



## Part 1

### EXCEPTIONAL EDUCATION: GETTING PARENTS INVOLVED

An Overview of Children's and Parental Rights Under the IDEA & PL 94-142

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#### Introduction

This material is intended not to be exhaustive in its review of the rights of the children and their parents, but rather gives an overview of the rights so as to encourage you the parents to dig deeper if you believe your rights and/or the rights of your children are being violated.

The IEP is the driving cog in the exceptional education wheel and is emphasized on this site. We also emphasize the importance of the team approach encouraging good communication, cooperation and parental assertiveness. Parents need to be focused on the "whole child" when planning for their children's education. These materials will bring many of you to a position of planning, which to this point you have felt unnecessary given the young age of your children. You will hopefully recognize that education prepares all children to live in the world. This education for life begins in preschool and ends only when the person ceases to exist on earth. Use it to educate yourselves to become the best advocates you can be for your children.

#### Special Thanks:

Our thanks to the staff members from United Cerebral Palsy of Tampa Bay: Nancy Garcia, Debbie Long and Belinda Brown for their assistance in helping us complete this revised edition.

#### Dedication:

We dedicate these material to the hundreds of parents already using them from our original books and to you parents who will use this material in assisting your children reach their optimal potential.

Best of luck on your journey into the ESE system with your children. We would enjoy getting your feedback on how helpful it is for you so email us at [jjmess@tampabay.rr.com](mailto:jjmess@tampabay.rr.com)

Sincerely, Jim and Connie Messina

**The following are excerpts from the website [www.coping.org/specialed](http://www.coping.org/specialed)  
**Please refer to the website directly to view the documents in their entirety**  
**and other relative information.****

### Getting Organized to get the most out of the System

#### A. Keep records on your child

Purchase a four drawer file cabinet or its equivalent and create a separate set of folders for the following information:

**Medical records:** history and medical records from birth on

**All evaluations and progress reports:**

- psychological evaluations
- physical therapy
- occupational therapy
- speech therapy
- audiological
- visual

- academic/cognitive
- perceptual
- developmental

**All relevant school materials:**

- school records:
- IEP's all past and current
- official letters of eligibility and placement
- a yearly file of selected samples of child's academic work from classroom, resource rooms, therapies and other activities
- annual standardized test results
- church and religious education records
- copies of all formal notes, letters, or correspondence exchanged between parent and professionals in the school
- resource materials on IDEA / PL 94142
- exceptional parent magazine articles or other magazine, journal or newspaper articles relevant to progress in treating your child's exceptionality

**B. Remind yourself about the process and your rights**

Read this manual at least once a year to remind you of your rights and responsibilities as you continue in your role as lifelong advocate for your child.

**C. Tips on how to handle yourself at meetings**

At all school conferences, staffing, IEP meetings and other school related meetings follow these helpful tips:

**1. Do not go to meetings alone.** It is common for parents to feel overwhelmed and alone when confronted with a room full of professionals discussing their child in a clinical manner. Invite other parents, friends, relatives, and anyone you know who might be interested in attending. Explain to them that you would like them to attend to give you moral support, and to function as witnesses in case of a disagreement.

**2. The image you portray will affect how the school personnel react towards you.** If you wish to be treated in a professional manner, you should dress in a professional manner. Choose clothing that is simple but dignified. Walk into the room with confidence. Don't wait to be acknowledged, but introduce yourself and begin greeting people as soon as you enter the room. Bring your copy of these material with you and display them prominently on the table. It lets the professionals know you are informed.

**3. It is a good business procedure to tape record the meetings.** It will not be possible to take accurate notes in these situations, and personal notes can be disputed. Simply place the recorder on the table and plug it in. (Don't ask for permission.) If someone expresses resistance, explain to them that it is a good business procedure to tape important meetings.

**4. Pass around a sign-in sheet at the beginning of the meeting.** You will then have the names of all those present, and be able to address them by name, (from their positions on the sign-in sheet.)

**5. When speaking during meetings,** take a deep breath to help project your voice clearly and confidently. Maintain eye contact with the professionals while you speak.

**6. Repeat what you are asking for whenever school personnel offer excuses or evasions.** Remember that you are not there to discuss the limitations of the school budget. You are there to determine what your child needs to have an appropriate education. **State this repeatedly, as often as necessary to make your point.**

**7. Don't be intimidated:** If school personnel state that there is a certain policy, rule, regulation, or law that requires them to take certain action or not to take certain action, **do not feel intimidated. Ask to see in writing the specific policy, rule, regulation or law** that they are referring to. Remember that federal law, rules and regulations take precedence over state and local policies, laws, rules and regulations.

#### **D. Know Yours and your Child's Rights which are Protected by Law:**

In recent years, Federal and State laws have been passed which guarantee that all children and youth with handicaps from birth to 21 years of age are provided a free and appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act also known as IDEA and the Education for All Handicapped Children Act, also known as PL 94-142, and state laws were passed to make sure that all children with handicaps have available to them a free appropriate public education

- make sure that the rights of children with handicaps and their parents are protected.

The federal and state laws identify the importance of parent participation in educational planning. The laws promote parent involvement with educators to provide the best possible program for every child with a handicap.

## **The Components of the Exceptional Education Process**

### **A. Definitions of the Exceptionalities covered in the Exceptional Student Program**

**1. Mentally Handicapped (EMH, TMH, SPMH)** The mentally handicapped student is one who may not be able to learn quickly or as much as most other students his age. This includes students who are EMH "educable," TMH "trainable," or SPMH "profound." In order to be eligible for "mentally handicapped" programs and services, a student must meet all the requirements listed in the State Board of Education Rules.

**2. Specific Learning Disabled (SLD)** The student with a specific learning disability is one who seems to have average or better ability, health, vision, hearing, and intelligence, but is still unable to learn things as easily or as quickly as most other students his age. In order to be eligible for "specific learning disabled" programs and services, a student must meet all the requirements listed in the State Board of Education Rules.

**3. Hearing Impaired** The hearing impaired student is one who has a loss of some or most of his ability to hear. This includes students who are deaf or hard-of-hearing. In order to be eligible for "hearing impaired" programs and services, a student must meet all requirements listed in the State Board of Education Rules.

**4. Blind/Visually Impaired** The visually impaired student is one who has a loss of some or all of his ability to see. This includes students who are blind or partially sighted. In order to be eligible for "visually impaired" programs and services, a student must meet all the requirements listed in the State board of Education Rules.

**5. Emotional Handicapped (EH, SED)** An emotionally handicapped student may seem to act differently, think differently, or have different feelings than most other students his age. This includes students who are "severely emotionally disturbed - (SED)". In order to be eligible for "emotionally handicapped (EH)" programs and services, a student must meet all the requirements listed in the State Board of Education Rules.

