

CONNECTIONS



*A Quarterly Newsletter
from the Parent Network of the Capital Region*



The mission of the Parent Network of the Capital Region is to provide parents with the knowledge, skills, and resources to facilitate productive relationships with their school districts ensuring an appropriate education for their child. These services are offered free-of-charge.

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CPSE/ CSE Parent Member Training to Be Rolled out in the Capital Region

The 13 parent centers across the state and the affiliated RSE-TASC's (regional special education technical assistance support centers) will soon be teaming up to co-deliver a training program especially for parent members of committees on special education and preschool committees on special education. The state education department vetted-training was developed by parent center, RSE-TASC and state education department staff and will be delivered on a consistent basis throughout the state beginning this winter.

The training was developed in response to a need identified by school districts for standardized, statewide training for CSE/CPSE parent members. All CSE/CPSE parent members are required to receive some degree of training prior to being approved as a parent member. The 4-hour training program

will include an overview of special education regulations, CSE/ CPSE proceedings and what the role of the parent member is. There will be no charge to participate in the training but school districts will need to pre-register their parent members prior to the training.

Currently, New York State education regulations require an additional parent member to serve on CSEs and CPSEs. The parent member must be the parent of a student with a disability currently classified, or who has been declassified or has graduated within 5 years. This is NOT the parents of the student on whom the committee is meeting but an *additional* member of the CPSE/ CSE.

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Figuring Out Your Child's Emotional Triggers: You Be the Detective

By Adene Karhan, Special Education Resource Specialist



The morning starts out running pretty smoothly. You wake up early enough to shower, get dressed and make lunches before your two children wake up. Today is school picture day and you've laid out outfits the night before. Your oldest child is fairly independent and enjoys school, so she gets dressed and pours her own bowl of cereal. You help your son button his shirt and find his socks and then you set some breakfast in front of him. He goes limp and melts into a puddle on the floor. He didn't want Rice Krispies. He wanted Cheerios. You sigh and dump the cereal down the drain and pour him a bowl of Cheerios. After a few minutes of coaxing, you are able to get him to eat the cereal so you can turn your attention back to getting yourself ready for work. A few minutes later, you hear bickering in the living room. Your son is arguing with your daughter because she sat in spot on the sofa that he wanted to sit on. The morning seems to go down hill from there. Your son doesn't want to wear the shirt you picked out for him after all, because he thinks it looks "stupid". Today is music class and he hates music. No matter what you do, it just feels like your son is trying to pick a fight.

Does any of this sound familiar? Does it seem like some children have more difficulty "rolling with the punches" than others? Do you sometimes feel like you're walking on eggshells, just trying to get through the day without an emotional meltdown? You're not alone. Many parents express frustration about their child's difficulty in regulating emotions.

Emotional regulation is a complex process that begins at birth and continues to develop throughout childhood and early adolescence. Emotional regulation is the process by which we become aware of the emotions that we are experiencing and the way that we process and express them. Emotions can be controlled or regulated both internally (from within ourselves) and externally (by others with whom we have interactions). For children their family, school, neighborhood, peers, and culture all come into play in emotional development and regulation. As parents and professionals, one of the most crucial roles that we play is to help them learn how to manage emotions in ways that are socially and contextually appropriate.

While our child's behavior may not always make sense to us, one of the most effective steps that we can take toward helping our child is to identify some of the triggers within the environment that lead to emotional meltdowns. Once we become aware of these triggers we can do two things: 1) help to structure the environment in a way that eliminates or decreases these triggers and 2) help our child understand the things in the environment that cause him/ her to feel overwhelmed. Doing so will assist the child to better understand factors that influence his/ her behavior.

Following is a list of some questions to ask yourself as you attempt to determine your child's triggers.

1. Are the conditions of the room uncomfortable to the child? A) Noisy B) Overcrowded C) Too hot D) Too cold
2. Was there a lack of? A) Structure B) Organization C) Predictability D) Clear Schedule/Routine
3. Was the child feeling unwell physically? A) Ill B) Tired C) Hungry D) Thirsty
4. Was it related to medication? A) Was the medication wearing off? B) Was the medication brand or dosage changed?
5. Was it related to a specific event or activity? A) B) Did the routine change without warning? B) Did the student feel bored or frustrated with work?
6. Was it related to a performance or skill demand such as the child being asked to? A) Remain seated B) Wait patiently for something C) Hurry to complete a task
7. Was it related to a specific time? A) Early morning B) Before or after lunch C) During time of transition D) Late afternoon
8. Other Triggers: Was the child? A) Given no choices or options B) Embarrassed in front of others C) Having difficulty communicating D) Given no assistance or access to help on difficult tasks

(The checklist for this article was adapted from [The ADHD Book of Lists: A Practical Guide for Helping Children and Teens with Attention Deficit Disorders](#) by Sandra F. Rief (2003), San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.)

