STEPs, which I have attended. The series was extremely informative, comprehensive, and well attended. Having attended the advocacy series, I felt more prepared and confident at my children's next meeting.

Over the last five years, CPAC has educated me on the laws and helped me to become a better advocate for my children. As a result, my children have greatly benefited from a more appropriate program that meets their needs. I hope they will be able to continue the invaluable work they do.

Sincerely,
Confident Parent