**6. Physically Impaired (PI)** The physically impaired student is one who has a severe illness, condition, or disability which makes it hard for him to learn in the same ways as other students his age. In order to be eligible for "physically impaired" programs and services, a student must meet all the requirements listed in the State Board of Education Rules.

**7. Autistic** The autistic student may seem to act, talk, think or behave very differently from other students his age. He may not like to be close to people. In order to be eligible for "autistic" programs and services, a student must meet all the requirements listed in the State Board of Education Rules.

**8. Speech and Language Impaired** The speech or language impaired student is one who has problems in talking so that he can be understood, sharing ideas, expressing needs, or understanding what others are saying. In order to be eligible for "speech and language" programs and services, a student must meet all the requirements listed in the State board of Education Rules.

**9. Homebound/Hospitalized** A kind of Exceptional Student Education for a student who must stay at home or in a hospital for a period of time because of a severe illness, injury, or health problem. In order to be eligible for "homebound/hospitalization" programs and services, a student must meet all the requirements listed in the State board of Education Rules.

**10. Gifted.** A gifted student is one who is very, very bright or smart and who learns things much more quickly than other students his age. In order to be eligible for "gifted" programs and services, a student must meet all the requirements listed in the State board of Education Rules.

## **B. Stages of the Exceptional Education Process:**

**1. Referral:** When a parent, school person, or friend notices that a child is not making progress in school, s/he gives that information in writing to the school system so that an evaluation can be done.

**2. Evaluation:** An evaluation is a careful look by a team of teachers and specialists at a child's abilities, strengths and weaknesses. It provides information about the child's educational needs and helps to determine whether an exceptional education program is necessary for the child.

**3. Eligibility Staffing:** for a child to receive exceptional education services, the child must first qualify according to guidelines. At the eligibility staffing a decision is made as to whether or not a child meets the program requirements to receive exceptional education services.

**4. Individualized Education Program Development (IEP):** Every child in exceptional education must have an IEP. The IEP is a written statement describing the specially designed program developed to meet the needs of the individual child. Parents have a right to participate with the school in the development of their child's IEP.

**5. Placement - Program Start:** The placement decision identifies the appropriate school program and services needed to meet each child's educational goals. Services may include speech therapy, occupational therapy, transportation, etc. After the goals and objectives of the IEP have been written, and a child has been placed in the school setting, learning activities begin in the classroom. Parents and school people then work together to make the IEP and placement work for the child.

**6. Annual Review:** Any time there is a change, or proposed change in a child's school program, parents and school people must gather more information and reassess the appropriate educational program for the child. Every three years, there is a new evaluation and eligibility decision for every child in special education. This is called the triennial review.

## **C. The Evaluation Process:**

### **1. Deciding on the evaluation:**

- Talk to someone - share your feeling about the evaluation
- Get parent handbooks and pamphlets on evaluation
- Make a list of all your questions
- Identify the school people responsible for your child's evaluation
- Ask the school people to write down the reasons for the evaluation

### **2. Before evaluation:**

- Make a list of the difficult and helpful parts of a previous evaluation
- Talk with your child about the reasons for the evaluation
- Choose a friend to share the evaluation with you
- Visit the place where the evaluation will be given
- Give your child the chance to make some choices about the evaluation
- Watch to make sure your child's needs are met (fatigue, hunger, bathroom needs, etc.)

### **3. During evaluation:**

- Review the day's plan with your child (including a celebration when it's over!)
- Let your child know you will be there, if appropriate
- Observe the evaluation if you can and write down your thoughts concerning your child's responses

- Make sure your child is feeling up to par

#### **4. After evaluation:**

- Ask child which activities and people your child liked and disliked
- Praise child for success in completing the evaluation
- Plan and hold a celebration activity for your child . . . and for you!
- Write down any additional thoughts you have regarding the evaluation experience
- Get a copy of the evaluation report and read it to see if it sounds accurate
- Meet with the school people so they may explain to you the results of the evaluation

#### **5. Evaluation analysis:**

- Check the date the tests were given
- Check to see if factual information is correct, i.e., name, birth date, etc.
- Check math computation
- Check to see if the test was completed on the same day or if it was broken up into different segments and give on different dates
- Check who administered the test
- Check was it a screening test or diagnostic test
- Check was it given in a group or individually
- Check if this test can be used to determine intervention strategies or is its only purpose to provide a numerical score
- Check if it is a timed test
- Check if the test(s) is age appropriate, is it in your child's native language, and is it discriminatory in any area

#### **6. Questions you might asked of person who administered test(s) to your child:**

- Did you observe my child in his classroom?
- What specific learning strengths and weaknesses appear on the test(s)?
- How does this information directly relate to the problems which caused my child to be referred for testing?
- What specific recommendations can you give to help solve these problems?
- Can you meet with my child's teacher and me to help plan an educational program?
- If I have questions in the future, how can I reach you?

**Note: You have the right to examine, correct and obtain copies of your child's school records.**

**The Evaluation Team:**

Title	Name	Business Address	Telephone
Evaluation Team Coordinator			
Evaluation Specialist(s)			
Therapist(s)			
Psychologist			
School Counselor			

**D. The Eligibility Decision Making Process**

The eligibility decision is usually made by a staffing committee. It is the purpose of the committee to decide if a child is eligible to receive exceptional education services. This decision is made by comparing the results of the evaluation and other important information against the definition of handicapping conditions as written in the law. The law includes in its regulations definitions for the following handicapping conditions: deaf, deaf-blind, hard of hearing, mentally handicapped, multi-handicapped, physically impaired, other health impaired, emotionally handicapped, specific learning disability, speech impaired and visually impaired.

If all of the formal and informal information about a child matches the definition of a handicapping condition, the child will be eligible for exceptional education services. Should the committee feel the results don't match, the child will not be eligible for exceptional education services.

Parents can attend the eligibility or staffing committee meeting. If you are a part of the meeting, but don't understand the definition of the handicapping condition your child is believed to have, ask to have the definition explained.

