PARENTS make the DIFFERENCE

Families, schools, and communities working together to support the unique learning potential of every child

Response to Instruction
Reaching Tough-to-Reach Kids
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By Lori Fowler, Prevention Makes Cents

“Can I please, please, please sleep over?” “But all my friends can bike ride by themselves.” “Why do I have to hold your hand, I’m a big girl?”

Sound familiar? Giving our children opportunities for independence during the summer helps to build their confidence, but along with that, including personal safety reminders remain an important part of the message. Children hear messages like, “don’t talk with strangers” often, but what is their understanding of what a stranger is?

Young children responses to this question range from someone wearing a mask to a “mean” person. Children need to know that a stranger is just someone you don’t know or recognize. Review basic rules like: keeping at least two arm’s lengths away from someone you don’t know, not giving out information or talking with someone and never to go with anyone you or your family don’t know well, no matter how nice they may seem. It is always safer to travel in groups or pairs and to call whenever plans change.

Children have wonderful instincts that help them know when something doesn’t feel right. We need to encourage children to trust that instinct but also give them the tools to act when they have concerns, such as if anyone approaches you and you don’t feel safe, yell, run and tell an adult. As you make your summer vacation plans, just add in some summer tips for safety in your picnic basket!

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April, 2013

Dear PIC Supporter,

Children with disabilities do not belong to an exclusive “club”; in fact, one in 7 children in New Hampshire has a disability. That means that in NH, there are over 29,000 children ages 3 - 21 who receive some type of academic or other support services. Additionally, all children need support at home and at school to have successful school experiences. All parents want to find ways to help their child feel confident that they can be successful learners. These are challenges that all parents experience at some time in their children’s lives. We understand, we have been there and we are here to help.

For over 35 years, the Parent Information Center (PIC) has provided training, information and support throughout New Hampshire to parents of all children, and especially children with disabilities. PIC also works with educators and other professional to provide them with effective strategies to partner with parents to support children’s learning. One educator told us “I am more aware now of useful strategies in meeting parents’ need and communicating more successfully.”

Research shows that when families and schools work together, children do better and thrive! Parents and educators know of the value of working together but often do not know how to create this partnership. PIC is the one-stop shop where parents and schools can receive this assistance.

“We are now coming to the end of our high school experience. One child has graduated and my other two children are seniors. Each child plans on furthering their education...with the assistance of PIC; I have high hopes that these three individuals will reach their goals and aspirations. My children’s success can be attributed to PIC teaching me how to advocate for my children in a positive, professional and respectful manner.” Pat, NH parent

As PIC nears the end of its fiscal year, we are asking for your support. Our dedicated services to families, schools and their children can not happen without your generosity! Your donation will help us continue to support families like Pat’s, where children succeed, thrive and make plans for their future!

Thank you for your support, any contribution makes a difference! If it is more convenient, please visit our website www.picnh.org to contribute securely online.

Michelle Lewis
Executive Director
Parent Information Center

Paula Ferenc
Board Chair
Parent Information Center
We all realize the importance of parent involvement in special education, but how do you make that happen—especially during extended school year (ESY)?

Well last year Milford School District Special Education Director Johanna Johnson and her staff found a creative way to increase parent involvement in her district’s ESY programming and they plan to do it again this summer.

As part of the ESY program’s curriculum, the district created the Summer Challenge. These are structured activities designed to help parents support what their children are learning in the ESY program. Every Monday parents were encouraged to sign in to the Summer Challenge website and discover their new “weekly challenge” which includes a visit to a local site. Each activity is outlined on the website and contains insightful questions, as well as some math and vocabulary activities. After completing the challenge, families need to document their experiences. Students can use creative ways (such as an essay, a story, a poem, a video, a recording, photos, or artwork) to report about their visit. Then the bonus, all those who participated were entered into a drawing for an iPad at the end of the program! Parents and students got busy!

The program was successful. Here are some comments from families participating in the program last summer: “DJ is working hard on each and every challenge. The first week’s challenge has been his favorite and he retained so much of Milford’s history. I even learned a few new facts about Milford”

“I try to make learning fun for Jake on our adventures and he really enjoyed our little field trip. I think this is a great opportunity for kids to get out with their parents and share in the learning experience”

Recently Johanna won a $500.00 reward from Sanford Temperature Control as part of its Community Commitment Program to continue the program again this year.

Why not try something like this in your town? So much fun and lots of learning! Cheers for the Milford School District. Maybe they have started a trend!

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**FAMILY-SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS IN SPECIAL EDUCATION**

*What’s In It For Me?*

—A School District’s Perspective—

The research is clear: when schools, families and community groups work together to support learning, children do better in school, stay in school longer and like school more. This sounds like such a simple concept but, it can often be difficult to make a reality. Schools, families and community groups come to the table with different goals and objectives. Why should people work together? Often people want to know, *What’s in it for ME?*

Ultimately, family-school partnerships in special education are about what’s in it for all of us! Here we share one school district’s perspective on the “what’s in it for me” in family-school partnerships in special education.

**Parent input** — Partnerships with families helps keep things real and relevant, which result in more practical and identifiable outcomes.

