

Accessing Social & Educational Services
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IMPORTANT ISSUES IN ACCESSING EDUCATIONAL SERVICES

- 1 Evaluations must be appropriate for your child's language, mode of communication and must answer the referral question. Since children with ACC are often described as being inconsistent in demonstrating skills, parent input is critical in the evaluation process.
- 2 Access to special education services is generally dependent upon how the disability adversely affects the child's education. (Rowley) School districts need only demonstrate that they provide an appropriate (vs optimal) education.
- 3 According to IDEA (federal law regulating special education) each child with a disability is entitled to receive a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE); this does not mean that each child will be fully included in the regular education program. You may advocate for the amount of time you feel your child should be in the regular class and make sure that supports are in place. The amount of time spent in the general curriculum is determined on an individual basis.
- 4 Parents are **EQUAL PARTNERS** in the IEP process, and should be treated as such. Bring friends, advocates or professionals along to meetings to ensure you are comfortable and help you 'catch' everything that is said. Try to remember that this is your child and you know him/her best. Also remember that many children behave or respond differently at school than at home, so the two environments can help one another understand and guide your child.
- 5 **IDEA** is federal law; it can be re-interpreted by local educational agencies (states are referred to as LEA's). Your state dept. of education is a good place to start to identify local issues.
- 6 **INCLUSION** refers to the practice of providing special education services in the regular education classroom, to the maximum extent possible. Each parent must decide this for their child, as this is an individual decision. The good thing about inclusion is that people will treat your child like every other child.....the bad thing about inclusion is that they will treat your child like every other child.....be prepared to assist in walking this fine line and making sure your child will be receiving appropriate attention in whatever setting he is learning.
- 7 **DUE PROCESS** is the protection/ procedure used to argue for different services when denied by the school district. It need not be adversarial, and may be the only way to objectively identify appropriate services in a conflict. School districts do not have to provide everything requested, but they do have to respond in writing to all requests and describe why they denied a request. Creating a paper trail and documenting everything you ask for is a good idea; many parents keep logs/ timelines so they can recall when they requested specific services.

ACCESSING EDUCATIONAL SERVICES

Traditional educational programs begin for most children in a typical preschool or Kindergarten classroom, between the ages of three and five years. Parents have more choices than ever regarding the type and focus of school curriculums available, including public, private, and home-schools. The purpose of this presentation is to familiarize parents with their options within the public schools regarding accessing educational services for their children with ACC.

Individuals with ACC do not appear to exhibit a consistent 'best' mode or method of learning, and they typically present with a wide range of skills and abilities. It would be impossible to suggest one type of classroom or teaching strategy that might benefit all of those with ACC, therefore it is important that parents look to their child's unique abilities, strengths and weaknesses to determine what skills need to be the focus of instruction. Some children develop skills within the domains of cognitive (thinking), communication, self-help, socialization, and motor skills within typical time frames, and may require limited additional supports and instruction. The regular education program may be appropriate for a child with age-appropriate skills to develop necessary academic achievements. This refers to the traditional academic program with state-approved goals and content. Other children may exhibit delays in skill development in one or more areas that may be obvious to the parent, pediatrician, or preschool teacher. They may require a more specialized or individualized method of instruction to learn basic pre-academic or academic skills, and may need some form of special education services. In most cases the determination of eligibility for special education services depends on the degree of delay or disability, and in some instances, a child with an identified disability may be determined ineligible for special education if that disability does not negatively impact his/her educational performance. If you feel your child is having a problem learning in one of the areas mentioned (motor, cognitive, communication, self-help, socialization) you can take one of the following steps to access evaluations and determine if he/she would benefit from special education services:

Call **Child Find (800) 323-GROW** to locate early intervention services in your area if your child is below the age of 2 years 9 months, or if you don't know your local school.

If your child is 2 years 9 months or older, you may **register at the local school** (the neighborhood school for your address) by bringing your child's birth certificate, any documentation of a potential disability, and a written request for a case study evaluation/full individual evaluation. (Keep a copy and sign consent form).

NOTE: Private evaluations may be accessed by parents' request through hospitals, insurance providers, or private practitioners/therapists. You should be aware that schools provide services under an educational model, which requires schools to work on skills that enable a child to access his/her education (appropriate vs optimal). The Medical model adopted by many outside agencies and organizations may provide services to optimize the child's functional skills, even if it does not directly benefit or impact his/her education.

RESOURCES/INFORMATION

ADVOCATES are persons/agencies that can help parents gain services for their children, understand their legal rights regarding education, and identify appropriate services within the schools. According to the federal law that governs special education services at this time (IDEA) schools may provide parents with a list of advocacy agencies in their district/area. If such a list is not available at your local school, you may find local assistance by calling your state's Department of Mental Health, or State Board of Education for a listing of advocates. Some states have advocates available at no charge, and in some areas there is a fee for service, so be aware before you enlist their services, and ask other parents for referrals.

There are also websites that can provide information and answer questions regarding legal issues and rights in schools.

www.reedmartin.org

www.wrightlaw.org

www.1.access.degix.net/~ed/awinc

General sites for special education information on advocacy, services and specific issues are as follows:

The Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) <http://www.cec.sped.org/>

Disability Resources <http://www.icdi.wvu.edu.Others.htm>

Family Village <http://familyvillage.wisc.edu/>

Internet Resources in Disability and Knowledgework www.cais.net/danw//piduk/dlinks.html

EVALUATION PROCESS

A full evaluation for early intervention programs or school age educational programs typically includes the following components:

- Child and parent interviews
- Social development studies
- Review of medical history, including vision/hearing screenings/evaluations
- Achievement testing (school age)/ Developmental testing (birth through 3 yrs)
- Specialized evaluations, as determined in the referral (psychological, speech/language, occupational/physical therapy evaluations)

Within 60 school days (days of school attendance) a multidisciplinary conference must be convened in which all evaluation results are discussed and interpreted to the parents. If parents have completed an independent evaluation in any of the areas assessed by the school district, and they provide results of those evaluations, the school district must consider the results (but may not accept findings).

EVALUATION PROCESS: STEP-BY-STEP

Referral – parents make request for evaluation with school district/ early intervention program.

Evaluation – assessments are conducted and eligibility for special education services are considered/suggested.

Child is found NOT eligible for special education services under one of the federal/ IDEA categories.

OR

Child is determined to be ELIGIBLE for special education services (significant delays/ weaknesses warrant intervention).

...THEN...

- consider providing services through **Section 504** plan

- consider **due process** hearing to review eligibility

- consider **private services** which may work on optimal vs appropriate outcomes

- develop **IEP (Individualized Education Plan)** including current levels of functioning, annual goals/objectives, methods of measurement/evaluation, amount of service time for special ed, and related services.

- identify appropriate placement location that can implement the IEP.

- Review progress yearly at **Annual Review**
- Conduct **full evaluation** after three years (Parents may request evaluation at any time.)