**The Eligibility Committee:**

Title	Name	Business Address	Telephone
Staffing Specialist			
Evaluation Team Member(s)			
Other District or School Staff called in:			
Consultant(s) used by you:			

**E. The IEP Process:**

**1. Who attends the IEP meeting?**

**For a child NEW to the school system:**

- 1. Director of Exceptional Education
- 2. Member of the evaluation team
- 3. Parents
- 4. Child, when appropriate
- 5. Other individuals chosen by the parents and the school

**For the child ALREADY in exceptional education:**

- 1. Principal responsible for the supervision of the special services
- 2. The child's teachers
- 3. Parents
- 4. Child, when appropriate

- 5. Other individuals chosen by the parents and the school

**For a child placed in a PRIVATE special education setting:**

- 1. A representative of the private school
- 2. A representative of the local public school responsible for supervision of special services
- 3. Parents
- 4. Child, when appropriate
- 5. Other individuals chosen by the parents and the school

**2. When is an IEP meeting held?**

**For a child NEW to exceptional education:** The IEP must be developed within 30 days after the eligibility decision

**For a child ALREADY in exceptional education:**

- 1. At the beginning of the school year with the new and/or former teacher
- 2. At the end of the year for annual review
- 3. Whenever an update of review is requested by the parents or school people
- Note: The IEP meeting must be scheduled at a time and place that is convenient for parents and others who attend.

**3. What is contained in an IEP?**

An IEP contains statements about:

- Your child's present level of educational performance in all areas
- Annual goals for each area
- Instructional objectives for each area
- The exceptional education and related services to be provided to meet each of the goals and objectives
- The amount of time the child will be able to spend in regular education programs.
- The dates for beginning the services and the planned length of the services.
- How progress will be determined, on at least an annual basis.

**4. At the end of the IEP meeting:**

- **If you are satisfied** that the IEP meets your child's needs to the fullest extent possible, you may sign the IEP at that time.
- **If you would like to relax and then read the IEP again**, tell the school people you would like to review the IEP over the next day or two. Ask that they provide you with a copy of the IEP and tell them exactly when you will give them your final decision regarding the IEP.
- **If you do NOT find the IEP totally acceptable**, you may:
  - Not sign the IEP and ask to meet again informally to resolve the disagreement.
  - Sign the IEP but note which parts you disagree with and state your plan to appeal those parts of the IEP.

- Refuse to sign the IEP and state in writing your intention to appeal the IEP. Before doing this, inquire what services your child will receive while the appeal is made.
- Sign the IEP and state which parts you disagree with but write nothing about your plan to appeal.

**The Individualized Education Program (IEP) Meeting**

Title	Name	Business Address	Telephone
School's Exceptional Education Representative			
Classroom Teacher(s)			
Child's Therapist(s)			
Your consultant(s)			
Your friend(s)			
District Representative			

**F. The Placement Process**

Placement means the setting where your child will be educated. This includes:

- the school or center
- the classroom and teacher
- the amount of time the child will spend with typical students who have no handicaps

**Placement decisions are based on:**

- Differences:

Because each child is different, the school system must have different types of schools and classes to match the educational needs of students.

- Choices:

Parents should become familiar with the placement choices available for their children. Parents can often visit other schools and classes to see what they are like.

- Least Restrictive Environment

The best kind of exceptional education placement for children is the setting that gives them the child as much contact as possible with children their own age while it meets all of their learning and physical needs.

**G. Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) Concept**

**Examples of the least to most restrictive environments:**

1. Exceptional children included into regular classes, with or without supportive services
2. Regular class attendance plus supplementary instructional services
3. Part time or resource room special class
4. Full time self-contained special class
5. Homebound
6. Instruction in hospital, residential, or total care settings
7. Special schools or exceptional education center in public school system

## Parent's Checklist on the Least Restrictive Environment

### The School:

- Does your child attend a regular public school?
- Is this the same school child would attend if not disabled?
- Is the proportion of students with disabilities at the school roughly the same as their proportion in the school district?
- Is the school physically accessible? (Can students with mobility impairments use the same entrance as other students? Are water fountains, bathrooms, and other facilities accessible?)

### Physical Inclusion:

- Are special classes and programs spread throughout the school (as opposed to being congregated in a separate section or wing?)
- Are special classes and programs located alongside regular classes?
- Are special classes and programs indistinguishable from regular classes (e.g., do they have the same titles as regular classes "room 220" instead of "resource room"?)

### Social Inclusion:

Does your child use (to the same extent as other students):

- the cafeteria at the same time as other students
- hallway lockers
- the school playground with other students
- regular school buses with other students
- the school library or media center (in a small group)

Does your child participate in (to the extent as other students):

- school assemblies
- graduation exercises
- school social activities
- school clubs
- regular music classes
- regular art classes
- regular physical education classes
- regular home room
- regular study halls
- field trips with other students

Does your child perform the same school jobs as other students (e.g., attendance monitor, audio-visual equipment aide, or cafeteria helper?)

- Is your child included with regular education students when participating in regular activities?
- Does your child's school provide for typical students to serve as helpers, buddies, tutors or friends for special education students?

**Individualized Education Program:**

- Does your child's IEP specifically address the least restrictive environment?
- Does your child's IEP provide for participation in regular academic or extracurricular activities?
- Does the school district have written criteria for making decisions on the least restrictive environment?
- Does your child participate in regular academic programs to the extent possible?
- Are supportive services (aides, interpreters, equipment, assistive technology) provided when your child participates in regular activities?
- Are resource rooms used as a supplement to regular educational programs rather than being used as placements (i.e., do students spend more time in regular programs than resource rooms? )
- Does your child receive related services (physical therapy, occupational therapy, health services, speech and communication services) that is needed?
- Does your child's IEP specify criteria for movement to a least restrictive program?

**Parent Involvement:**

- Are you encouraged to provide ways and suggestions on how to have you included into regular school activities?
- Does the school encourage parents of special education students to participate in the P.T.O.(P.T.A.)?
- Does the school involve parents in planning for inclusion activities and policies?
- Does the school explain the program options available to students to parents?

**Attitudes:**

- Are typical students encouraged to interact with special education students?
- Do social studies, health, and other academic courses include sessions on disabilities?
- Do regular teachers promote positive attitudes among regular education students about relating to people with special needs?
- Does the school have books, films, and media presentations on disabilities?
- Are parents of students with disabilities and adults with disabilities invited to speak to regular classes?

**Staff:**

- Do special education teachers coach athletic teams, serve as home room teachers, sponsor school service clubs, and perform other faculty responsibilities?
- Do regular and special education teachers share the same lounge?
- Do regular and special education teachers hold joint staff meetings?

- Are in service training sessions on special education offered to all school personnel?
- Do regular and special education teachers plan inclusion activities together?
- Are consultants available to help special and regular education teachers with curricula?
- Does the principal demonstrate support for inclusion with staff and parents?
- Is the principal involved with special education programs?