Strategies to Make Homework Time Less Stressful

By: Heather Loukmas, Special Education Resource Specialist

It's that time of year again when the nightly homework struggles between parents and their children resume. For many children, homework can be a difficult task. Many parents, educators and researchers have questioned whether homework actually improves a child's learning directly but what is clear is that homework teaches children important study skills that will become essential to them as they move up the educational ladder. It also teaches them about responsibility and meeting deadlines, two skills that will be critical to surviving the adult world of work. Knowing these things to be true doesn't make it any easier when you are faced with a child who struggles to complete his homework each evening or who forgets to even bring it home!

Here are a few ideas that can help make homework time less frustrating, argumentative and tense for both parents and students:

Develop a plan: you and your child should work together to develop a homework plan that includes the time and place where your child will work on their homework. Take into consideration your child's limits and preferences. Some children need time to unwind when they get home from school so an after-dinner timeframe might work best. Other children might prefer to work on their homework as soon as they get home so they can focus on other activities for the remainder of the evening. As much as possible, try to stick to that consistent time that you agree upon. Coming up with an ideal place for your child to work on homework is equally important. Don't automatically banish him to that lonely desk in his bedroom upstairs, away from the rest of the family (unless this is what they prefer). Children spend their day in school around many other kids with lots of commotion and activity going on. You may find that the kitchen table following dinner is an ideal place for them to work. While the hustle and bustle of family activity going on in the background may be beneficial to some students, the sounds of the family watching television in the next room while they are in the kitchen doing homework could be distracting, frustrating and downright anger-provoking. The designated "homework" time should be respected by all family members. Discussing what your daily expectations for homework completion, resolving homework issues (ie: what your child should do if they are having difficulty) are with your child is also an important part of the plan.

Use an agenda: it's a good idea for even the youngest of students to use some sort of tool to organize their homework assignments. A very simple agenda, which simply lists what their homework assignments are and when they are due is a good way for young students to begin learning the skills of organization, planning and prioritizing. Older students will want to keep more details in their agenda such as when the assignment was given, what materials will be used, if it is a

group project who the team members are, etc. Many schools now provide students with agendas. If your child does not receive one from the school a simple notebook for younger students or possibly a day planner for older students will suffice.

Have necessary materials on-hand: consider creating a homework "toolbox" with all of the essential supplies your child will need to do homework. The toolbox could include duplicates that were on your child's back-to-school supply list. Depending on the age of your child, throw other essentials like pencil sharpeners, calculators, rulers, glue, etc. in the box as well. Keep the box stocked and nearby the designated homework area so "I can't find a pencil" can no longer be used as an excuse for why homework doesn't get done.



Know when to say enough is enough: if your child is truly struggling with a particular homework problem or question

that he just doesn't understand or can't resolve, don't spend time arguing about it as this will most likely only end in increased stress and frustration for both of you. Attach a note to your child's teacher explaining that despite your child's best and true effort, they were unable to complete the assignment because (provide reason). If your child is older, encourage them to discuss their difficulty with the teacher directly.

Offer encouragement and praise: words of praise and encouragement from a parent can go a long way to keeping a child engaged and motivated where homework is concerned. If your child is really struggling, you may want to consider devising a reward system for getting through the work. Celebrate homework successes with your child. Consider doing something extra special for or with your child when they accomplish a particularly difficult task or overcome a major obstacle. This will provide further reinforcement for them to continue their hard work.

Finally, as a parent, it is your job to help your child build the strategies they need to do the work, not how to do the work. Starting early to help your child build good homework skills will go a long way toward laying the foundation for academic success down the road.

(Adapted from Families Together for People with Disabilities' "ABCs of Homework: A Parent's Guide to Helping Children be Successful in School")

School-Age Transition to Post-School Activities

By: Letah Graff, RSE-TASC Transition Specialist

The New York State Education Department defines transition Services as “a coordinated set of activities for a student with a disability, designed within a results-oriented process that is focused on improving the academic and functional achievement of the student with a disability to facilitate the students’ movement from school to post-school activities, including, but not limited to, post-secondary education, vocational education, integrated employment (including supported employment), continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, or community participation. The coordinated set of activities must be Based on the student’s strengths, preferences and interests, and shall include needed activities in the following areas: instruction; related services; community experiences; the development of employment and other pos-school adult living objectives; and when appropriate, acquisition of daily living skills and provision of a functional vocational evaluation.”

WOW...so what does that mean for my child?