**Ability** — Partnerships provide the ability for a school district to develop the leadership and communication skills of its parents.

**Relationships** — Partnerships provide a vehicle to strengthen relationships between parents, staff and the school district.

**Team** — Partnerships encourage communication and the development of a team.

**New Ideas** — A partnership allows for discussions and feedback about school initiatives and activities in a safe and constructive way.

**Engagement** — Partnerships encourage parents to be more invested and active in their school/school district and better prepared to support school initiatives.

**Respect** — Partnerships foster respect and shared responsibilities among parents, community members, teachers and school leaders.

**Staff Development** — Partnerships provide staff and parents the opportunity to gain knowledge and resources beyond their own area of expertise.

**Heard** — Partnerships allow for parents and school personnel gain more accurate and positive views about each other’s attitudes, intentions and abilities and to feel heard.

**Increased Effectiveness** — Partnerships allow for issues to be discussed from a variety of perspectives. School staff can gain a better understanding of the concerns and constraints of families and learn ways to address them, increasing their effectiveness in working with families and other staff.

**Provides Two-way Communication** — Partnerships provide an opportunity to communicate with families that school staff do not have to manage! The group can do the work for you!
schools are committed to helping all children succeed. They have many ways to help children who are struggling to learn and need additional supports to be successful. Response to Instruction (RtI) is one of them. RtI is a multi-step process of providing instruction and educational support to promote the success of all children. Individual children’s progress is monitored and the results are used to make decisions about further instruction and intervention. The RtI process typically has three tiers. Each tier provides different levels of support. Assessments and screenings are provided to take a snapshot of how children are doing on specific skills and helps determine if whether an intervention is successful or needs to be changed.

Tier One – ALL children receive a high quality curriculum and instruction in the regular classroom. Universal screenings are conducted and utilized to review progress and identify children who may need additional support.

Tier Two – Research based interventions are provided to children who need more than they are receiving in the general curriculum. There are many different kinds of interventions and instruction that can happen in the classroom, outside the classroom or in small groups. Progress in these interventions is monitored and used to drive further instruction and intervention.

Tier Three – Intensive interventions are developed to meet the individual needs of children.

It’s important for families to know that RtI does not replace the special education process. If at any time a parent believes their child has an educational disability and requires special education, they have the right to request an evaluation for special education eligibility.

Parents play a crucial role in supporting their child’s education. To help parents support their child in RtI, PIC has developed a family-friendly online module, brochure and Tip Card on RtI. All include information about RtI and questions parents can ask to learn more about how RtI works in their school. You can view the online module and download the Family Guide to RtI and Tip Card from by visiting our website at www.nhspecialed.org or calling PIC at 224-7005 for print copies.

By Kimberly Clementi Eadon
LMHC ET and PIC Volunteer Advocate

An effective advocate needs to be organized! By creating an Education Binder you will have a major tool in being an effective advocate for your child. It’s important to know there is no one way to get organized. The key is to find something that works for you. Here is an easy way to get started!

**Materials:**
- A three ring binder (larger than 1 inch!)
- A set of divider tabs (at least 6)
- A three-hole punch

**To Begin:**
First, label the tabs for your binder:
1. IEPs
2. Evaluations (any evaluation done on your child)
3. Contact Logs (a list of any conversations or contacts you’ve had about your child)
4. Meeting Logs/Notes (your notes and logs)
5. Documentation (any letters you receive or send to anyone involving the education of your child; include Written Prior Notices, IEP meeting invites, etc.)
6. Samples/Resources (samples and resources that have been provided or that you find on your own)

Now, pull together all the paperwork you have. Sort it into the categories above; filing the papers with the newest/most recent date on top. (If you have several years worth of materials, use this binder for the last three years and have a separate binder for the older documents filed in the same way.

Now you have completed the one of the most important steps! You can also download the Organization 101 Tool Kit at http://www.nhspecialed.org/

**Remembering Jan Larson**

The Parent Information Center, disability organizations, persons with disabilities and families throughout New Hampshire lost a dear, true supporter last month when Jan Larsen passed peacefully in her sleep after a period of declining health. Jan was a member of the very first PIC Volunteer Educational Advocate class in 1982. She had plenty of heart, energy and enthusiasm and helped hundreds of families who have children with disabilities see endless possibilities for their children. We always knew that we could count on Jan to help us advance the issues and rights of persons with disabilities. We sure are going to miss her!
The Affordable Care Act passed in 2010, with incremental changes to happen from that date until full implementation occurs in 2014. The first notable change for families of children with special health care needs was gaining the ability to keep our young adults on our health insurance until the age of 26. And then the change that pre-existing condition clauses for children under the age of 19 were no longer allowed. Now as we approach 2014 there are other important changes that will occur.