**H. After the Child is in the Program**

**1. Making it Work:**

Once a child is in the classroom setting, it is the goal of both the parents and the school to provide the highest possible quality of education for the child. The best situation is one in which the parents and school people are working together for the child. Parents can help this process by doing the following:

- Give the school people some time to get the IEP fully implemented.
- Tell the teachers and other school people what you like about the way they work with your child.
- Let the school people know your understanding of the difficulties they face in their job.
- Try to bring out needed changes in the most friendly, informal way beginning with the teacher in the classroom.
- Contribute in any way you can to the solutions of problems that occur.

**2. Annual Review:**

At the end of the school year, it is time to go over your child's IEP carefully with the teacher:

- to check progress
- note suggestions for next year and summer activities planned

Be prepared to take an active part in your child's IEP formulation by:

- frequent communication with teachers
- making and recording observations of child's progress at home

**3. Triennial Review:**

Every three years a full evaluation, including psychological and educational testing, is required, then the full process begins again.

**Annual Review Meeting:**

Title	Name	Business Address	Telephone
School's Exceptional Education Representative			
Classroom Teacher(s)			
Child's Therapist(s)			
Your consultant(s)			
Your friend(s)			
District representative			

## I. Observing Your Child's Program in the School

- Let the teacher know ahead of time that you would like to observe in the classroom.
- Decide what activities you specifically want to observe (reading group, playground time, individual therapy, etc.)
- Tell the teacher how long you plan to spend in the classroom observing.
- Observe only your own child and activities that involve your child with other children and adults.
- Keep conversations with other adults in the classroom to a minimum during the observation.
- After the classroom visit, make some notes describing your observations, impressions, high points, low points, and concerns. Use the following observation guide to assist you in recording your observation.
- Follow-up your observations with a brief meeting, phone call or note to the teacher to share your findings, thoughts and concerns. Remember to stress the positive first, so that the teacher will hear your concerns in a constructive frame of mind. Try to close the conversation or note in an upbeat, cooperative manner.

<b>Parent's School Observation Record</b>
<b>Date of observation:</b>
<b>Name of School:</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• School Address:</li><li>• Distance from Home:</li><li>• Telephone Number:</li><li>• Contact Person:</li><li>• Age range of students:</li><li>• Educational Exceptionalities:</li></ul>
<b>PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT:</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• appearance</li><li>• room arrangement</li><li>• safety factors</li><li>• special instruction areas:</li></ul>
<b>LEARNING ENVIRONMENT:</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• size of class:</li><li>• number of teachers/aides/volunteers:</li><li>• length of sessions</li><li>• curriculum used (content or instructional guides)</li><li>• inclusion activities (special and regular education students)</li></ul>
<b>SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT:</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• teacher behavior/attitudes</li></ul>

- students' behavior with each other and with adults
- amount of "play" time
- overall "feel" of the class:

**SPECIAL SERVICES OFFERED:**

- Transportation:
- Assessment Services:
- Therapy Services:
- Support Services (library, art, music, physical education etc.):
- Obvious use of Assistive Technology:

**PARENT INVOLVEMENT:** How are parents encouraged to be involved?

**J. Related Services for Exceptional Students**

**Recreation**

- Assessment of leisure function
- Therapeutic recreation services
- Recreation programs in schools and community agencies
- Leisure education

**School Health Services**

- provided by a qualified school nurse or other qualified person.

**Social Work Services**

- Preparing a social or developmental history on a handicapped child
- Group and individual counseling with the child and family
- Working with those problems in a child's living situation (home, school, and community) that affect the child's adjustment in school
- Mobilizing school and community resources to enable the child to receive maximum benefit from educational program

**Speech & Language Pathology**

- Identification of children with speech or language disorders
- Diagnosis and appraisal of specific speech or language disorders
- Referral for medical or other professional attention necessary for the habilitation of speech or language disorders
- Provision of speech and language services for the habilitation or prevention of communicative disorders
- Counseling and guidance of parents, children, and teachers regarding speech and language disorders

### **Occupational Therapy**

- Identification of children with fine motor, motor planning or sensory integration disorders
- Diagnosis and appraisal of specific fine motor and sensory integration disorders
- Referral for medical or other professional attention necessary for the habilitation of fine motor and sensory integration disorders
- Provision of occupational therapy services for the habilitation or prevention of fine motor, motor planning and sensory integration disorders
- Counseling and guidance of parents, children, and teachers regarding fine motor, motor planning and sensory integration disorders

### **Physical Therapy**

- Identification of children with gross motor or physical disabilities
- Diagnosis and appraisal of specific physical disabilities
- Referral for medical or other professional attention necessary for the habilitation of physical disabilities
- Provision of physical therapy services for the habilitation or prevention of physical disabilities.
- Counseling and guidance of parents, children, and teachers regarding gross motor and physical disabilities

### **Transportation**

- Travel to and from school and between schools
- Travel in and around school buildings
- Specialized equipment (such as adapted bus, lifts, and ramps,) as required to provide special transportation for a handicapped child

### **Assistive Technology**

- Computer assisted learning
- Language boards or electronic language communicators
- Visual and auditory aids
- Talking books, books on tape
- Calculators for math
- Word processing for handwriting

### **Issues to address when thinking about related services:**

- Which services are needed?
- How often are they needed?
- What length of time will be provided for these services?
- Who will provide these services?

**K. Due Process - Protection for Your Child's Rights**

The special education rights provided by IDEA and PL 94-142 are protected for all participants - the child, parents and educators. If you disagree with school officials regarding your child's rights to special education, there are steps you may follow to solve the problem.

**Initially:** Meet with your child's teacher and the school administrator. Be prepared to state the problem clearly and to present facts supporting your opinions. A disagreement resolved informally is best for everyone, especially your child. If such a meeting does not result in a solution to the problem, more formal steps may be taken.

**First Formal Step:** Request a conference with the Director of Exceptional Education. Be prepared to state your concerns in specific terms. If a conference does not solve the problem, then you may . . .

**Second Formal Step:** Request a meeting with the Superintendent of Schools or his representative. If the problem is still unsolved, you may . . .

**Third Formal Step:** Write a letter to the Director of Special Education, State Department of Education, requesting that your complaint be investigated.

The above three formal steps are recommended, though optional, you could skip them and just proceed to this step:

**Fourth Formal Step:** Request a Due Process Hearing. Write to the local Superintendent of Schools and request a due process hearing. You may wish to obtain advice from a parent group or legal counselor. The hearing must be concluded within 45 days. If you are not satisfied after receiving the hearing officer's opinion, you may...

**Fifth Formal Step:** Appeal to State Education Agency for Review of the Local Hearing

This review must be conducted within 30 days. Should you not be satisfied after the appeal process, you may . . .

**Sixth Formal Step:** Prepare a Civil Suit by getting legal advice you may and pursuing action through the court system.