As a part of transition planning, school staff, the student and parents will be working together as a team to help plan for the student’s transition into the adult world of learning, earning and living. During the school year that your student turns 15 you will begin to see new transition information incorporated into their educational program and the IEP. Discussions about post-secondary goals and transition needs will now become a part of the IEP development process. Some areas to consider during transition planning include

- Employment
- Post secondary education
- Residential considerations
- Daily living skills
- Transportation
- Assistive Technology
- Financial Needs
- Recreation/Leisure needs
- Legal and/or Guardianship Issues
- Medical needs

Transition is a process. It is a series of activities and discussions that will help teens clarify their goals as they prepare to leave the school setting. Transition begins by focusing on the future; what does the student plan to do after high school, how can we help them decide what they want to do and what do we need to do to help them reach their goals. Parents play a critical role in this process. In the next newsletter, we will share tips on making the transition process easier.

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WWW.PNCRNY.ORG

UPCOMING PNCR WORKSHOPS

Oct. 20- “Behavior Challenges at School: Functional Behavior Assessments and Positive Behavioral Supports for Students with Disabilities”. Wildwood Programs, Clifton Park/ 6:30pm-8:00pm

Oct. 25- “Diploma Options for Students with Disabilities”. Crandall Public Library, Glens Falls/ 6:30pm-8:30pm

Oct. 27- “Behavior Challenges at School: Functional Behavior Assessments and Positive Behavioral Supports for Students with Disabilities”. Greene County Mental Health Bldg./ 10:00am-11:30am

Nov. 8- “Getting Off on the Right Foot”. Wildwood Programs, Latham/ 9:30am-11:00am

Nov. 9- “Behavior Challenges at School: Functional Behavior Assessments and Positive Behavioral Supports for Students with Disabilities”. Wildwood Programs, Latham/ 10:00am-11:30am

Nov. 16- “School Discipline and Students with Disabilities: Understanding Your Rights”. Wildwood Programs, Latham/ 6:30pm-8:30pm

Nov. 19- “Diploma Options for Students with Disabilities”. Wildwood Programs, Latham/ 10:00am-11:30am

Dec. 1- “Behavior Challenges at School: Functional Behavior Assessments and Positive Behavioral Supports for Students with Disabilities”. Crandell Public Library, Glens Falls/ 7:00pm-8:30pm

Dec. 3- “School Discipline and Students with Disabilities: Understanding Your Rights”. Wildwood Programs, Latham/ 9:30am-11:30am

Dec. 8- “Diploma Options for Students with Disabilities”. Greene County Mental Health Bldg./ 10:00am-11:30am

Dec. 9- “CPSE/ CSE Parent Member Training”. Capital Region BOCES, Albany./ 9:30am-2:00pm.

For more information and specific registration details about these workshops, please visit the “Upcoming Events” section of our website at www.pncrny.org.



Getting Off on the Right Foot

By Mary Fornabia, Special Education Resource Specialist

As we proceed through the first quarter of the school year it is important to take some proactive steps in working with your child's educational team. Developing a positive relationship with all teachers is essential for a successful school year. There are many strategies for building communication so that you can meaningfully participate with the educational team. If you have not already met your child's teacher as well as all teachers who work directly with your child, it is important to do so at this time of the year. The main purpose of meeting is to establish how you will communicate throughout the year. Three communication options to consider are: team meetings, individual meetings, or phone/e-mail.

A **team meeting** can occur one time a month or every 6 weeks as you see needed. This meeting would include all teachers working directly with your child. This type of meeting is useful when, consistency between home and school is key, your child has unique needs or behaviors, and your child is in a new

year. This meeting can be included on the IEP.

Individual meetings are when you meet with just one service provider or teacher. This type of meeting is most effective when your child is struggling in a particular class or setting, there is little progress or there are communication problems.

The third type of communication is **phone/e-mail**. This is useful when you have a quick question, verifying something your child has said in class, a face to face meeting is not possible, or to thank or acknowledge a teachers efforts. E-mailing or a phone call is also effective if you are afraid you may get too emotional in person. One caution is that when using e-mail sometimes a tone we don't intend is communicated, so be careful to communicate clearly.

Additionally, at the first meeting of the year you want to clearly define **your** expectations for the school year as well as hearing what the teacher's expectations are for your child for the

year. This is important to building mutual respect. Ask about how they see your child in the class, their observations, what do they see working/not working. It is important to really listen to what the teachers are saying. Then share with them your expectations, your goals for the year for your child. This may include but not be limited to academic goals. For instance you may want your child to develop some friendships for the year, or become involved in an after school activity.

In summary it is essential at this point in the school year to introduce yourself and meet your child's educational team. Setting up a good form of communication and letting the team know that you are willing to be an active participant with them will lead to a prosperous and productive school year.

