



# Nebraska Newsbriefs

Learning Disabilities Association of Nebraska

Winter 2008

## Everybody Wins: How to Be an Effective Member of Your Child's IEP Team

By: Pamela G. Hackett, MPT

As a pediatric specialist and co-owner of a large therapy services company, parents of children with disabilities often ask me, "How do I approach my child's IEP (individualized education program) team so that my child gets what is needed?" Too often, parents come with negative expectations about the intentions of the teachers and administrators who are proposing an education plan for their son or daughter. In preparation, they arm themselves with advocates, lawyers, and a myriad of outside evaluations in preparation for the "battle" ahead.



In my 15 years working with the special education system, it has been exceedingly rare that I have come across professionals who do not genuinely want the very best for the children they serve. In today's world of shrinking budgets, increasing demand for services, and a shortage of qualified pediatric specialists, the current climate of opposition between parents and IEP teams is creating a lose-lose situation for everyone except attorneys, who may profit from special education litigation. On a global scale, this results in less and less special education dollars available to help students as school districts pour hundreds of thousands of dollars into defending against due process lawsuits. The majority of families and students, who are not involved in the litigation, are left with far less resources available to meet their own special education needs. Alternatively, when families and IEP teams work collaboratively, the possibilities for programming and potential are limitless and valuable special education dollars go to the kids, where they belong.

The key to being a highly effective advocate for your child is to use the special education process to build positive, respect-based relationships with the individuals working with your child. The old adage that you attract more bees with honey is as true as ever.

### Know the Law

Much of the conflict that occurs between

parents and IEP teams is based on a misunderstanding of what school-based services are all about. Very often, the school's actual legal obligations, based on state and federal mandates, are quite different from what parents can expect from the "medical" care system.

A second area of confusion stems from the transition process between early childhood services (for children aged 0-3) and pre-school/school-age programming, where the goal of services shifts from home and family support to an education-based model. In early childhood, children qualify for services based on where their skills fall on standardized developmental tests and are considered eligible if they test below a specified percent delay or if they present with a diagnosed disability that typically causes delays, such as Down's syndrome or autism. This changes when children reach school age. At that point, standardized testing is still performed, but the determining factor is based upon whether or not a child is sufficiently impaired that he needs support services in order to access his education. By understanding the purpose of special education law as it relates to your child receiving services, you can advocate more effectively for appropriate supports.

### The School-Age Child: IDEA '97 and Section 504

The landmark federal education legislation, IDEA '97 (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act), says that students with disabilities who need specially designed instruction to succeed in school are entitled to a free, appropriate, public education. (IDEA underwent an amendment process in 2004.) Another federal law, referred to as Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, guarantees that students with disabilities will not be discriminated against in school. These two laws represent a national commitment to education that supports the individual needs of each child and that is provided in the least restrictive, or most typical, environment possible.

In preparing for your child's IEP team

meeting, it is important to consider how the services you are requesting are specifically tied to your child's ability to succeed in the classroom. Therapy services, as well as other supports, when provided in the school setting, are implemented based on the existence of measurable, education-based goals related directly to your child's ability to function at school.

For example, at one of the schools that my company serves, there was a boy who had a prosthetic leg, due to the loss of his limb in an accident. He was able to run, walk, climb stairs, and even play basketball-so well, in fact, that no one at the school knew he had prosthesis until a strap broke, and his prosthesis accidentally fell off on the playground. The teachers were understandably shocked to see a leg resting quietly in the middle of the basketball court and put in a referral for physical therapy (PT) that afternoon. It was determined that even though this child had sustained a potentially life-altering injury, he was functioning beautifully in his school, and there was no observable impact on his ability to learn. Consequently, there was no need for physical therapy. While this child may have some periodic need for medical follow-up for new prostheses, skin care, and bone growth issues, those medical needs fall outside of the domain of education. Therefore, the school would not be legally required to provide PT to address those needs.

Alternatively, a child with Down's syndrome, who experiences muscle weakness and poor coordination which makes getting up and down the stairs and sitting at circle time a physical challenge is eligible for physical therapy because he needs to be able to do those things to move around the building and participate in class.

By keeping the true purpose of school-based services in perspective, you can more effectively communicate your child's needs in a way that respects the inherent boundaries that special educators must observe. Equally important, you can channel requests for services to the appropriate party.