**Identify the Key Players in the Steps of Due Process**

Title	Name	Business Address	Telephone
School Board President			
School Board Member in your Neighborhood			
Sympathetic Board Member to your issues			
School Board's Lawyer			
Superintendent			
District Director of Exceptional Education			
School Principal			
Local School Coordinator of Exceptional Education			
Local Parent Advocacy Organization			
State Office for Advocacy for the Disabled			
Legal Services for the Disabled			
Your Lawyer			

**L. Parents' Summary of the Steps of the Exceptional Education Process**

- **Referral** - The act of telling a school or agency that a student may have special learning needs. A referral can be made by a parent, a teacher, a doctor, or any person who has worked with the student. Children do not have to be in school to be referred.
- **Evaluation** - A way of collecting information about a student's special learning needs, strengths, and interests. It is used to help make decisions about whether a student is exceptional and eligible for Exceptional Student Education programs and services. It may include giving individual tests, observing the child, looking at records, and talking with the student and/or his parents.

- **Eligibility-Staffing:** A meeting at which a group of school staff members decide whether or not a student is exceptional, what kind of exceptionality he has, and whether or not he is eligible for Exceptional Student Education programs and services. Sometimes parents may be asked to be at this meeting.
- **IEP - Individual Educational Program.** A written plan which describes an exceptional student's special individual learning needs and the Exceptional Student Education programs and services which will be given to that student.
- **Program start, placement - Initiation date:** The date, month, and year on which a program or service will begin for an exceptional education student.
- **IEP Review -** A meeting held at least once a year to look at, study, and talk about an exceptional student's IEP. The purpose of the IEP review is to make decisions about changes in the IEP.
- **Re-evaluation -** to evaluate again. An exceptional student must be re-evaluated every three years.
- **Ongoing Staffing -** A meeting at which a group of school staff members decide whether or not a student should continue in the Exceptional Student Education programs and services. Sometimes parents may be asked to be at this meeting.

#### ACCOMMODATIONS FOR ESE STUDENTS

**CLASSROOM ACCOMMODATIONS** Check those accommodations most needed for his student:

##### **ALTERING THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT**

- Seat near teacher
- Assign student to low distraction work area
- Seat near positive peer models
- Use rows instead of tables in classroom
- Don't assign to open classroom setting
- Use study carrel
- Stand near student when giving instructions

##### **ALTER PRESENTATION OF LESSONS**

- Adjust work load (reduce rote writing)
- Use visual aids with oral presentations
- Give student outline of material to be covered in the lesson prior to beginning lesson
- Highlight instructions by emphasizing the major points
- Permit student to tape record lesson
- Provide student with written instructions concerning the lesson
- Give clear behavioral objectives
- Clearly explain grading criteria for all assignments
- Break lesson into short segments
- Ask student to repeat instructions
- Use high - impact, game - like materials
- Modify student's schedule
- Call on student often
- Give reminders for student to stay on task

##### **ALTER TESTING/EVALUATION PROCEDURES**

- Permit untimed testing
- Arrange for oral testing
- Have resource teacher administer tests
- Use short, frequent quizzes
- Permit breaks during tests
- Permit student to type tests by use of computer in classroom
- Adjust grading criteria

##### **ALTER DESIGN OF MATERIALS**

- Use large type
- Keep page format simple
- Use dark ink
- Use buff-colored rather than white paper to reduce glare
- Divide page into clearly marked sections
- Remove distractions from paper
-

**PROVIDE ORGANIZATIONAL ASSISTANCE**

- Schedule a study hall in last period of day
- Provide AM check-in to organize for day
- Provide PM check-out to organize for homework
- Provide lunch-time check-in to organize for afternoon
- Give time to organize desk during class
- Provide training in time management
- Provide training in study skills
- Provide training in how to take tests
- Use a schedule or day timer to plan for long term assignments
- Provide periodic review of student=s notes
- Provide training in how to take notes
- Allow student to take notes by use of PC or laptop computer in classroom

**EMPLOY EFFECTIVE MOTIVATIONAL TECHNIQUES**

- Increase frequency of feedback
- Provide a daily assignment sheet
- Send daily progress note home
- Send weekly progress note home
- Periodically review the student=s progress with student and parents
- Encourage student to use a computer at all times to complete school work
- Use a "response cost" for misbehavior, student subtracts a set amount of points from points given at beginning of each day which points result in a special privilege or activity for the student to participate
- Use time out for misbehavior
- Use in-class point system for positive behaviors, with points earned for positive goal behavior with daily reward experience at end of each school day
- Write sentences for bad behaviors
- Call parents if student does

**ADDITIONAL SUPPORTS**

- Peer tutoring
- Cross-age tutoring
- Study-buddy
- Work with teacher aid or personal assistant
- Meet with teacher after school

**ADDITIONAL SKILL TRAINING**

- Provide conflict resolution training
- Provide communications training
- Teach student to monitor own behavior
- Teach cognitive self-instructional (self-talk) techniques
- Provide stress reduction and relaxation training and techniques
- Keyboard and computer usage training to use computer instead of handwriting
- Provide training in test taking skills

**PARENT INVOLVEMENT**

- Call parents immediately if student
- Conduct parent conferences on at least a quarterly basis
- Involve parents in selecting teacher(s) for the next school year

**INPUT TO MEDICAL/THERAPEUTIC SUPPORT**

- Maintain a narrative log of significant events
- Complete teacher ratings as follows
- Look for specific medication side-effects
- Train office staff to administer medication as prescribed
- Remind student to go to the office to take medication
- Check to see if medication is wearing off too soon

**SOCIAL/PEER ORIENTED INTERVENTIONS**

- Monitor playground interactions with peers
- Monitor lunch-room interactions with peers
- Prompt student to engage in specific social skills such as:
- Assign to be with adults during lunch and/or recess times

**ONGOING OR INTENSIVE INTERVENTIONS**

- Provide individual counseling for student with school or mental health counselor
- Provide social skills training by outside mental health professional or agency
- Teach self-instructional strategies by outside mental health professional or agency
- Provide student's family with family therapy with a mental health counselor
- Monitor behavioral plan at school and home for consistency in approach
- Maintain ongoing consultation with parents by phone and in person
- Maintain a procedure to provide crisis intervention if ever needed
- Refer student to see if good candidate for medication
- Refer student for medication review and update if noticing problems

**TEACHER ATTITUDES/BELIEFS**

- Provide student's teacher(s) with in-service workshop on inclusion of students ESE concerns
- Provide student's teacher(s) with reading materials on students with ESE concerns

- Provide student's teacher(s) with all relevant background information on student to assist in planning an appropriate educational plan

## **The Individual Education Plan (IEP)**

### **A. Information in my child's IEP paperwork:**

#### **1. Exceptional Student Education Program** - child is enrolled in

**2. Related Services** - special help child may need. Related services means transportation and such developmental, corrective and other supportive services that are required to assist a child with special needs to benefit from special education. These related services can include speech pathology and audiology, psychological services, physical and occupational therapy, recreation and extracurricular activities, early identification and assessment of disabilities in children, counseling services, and medical services for diagnostic or evaluation purposes. The term also includes school health services, social work services in schools, and parent counseling and training. The IEP should specify the services to be provided, the extent to which they are necessary, and who will provide the services.