Parent Member Training- Continued

Regulations further allow the role of the parent member to be one that supports the parent of the student for whom the meeting is being held. They bring to the table the perspective of another parent of a child with a disability and can assist in facilitating communication and understanding between parents and the CSE. They can also be a resource for parents. The role of the parent member, however, is NOT to be an advocate for the parent, a special education expert or meeting leader.

As required members of the CPSE and CSE, it is important that parent members understand the CPSE/ CSE process, have general knowledge regarding special education laws and regulations and that they understand and embrace just what their role as a parent member of these committees is. The parent member training will provide a good foundation for that knowledge base. Any parent currently volunteering as a parent member, or who is interested in becoming a parent member may participate in the training. CPSE/ CSE chairpersons are encouraged to attend the training along with their parent members.

In the Capital Region the first parent member training is scheduled for December 9, 9:30am-2:00pm at the Capital Region BOCES in Albany. For information about this training, or to register, please contact the PNCRat 518-640-3320 or by e-mail at info@pncrny.org. More information on additional parent member trainings will be sent to school districts directly as information arises.

What to Look for in Your Child's First Quarterly Reports

By Julie Keegan, Special Education Resource Specialist

Report cards and IEP progress reports are often the first windows through which parents will glimpse how their child is progressing at school. For parents of students with disabilities, this initial information, and what is or is not done with it, can significantly impact the child's growth at school for the entire school year.

First reports cards and progress reports should provide parents with a clear picture of how the child is progressing. While report cards typically offer information on the child's academic success, IEP progress reports should inform the parents of:

1. The child's progress towards his or her annual IEP goals, and
2. Whether this progress is sufficient in order for the child to achieve the goals by the end of the school year.

Unfortunately, this second requirement is sometimes overlooked by school districts and parents, and this oversight can prove to be detrimental to the student's progress over the course of the year. The New York State Education Department has recently clarified that the purpose of assessing and reporting the adequacy of progress towards goals is to allow monitoring of the effectiveness of the student's special education services. "If progress is such that the student is not expected to reach his/her annual goals, the Committee [on Special Education (CSE)] must review and revise the student's IEP to ensure that the student is being provided the appropriate supports and services."¹

The simplest way for parents to determine if their child is on the right track is to review the progress report and ask: does this report give me enough information to determine if my child will meet the goals of his or her IEP by the end of the school year. For example, if the annual goal is: "Johnny will read a short story at the third-grade level and answer who, what, where, when, and why questions with 80% accuracy," then the quarterly progress report should indicate how accurately Johnny is able to answer these questions at the present moment **and** whether this rate of progress suggests Johnny will be answering grade level comprehension questions correctly 80 percent of the time by the end of the year. Ideally, the progress report would indicate something like: "Johnny's accuracy in answering comprehension questions increased from 35% to 50% this quarter. If Johnny maintains this rate of progress, he will reach his goal by June."

In contrast, if the progress report merely indicates "some progress" or even "progressing satisfactorily", it is difficult for parents and other CSE members to clearly determine if Johnny is likely to achieve his goals by year's end. In this case, parents may want to seek additional information from school personnel to gain a clear understanding of the child's rate of progress and whether this progress is sufficient.

Some simple strategies for obtaining more information about your child's progress include:

- Request a *team meeting* that includes the school personnel who are responsible for the various goals on your child's IEP. This may include teachers, occupational, physical and/or speech therapists, school counselor, and/or social worker. At the meeting, review the goals on the IEP one by one and seek specific feedback from the team.
- Request that the progress report be *updated* to include progress reported in *measurable terms* regarding the extent to which your child is progressing towards meeting his or her annual goals.
- *Ask for the data* that has been collected to determine whether the student is making progress. Each goal on the IEP must identify the "Evaluation Procedure" i.e., the way the student's progress is assessed throughout the school year. Common evaluation methods include recorded observations, teacher made tests, charts, etc. The data collected each time this procedure is used should provide clear evidence of the child's current functional level and whether there has been any improvement.

Taking the time to thoroughly determine your child's rate of progress is critical – especially early in the school year. If your child is not progressing or progress is unexpectedly slow, the CSE should meet to determine if changes in services, methodology, and other supports are needed to get your child back on track to achieve his or her goals. Waiting until mid-year or spring will delay the implementation of appropriate services and cost your child valuable weeks of intervention. In contrast, actively monitoring your child's progress in partnership with school personnel will likely result in a year of meaningful progress and growth.

¹ *Guide to Quality Individualized Education Program (IEP) Development & Implementation*, NY State Education Dept. (Feb. 2010), p. 36.

For additional information on reporting progress, annual goals, and Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), consult the *Guide to Quality Individualized Education Program (IEP) Development & Implementation*, available at: <http://www.p12.nysed.gov/specialed/publications/iepguidance.htm>