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## Learning Disabilities Association of Nebraska

E-Mail: ldaofneb@yahoo.com

**President:** Deb Carlson  
Omaha  
402-731-3039

**Vice-President:** Sue Schuele  
Omaha  
402-431-8547

**Secretary:** Vicky Olson  
Omaha

**Treasurer/  
Membership:** Sharon Bloechle  
Omaha  
402-571-7771

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Cyndi Muhlbaauer  
Maureen Penton  
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### LOCAL CONTACTS

**Columbus:** Nora Tonnies  
402-562-1514

**Gering:** Agnes Larson  
308-436-2789

**Kearney:** Robyn Roth  
308-263-3411

**Lincoln:** Charlene Gondring  
402-489-4621

**Ogallala:** Sue Geischen  
308-284-2106

**Tekamah:** Jane Marquardt  
402-374-2065

## LDA of Nebraska Reading Grant

LDA is pleased to have been awarded a grant from the LD Foundation that will allow us to begin a program to develop a program(s) that will strengthen reading skills for people with a learning disability. We hope to be able to train parents and tutors in methods to teach reading. We now have the resources to purchase materials that can be used on a check out basis throughout the state of Nebraska. If you think you would like to learn more about teaching and tutoring in reading skills or would like help in working with your child, be sure to call or email us at the LDA office and volunteer to be a part of developing this program.

## From the President...

### Learning Math Skills around the House

Spring is coming which is a good time to practice some basic math skills around the house. You can have children learn and apply measurement skills as you get ready to plant flowers or your garden. Have your children measure the spacing between plants by using a ruler and marking with a stick where each plant should be placed. You can also have them dig the hole for the plant and measure the depth that is needed for the plant. This will help your children with some basic linear measurement skills as well as developing time shared with your children.



Another way to learn and apply measurement skills is in the kitchen. You can collect various containers in the basic liquid measurement amounts (gallon, quart, pint, cup, and ounce). Make up some simple questions such as: How many cups are in a quart? The children can measure using a cup measurement into a quart container counting each cup as they dump it into the quart container. All you have to use is basic tap water for this activity. Keep changing up the different measurements and asking review questions. This is a fun way to learn liquid measurement and a good hands-on approach to helping them learn.

Look in some future issues for some more math skill builders to try at home or on the computer to boost your child's mathematical skills. Practice always makes us more knowledgeable and allows us to apply the skills that we learn.

Deb Carlson; President LDA of Nebraska

## Meet a Board Member

The Learning Disabilities Association of Nebraska board includes parents, educator and other professionals. They all have one thing in common: they volunteer their time to inform other parents, educators, professionals and the general public about the hidden handicap of learning disabilities.

In this issue we meet one of the newest members of our board from Lincoln, NE.

### Meet Linda Hanigan

**Q:** Tell us a little bit about yourself

**A:** I work part time as a computer programmer I have four children ages 12 to 19. When I am lucky enough to have a few minutes of free time I enjoy reading and going for walks.

**Q:** How did you get involved in LDA?

**A:** When my husband and I were looking for ways to help my youngest daughter we came across LDA on the web. Missouri was having their annual conference a few weeks later so we decided to attend. It was very helpful.

**Q:** What changes have you seen in special education since your child first started receiving services?

**A:** Our services changed more because we moved from private to public school. In private all the service was pull out where she receives support in the classroom in the public schools and has no pull out services.

**Q:** What concerns you most about the current trends in special education?

**A:** I worry that with RTI (Response to Intervention) kids will have no real evaluation so parents will not realize either their child's strengths or weaknesses especially outside of the worst area where the attention is focused. Also the RTI model seems to be fairly well developed for early grade school reading, but what about writing and math? Also when do you decide it is not enough, will children be left in limbo indefinitely.

## How can I get an accommodation at work for my difficulty with handwriting?

I'm a 28-year-old male and am currently a head of department at a school of media and design. I suffer from a form of dysgraphia (at least I think that's what it is) in that I have terrible handwriting. I actually draw the shape of the word rather than spell it out (my spelling is terrible) and I cannot control the placement of capital and lowercase letters if I write by hand (though with a keyboard I don't have a problem).

I've recently enrolled in an advanced assessors course where all the work submitted has to be hand-written. It takes me hours to write out a single page, which is then only mostly illegible. And although each sentence starts with a capital letter, extra capitals crop up throughout the sentence.



I just wanted to know if there is a specific name or diagnosis for this so that I can plead my case.

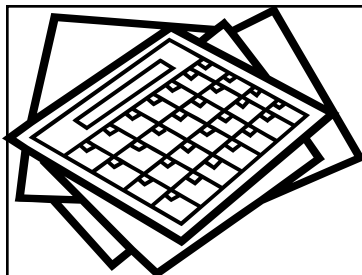
Thanks in advance,

Guy

Guy:

You need appropriate accommodations - possibly permission to use a computer to write responses. First, you must document your motor-based writing disability. This can be done by a psychologist who does psycho-educational testing. Once documented, you are entitled under the Americans with Disabilities Act to such accommodations.

Meet with the Office of Disability Services at the institution you are attending. Explain your problem. Possibly, they can arrange for such studies. If not, they can direct you to the right person to do this assessment.