**3. Participation in Regular Education:** The law required that handicapped students be educated to the maximum extent appropriate with students who are not handicapped. The committee must keep in mind that each child must be provided with the required services in the least restrictive environment. The exact percent of time spent with normal children must be specified on the IEP.

#### **4. Dates:**

- Initiation of IEP
- Duration of IEP
- When IEP written
- IEP Review
- When Signature Written
- **Time lines** must be developed for each service provided. This allows for accountability by you and other program monitors. It also reduces the possibility of never ending delays or postponements of needed services. The law also requires that there must be an annual review of your child's IEP. At that time, your child's progress should be discussed with you as well as whether or not the placement and services were appropriate. As a result of the annual review, you should expect a new IEP, one with an updated level of educational performance, and revised annual goals, short-term objectives, and statement of services to be provided for the coming year.

#### **5. Signatures:**

- Given - Why?
- Not given - Why not?

#### **6. Present Level of Performance**

The people at the IEP conference should carefully review all the educational related information they have about the child, and identify the skills or subject areas for which special education is needed. Then, within each identified skill or subject area, the child's strengths or weaknesses should be specified in terms of present ability levels.

#### **In different areas of learning such as:**

- Speech and language
- Sensory

- Motor
- Self-help
- Emotional Maturity
- Physical
- Pre Vocational/Vocational

**7. Annual Goals:** The IEP must include a statement about what is expected of your child by the end of the school year. This represents the "best guess" of the IEP committee members as to possible progress, and is not legally binding. In other words, the annual goals set should be stated in such a way that you will be able to see the specific changes that this education will produce in your child's behavior. For example, a goal for self-help skills might be, "Suzanne will independently dress herself except for working back buttons and zippers." A good way to check to see if the goals are appropriate is to ask "What do I want my child to do at the end of this year?"

**8. Short Term Instructional Objectives:** The short term instructional objectives generally refer to expected outcomes of instruction to be accomplished in one grading period. Each instructional objective should be written in such a way that you will be able to judge if your child has mastered the objective. It should include a specific behavior and the criteria for meeting the objective. This criteria might be a percentage or across time. For example, 80 percent of words spelled correctly, or hopping ten feet on four out of five days. If you don't understand any of your child's objectives, ask that they be rewritten to clear up confusion.

**9. Evaluation Criteria and Procedures:** The evaluation procedures should be determined directly from the goals and short term instructional objectives listed in the IEP. Possible evaluation strategies include: formal testing, observation, dated samples of the student's work, regularly scheduled informal tests, or checklist. Each objective should be stated in measurable terms. An example of the evaluation strategy for adding sums might be to give a test every week and to keep track of the student's scores. Another strategy might be to mark beside the stated objective on the IEP form the date that task was achieved and by what means the achievement was determined (e.g., if the stated objective is: "Ethan will be able to read and identify ten safety signs found in the community," then the teacher can mark "March 10, 1999" next to the objective when Ethan is able to accomplish that task).

## **B. Parents' Information Needed for IEP Meeting**

**1. Who is attending the IEP Meeting:** Federal guidelines require that certain people participate in the IEP meeting. These include:

- a representative of the local education agency other than the child's teacher(s) who shall be qualified to provide, or supervise the provision of specifically designed instruction to meet the unique needs of the child (this is usually the school principal; if this is the first time your child has been evaluated, and if this representative is not an expert on evaluations, then one of the people who participated in the actual testing of the child must also be present)
- the teacher(s) of the child responsible for implementing the IEP
- the parent or surrogate parent of the child
- the child, when appropriate.
- In addition the school must allow any other individual whom you wish to invite to attend the meeting. This may be a case worker involved with your family, people involved with the day to day care of your child, or any person whom you feel can contribute vital information to the meeting. You may also choose to bring with you someone to aid you in understanding the IEP or the IEP process, for example, a lawyer experienced with educational advocacy or parent advocate. The school also has the right to invite other individuals who may contribute additional information about the child, a speech therapist for example.

**2. When is the IEP meeting scheduled?** Within thirty days after being informed that your child qualifies for exceptional education, you should be invited to attend a meeting to develop the school program that is going to best meet your child's individual education needs. If the meeting time suggested by the school is inconvenient for you, you may request a change of time or date. Make sure there is adequate time scheduled so that the meeting will not be rushed. If it is impossible for you to attend any meeting, you may request that a conference call be arranged so that you can talk to committee members by telephone. This, however, should be a last alternative. The IEP must be in effect at the beginning of each school year and be reviewed at least annually, which means that the IEP should be reviewed at the end of each

school year, or during the summer. However, if there are significant changes in your child during the school year, you may request an IEP conference be held at any time. In addition, a child must have a complete diagnostic examination at least every three years.

**3. What are my goals for this IEP meeting:** It is essential that you participate in the development of your child's individualized education program. You have two very important jobs at this meeting.

- first to make sure that the most appropriate IEP is developed for your child
- Second to contribute valuable information. You may want to provide additional background history on your child or talk about the child's strengths and weaknesses in the home and community.

**4. What are the statements I want included in my child's IEP:**

- Placement
- Long Term Goals
- Short Term Instructional Objectives

**5. Steps I will take if I do not agree with the IEP:**

- If you cannot come to an agreement, and you are running out of time. Or if you feel you need time to consider the situation, you have the right to request another meeting. Do not feel pressured to make a decision.
- Most schools ask that you sign the IEP form. If you refuse to sign, the IEP can still be implemented as is. If you don't agree, simply sign your attendance sheet at the IEP meeting to document your presence. Specify that you are not in approval of the present IEP.
- If school personnel refuse to include needed services in the IEP, inform them that you intend to file for a due process hearing and that you will file a written complaint with the Office of Civil Rights, Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, and write to the Bureau of Education for the Handicapped.

**6. After you get a copy of the IEP, then what?** After the meeting, keep your child's IEP in a convenient place. Refer to it often. Make sure the services that were listed on the IEP are actually being provided as stated. For example, if the IEP indicates that "Charles is supposed to be receiving speech therapy for twenty minutes three times a week," but he is only scheduled for therapy twice a week, contact the school, show the therapist the IEP, and ask that these changes be initiated. Your IEP is your guarantee that the needed services will be provided to your child. The IEP also allows you to watch your child's progress.