Starting in 2014, the Affordable Care Act guarantees that all Americans – regardless of their health status or pre-existing conditions – will finally have access to quality, affordable coverage. People will be able to apply for affordable health insurance coverage choices in Health Insurance Marketplaces when open enrollment begins on October 1, 2013. The Health Insurance Marketplace will offer a choice of quality, affordable health plans. Coverage begins on January 1, 2014. If you are looking for more information on what will be happening and how you can plan for your health insurance options in 2014, check out the website www.healthcare.gov where there is lots of information that is updated routinely.
FAMILY/SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS IN SPECIAL EDUCATION IN ACTION
HAMPSTEAD SPECIAL EDUCATION PARENT GROUP

As more and more districts and families work to improve family/school partnership in special education, school staff and parent leaders continue to look for the “magic event or topic” that will make their partnership a success. Sometimes, the “magic” happens when you least expect it. Such was the case in Hampstead.

It was in doing researching on buddy programs for her town that Michelle Grimm came across many other great ideas. One of those ideas was an Information Packet for Parents. In speaking with other Hampstead parents, Michelle realized that there was a need for a group to work on some of these initiatives. That is exactly how the Hampstead Special Education Parent Group was founded. As Michelle stated “once people in town started hearing about our group, the need for Parent Info Packets was quickly echoed by others – parents asked for them at our group’s kick-off meeting and two teachers stopped me in the halls requesting them!”

At their very first steering committee meeting they decided to make the Parent Information Packets a priority. Kristine Charles, another steering committee member, quickly volunteered to lead this initiative. In thinking about what should go in the packet, they considered what it is like to be a parent of a newly identified child or a child transitioning from Early Intervention Supports and Services. They decided that the packets should contain a list of the members of the special education team and their roles, a list of commonly used acronyms, and various brochures, pamphlets, etc that describe the special education process as well as their support group brochure.

The steering committee also approached Karen Gallagher, Director of Special Education for Hampstead, who was very supportive of the idea from the beginning. Karen provided the group with a list of staff names and roles for the packet, as well as any staff updates when the new school year began. Karen also agreed to distribute the packets to the case managers and communicate the groups’ intent for them to her staff.

Parent Information Packets are now a wonderful resource that is available to parents within the Hampstead school system. Think what possibilities exist within your school or district for improving family/school partnerships in special education!

Turning a Challenge into a Success: How I View My Learning Disability

Success is being faced with a challenge and working as hard as possible to achieve that challenge or goal. Overcoming the challenge of a learning disability, that I was diagnosed with in third grade, has been my greatest struggle but also has been my greatest success. The most important thing to me in school was making sure I was not labeled by my disability and that my IEP did not define me. Being a student with a math learning disability, I have been told many times “you cannot take that class” but my reaction has always been “let me prove I can” and that is exactly what I have had to do throughout high school. I have always chosen to take classes that are more challenging than what was recommended to me because I would rather fail pushing myself to my full potential then succeed by taking the easy way out.

Math has always been the biggest area of struggle for me. During my senior year I chose to prove, like I have had to do many times, that no matter what a learning disability will not hold me back. I was determined to take Algebra 2 because I was confident in the success I had in Algebra 1. Many people told me to take the lower level math class because it would be easier for me, but I knew even though I have a disability in math, I could do it. I have gained tremendous drive and enthusiasm from the many challenges I have been faced with from having a learning disability that overcoming these challenges has allowed me to experience great triumphs.

My learning challenges have even carried over into my passion for equestrian because I am required to memorize the routines and layouts of dressage tests and jump courses. Adding onto that challenge my horse is an “off the track” thoroughbred and does not have great skill for my riding discipline of Eventing. I knew he could do it though, and I knew I could do it as well. I saw great potential in him just like people saw great potential in me even with my learning disability so I knew no matter what I was not going to give up on him just like no one gave up on me. We had many struggles in the beginning and at times it felt like we would never succeed at a show but we kept working. At the last show of the season he and I placed first, that feeling of achievement that we experienced was the ultimate feeling of success. I have had that feeling more times than most people because the challenges I have been faced with make my successes even greater. I am not afraid to fail or push myself to my full potential, I know that with success comes failure and I have felt earned success so many times that I will not give up on anything until I achieve it.

This article was written by a NH high school senior as her college essay. We are happy to report she was accepted to several colleges and is looking forward to starting her college experience this fall!
Parent Information Center on Special Education — Provides telephone assistance, workshops, and information related to special education. PIC on Special Education is funded by the US Department of Education.

SSECT (Supporting Successful Early Childhood Transitions) — Supports the transition from Early Supports and Services to preschool special education as well as Child Find and Least Restrictive Environment for toddlers and preschoolers with disabilities. SSECT is funded by the NH Department of Education, Bureau of Special Education.

NH Connections — Supports school district personnel and families of children with disabilities build and strengthen family-school partnerships in special education. NHC is funded by the NH Department of Education, Bureau of Special Education.

AFC (Advocates for Families of Children with Disabilities) — a fee-for-service program that provides in-person consultations and technical assistance to families of children with disabilities.

MICE (Multi-Sensory Intervention through Consultation and Education) — Provides services to children birth-age 3 who have a vision or hearing impairment.

NH Family Voices — Library and resources for parents with children with disabilities or special health care needs.

Prevention Makes Cents— Focuses on working to reduce the incidence of child abuse and neglect through school and community-based prevention education and parenting support.

Visit www.picnh.org for more on these programs.