- 
- Periodically, re-read the IEP goals and objectives.
- Is your child making progress in the areas stated in the IEP?
- Does child's school work seem to be emphasizing the right skills?
- Do child's activities in therapy make sense to you? If not, contact the teacher or therapist and express your concern.

**C. Sample Parent IEP Statement:**

***Parental input on the individualized education program for Jamie Green:***

**Placement:** in a class of 4 to 6 students with a teacher who is skilled in "Floor Time," play therapy, intrusion therapy, consistency, and positive reinforcements. The teacher and the teacher's aid must be proficient in sign language.

- It is crucial that Jamie have contact with peers with typical communications skills who can function as role models on a daily basis.

**Long Term Goals:**

- Increase in relating and socializing abilities

- Increase in communication skills
- Improvement in self-help and survival skills
- Development of Pre-Vocational skills

**Short term Instructional objectives:**

- To increase relating and socializing abilities: "Floor Time," intrusion/play therapy, using simultaneous communication should be provided for 30 minutes, 5 times a week on a one-to-one basis. Doll play, tickling, picture book sign language stories, etc., should be utilized.
- To increase communication skills: art therapy, utilizing drawing, should be used on a one-to-one basis for 20 minutes, daily. Jamie expresses herself through her cravings more so than through any other means.
- To improve self-help and survival skills: 40 minutes daily should be spent on activities such as washing dishes, bathing, and crossing the street.
- To develop Pre-Vocational skills: crafts should be used for 45 minutes, 3 times a week. The curriculum should include macramé, pottery, weaving, and basket weaving.

**A. Cue Questions\***

Parents have the right to participate in the educational planning for their child with a disability. They often need guidelines for communicating effectively with professionals to insure the best programs for their children.

The following are sample communication cue questions which hopefully can assist you when the need arises.

**1. Defining Terms**

- "Things are going quite quickly here, and I'm still behind one paragraph. Could you slow down and explain what you mean by expressive and receptive language?"
- "I know my child pretty well, but I'm not very familiar with the terms you're using. Could you explain some of them, so that I can relate them to my own experience with Jimmy?"
- "Wait a sec; could you explain what articulation means."

**2. Understanding content**

- "I'm trying to understand what was just said." There's a lot of new information here. Could you go through it again?"
- "Wait a minute. Can you go slower? I want to make sure I understand what you said."

**3. Understanding Procedures**

- "Let's go through this again. To review Jeff's file, I need to call the special education office and talk to Joe Jones and he'll set up a time to review the file. If I want, a staff person can be available to answer any questions I may have."
- "To cancel the bus when Sylvia's in the hospital, I just call Sue Smith. Is this right?"

**4. Getting More Descriptive Information**

- "Mr. Jackson, you were saying that Sally hasn't been working very hard in school this week. Could you give me some examples?"
- "Which subjects isn't she working well in? What does she do when she's supposed to be working? What are other students doing at that time? How long can she work on an activity? What activity does she work on the longest?"

- "Mr. Bressler, how are you going to teach Joan (a self-help skill.) I thought I might be able to work with her at home also. What is the first skill you want her to master? How can I help?"
- "I would like to help Jenny with her reading flash cards at home. What should I do specifically?"

### 5. Determining Implications

- "I want to know if I'm hearing you right. Do you mean that if we go ahead and start this new approach to speech, we could evaluate it's effectiveness in one month to see if it's working?"
- "Now, let's stop for a minute. Are you saying that if we are able to get Sally to comply with our directions using redirection, then she is not having difficulty understanding the language we're using?"
- "I have a really long-term question to ask. Will Johnny ever catch up?"
- "You've shared the results of the testing and I generally understand what you've said. What I want to know now is how these findings are going to effect her ability to learn at school."
- "Thanks for sharing the results of the testing. What I'm interested in knowing is what they mean in terms of her ability in the future? Will she always need special education?"
- "What do the test findings tell you in terms of the kind of specific teaching she will need in reading?"

### 6. Understanding Differences of Opinion

- "I'm confused. Mr. Jensen, you're saying you think Mark should be included and Mr. Langford, you think we should wait. I have not decided yet how I feel. Could you each explain the reasons for your opinion?"
- "It's really incredible, we each spend time with Laura yet we have such different opinions on what she's capable of doing. Maybe we should get more specific and talk about each academic/developmental area."

\*These cue questions appeared in the article Communication Skills for Parents by Nye, Westling and Laten in the Exceptional Parent Magazine Vol. 16, #5 September 1986, pp. 30-36

### B. "Cue Questions" for Parents for Annual IEP Review\*

**Before the annual IEP review**, parents can telephone significant team members to help prepare themselves for the meeting.

- "How much time are we going to have to develop my child's Individualized Education Plan (IEP)?"
- "Who is going to be at the Annual Review and what will be their roles in the meeting?"
- "How is the meeting going to be run? Who will chair it? What will we be covering at the meeting?"
- "I would like \_\_\_\_\_ to be at the meeting (someone from another agency) because she has been so involved with my child. Should I call her?"
- "What are your perceptions of my child's progress and what goals are you thinking of for next year?"

**At the annual review**, parents usually need to know about the child's current school performance, the school's goals and objectives for the future, the extent of the child's participation in a regular classroom, and the child's specific placement in the system.

### Current School Performance

- "When looking back on last year's goals and objectives, how much progress have my child made on goals and objectives?"
- "What goals and objectives does he or she still need to work on from last year?"

- "What can we do to help my child make more progress in his or her weak areas?"

### **Discussing Goals and Objectives**

- "Should we include in the objectives that my child be able to generalize these skills to the classroom and other school and home settings?"
- "How often do the people who are implementers of the goals meet to discuss progress and program planning?"
- "How do the goals established for my child relate to the reasons he or she was referred to special education?"
- "Regarding behavior programming - what kinds of plans are you making to fade the program back to more natural consequences?"
- "Will we need to meet in the fall to set more objectives?"

### **Participating in Inclusion in Regular Education**

- "What opportunities will my child have to interact with normally developing peers? Language models? Social/behavioral models? Will that be at unstructured or structured times?"
- "How are my child's interactions in inclusion going to be monitored and progress documented?"
- "Will my child be able to take advantage of regular education extra curricular activities, such as band and after school sports?"
- "Given that my child is in a small special class, will he have opportunities to experience a larger group? Do you feel that would be important for my child now?"
- "When do you think my child will be ready to be involved in inclusion activities?"
- "What are the exit criteria from special education?"

### **Placement**

- "I would like to observe several of the classes which might be possibilities for my child next year."
- "I would like my child's new program to be closer to home if possible."
- "My child has changed programs many times. I would like my child to stay in the same program, if possible, for continuity."
- "How many years do most kids stay in primary, intermediate, junior high and high school special classes?"

### **General Suggestions**

- "What can I do to help my child at home? If we do not have time now to discuss this, can we talk at another time soon?"
- "Is there anything else I can do to help you help my child?"

\*These cue questions appeared in the article Communication Skills for Parents by Nye, Westling and Laten in the Exceptional Parent Magazine Vol. 16, #5 September 1986, pp. 30-36.

### **C. Getting the Most out of a Parent Teacher Conference**

The following guidelines concerning parent/teacher conferences are offered to assist you to become better prepared and relaxed so that you can be an effective advocate for your child and improve your communications and assertive skills.

#### **What to do before the conference:**

1. If you are initiating the conference, do so in writing specifying dates and times when you are available.

2. Your conference request needs to specify the purpose of the meeting. Instead of making general statements such as "I want to find out how my child is doing", it is suggested that you ask direct questions such as "What has my child done to have earned poor grades in conduct and what can s/he do to improve it?" and to list your specific concerns so that the teacher can be fully prepared to discuss these matters at the time of your meeting.
3. In your conference request ask the teacher to send home any information which you might need to see in advance such as copies of your child's tests, reports, workbooks, etc. You might also wish to request that other useful information such as a counselor's report or test data be made available to you before the meeting. Additionally, request that the teacher have all pertinent materials available at the conference.
4. If the conference is at the teacher's request, make sure you understand its specific purpose(s) and have the teacher provide you with a list of concerns/questions as well as any appropriate material for you to review in advance. You should not walk into the situation without having a complete understanding of exactly what is to be discussed.
5. In your request for the conference, ask for a written reply.
6. Arrive a few minutes prior to the meeting so that you can review your list of questions and any other information which has been provided to you.
7. Make sure you bring paper and pen to the conference for note taking or bring a tape recorder to record it.
8. Plan how you will greet the teacher and be prepared to say something positive about your child's school experience.
9. If appropriate, gather and bring examples of your child's work to illustrate what you plan to discuss.
10. If you have read about a procedure or materials that you would like to discuss at the conference send a copy of what you read to the teacher.

**What to do during the conference:**

1. Use the positive conference opening you have prepared.
2. Use your notes, if necessary, and have paper and pen readily available for your use.
3. Make sure you understand what you are being told. Don't be afraid to ask questions.
4. Take notes - don't rely on your memory.
5. At the end of the conference, summarize/review the major points discussed and steps to be taken. Write these items in your notes.
6. If the teacher is planning to do some type of follow-up, make arrangements to check that this has been done i.e., written communications, phone call.
7. If necessary, set up a follow-up conference and set up this time before you leave the meeting.

**D. Professionals are Human Too!**

Parents often report that, "Whenever I'm meeting with professionals I usually feel so frustrated, angry, guilty and helpless." When professionals have meetings with parents they also feel "frustrated, angry, guilty, and helpless" This was documented at a conference where a group of parents and professionals were separated (with all the parents together, and all the professionals together) into two groups and were asked separately to list their feelings during meetings with parents (in the professional group) and with professionals (in the parent group). Here are the lists each group came up with:

**Parent Group List: *'When I'm meeting with professionals I feel ...'***

- a desire for honesty guilt, guilt, guilt
- run around overwhelmed
- dumb, not good about myself good
- frustrated by jargon unsuccessful
- anger trustful

- disgust respectful
- disappointed sympathy
- defeated
- threatened

***"I wish professionals were more..."***

- helpful
- child oriented
- concerned
- knowledgeable
- receptive to professional upgrading
- humanistic
- understanding
- free to be open

***"I like it when professionals . . ."***

- contact/communicate with me
- listen to me
- come with positive information
- show respect for students
- become involved in support groups
- respect the knowledge of parents
- individualize for students
- share information
- share professional knowledge
- treat parents as equal

**Professional Group List: *"When I'm meeting with parents I feel..."***

- frustrated incapable of dealing with parents
- professional liability unprepared
- parents don't care indignant
- parents not very informed put down
- uptight successful

- threatened organized
- insecure confident
- pressured satisfied
- patronized knowledgeable
- tired, burned out helpful
- tense appreciative
- upset fulfilled
- unsure accomplished
- needed good about myself
- burdened with red tape

***"I wish parents were more . . . "***

- better listeners caring
- informed involved
- assertive supportive
- interested objective
- less intimidated better models
- reliable sensitive
- responsible initiating in dealing with problems

***'I like it when parents . . . "***

- are perfect
- attend conferences, staffing, etc.
- follow through with suggestions
- both attend meetings
- see progress
- provide feedback regarding the child's "performance"
- are supportive of special services
- are open with their communication
- put their child's education first
- show initiative in finding out what their child does in school
- are honest

- are objective
- understanding of professional perspectives
- are open minded

**If you remember that professionals are experiencing the same feelings when they are having meetings with you,** and that they too are "frustrated, uptight, insecure, threatened, tense, upset, unprepared, put down, burdened with red tape . . ." you can meet them as partners, involved in the same meeting, sharing the same feelings, the same frustrations, the same fears.

**Remember, when you are feeling frustrated,** that they too may also be frustrated; when you are feeling angry, they too may be angry; when you are feeling afraid, that they too may also be afraid; when you are feeling helpless, that they too, may be feeling helpless. A real partnership can develop between you and the professionals you are meeting with if you can share your feelings with each other.

### **E. Can You Really Listen?**

Effective listening is an important part of communication. It is also an important part of negotiation and assertiveness. Can you really listen when you are meeting with school officials about your child?

#### **To test your listening skills:**

1. pair up with another person and have her/him speak to you non-stop for a full minute (about any subject matter)
2. repeat - as closely as possible to the speaker's version - what the speaker just said.
3. have the speaker make appropriate corrections.
4. change roles - speaker is now the listener and vice-versa.

#### **Reaction Questions:**

1. Did you listen intently enough repeat the speaker's statement reasonably accurately?
2. Did you find it hard to concentrate, with your mind wandering? How would practicing this exercise before your school meetings help you to be able to listen actively and get the most out of the meeting?
3. How would practicing this exercise with other parents, with members of your parent group, and with professionals help you to become a better advocate for your child?
4. How can a parent-professional pairing be useful in this exercise?
5. How can you become more tuned to the thoughts, feelings, and problems of others?
6. How does this exercise increase your listening skills? How does improving your listening skills, help you to be better able to assert yourself effectively?