### SAVE THE DATE!!!

Make plans now to attend the LDA of Nebraska 32nd annual state conference on **October 3, 2009** at the Lancaster Extension Ed Center, Lincoln, NE

The keynote speaker will  
be *Ann Whitten, M.Ed.*

Ann Whitten, M.Ed. a certified teacher and reading therapist in private practice in Aiken, S.C.  
Mark your calendar and watch future Newsletters for details, or email [ldaofneb@yahoo.com](mailto:ldaofneb@yahoo.com).

***Mark your calendar!***

## BULLETIN BOARD

### American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (stimulus funds)

These are four new documents on the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA). The first describes the principles and strategy that will guide the distribution and implementation of ARRA funds appropriated to the U.S. Department of Education. The other three provide initial guidelines for three key components of the ARRA: the State Fiscal Stabilization Fund; Title I, Part A of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act; and Part B of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). The Department will issue guidelines on other ARRA components as they are developed. All available information will be posted at <http://www.ed.gov/recovery/>.

Information will be posted here as made available. You can access more information from the following links: [recovery.nebraska.gov](http://recovery.nebraska.gov)

### Do you have some good news you would like to share?

We want to hear from you! If you have a child/student with LD who is graduating, making honor roll, has won an award or recognition from their school or community, let us know! We would love to give out "atta boys/girls" to that special person. Send the information to: [Omahamoe@yahoo.com](mailto:Omahamoe@yahoo.com), be sure to include the words Nebraska Newsbriefs in your subject line.

The Learning Disabilities Association of Nebraska mourns the loss of a long time member and former volunteer, Doreen Gruebel. Doreen was a fierce advocate for her kids and all people with LD. Our sympathies go out to her family and friends. She will be greatly missed.

### The Nebraska Educational Technology Association has a new website

The Nebraska Educational Technology Association exists for the purpose of providing leadership and promoting the application of technology to the educational process. Its span of interest includes all levels and aspects of education. Check out their website at: [www.netasite.org](http://www.netasite.org).

### Project Explore

Project Explore has the unique purpose of providing learning disabled or attention deficit youth between the ages of 8 and 16 with a positive summer camp experience. For more information contact D'Arcy Goodrich (402) 334-1677 or by email at [proj-expl@cox.net](mailto:proj-expl@cox.net).

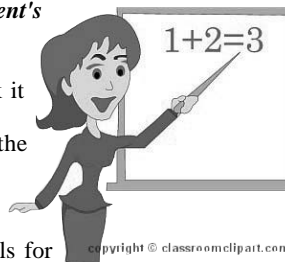
# AD/HD Tips for Teachers

## Use teaching techniques that requires student's participation:

- Role-playing
- "Think, Pair, Share": Have students talk it out with a partner
- Pass props and artifacts around the classroom
- Have student list class' answers on board

## Provide instruction in written form:

- A rough syllabus or list of learning goals for the school year
- A more detailed syllabus for the semester showing large projects
- Weekly assignment sheets with due dates including readings
- "Outlines of daily lecture with fill-ins for critical concepts or facts
- Copy pages from the book and allow students to highlight



## Pre-teach classroom rules:

- Review rules prior to instances where they are likely to be broken
- Talk with students about specific behaviors that violate rules; ask students what they can do to help them stop and think
- Discuss with the class how misbehavior makes others feel, or how others regard the person responsible

## Teach students to break down projects into segments:

- For the first project, provide a rubric that itemizes and orders each step for the student
- Later, provide a rubric that asks student to underline major steps, and leave blank numbered lines for students to fill in steps in order, with space to check off when the item is completed

Create a quiet corner free from distractions for students to use.

# Grocery Store Literacy for Preschoolers

By: Reading Rockets (2009)

A simple trip to the grocery store can turn into a real learning experience for your preschooler. Below are some easy ways to build literacy and math skills while getting your shopping done at the same time!

## Focus on reading readiness skills

Choose a letter as you're walking into the school. Make a game of finding things in the store that start with that letter. For example, for the letter "p" you could find **peanuts, popcorn, pineapple, paper** and **pizza**. Emphasize the letter "p" and the sound it makes with each of your "p" words.

Environmental print is the print of everyday life. This includes familiar symbols, words, and numbers found on signs, billboards, coupons, and stores. They are a natural way for children to learn that print carries meaning. Their understanding that the big **K** means **Kmart** and that the Dannon label means yogurt is a first step toward learning to read.

## Focus on vocabulary skills

Position words are used every day at home and in the classroom. Use the items on the grocery shelf to give your child practice finding

something **above** their belly button, **below** their nose, on the **bottom** shelf, and **between** other items on a shelf.

Opportunities to use superlatives, those little endings that help describe size, are all around the grocery store. Have your child find a **big** fruit, a **bigger** fruit and the **biggest** fruit in the produce section. What's the **smallest** item in the cart? The **largest** item?

## Focus on math skills

Ask your child, "How many apples do we need so each person in the family gets one?" Encourage him to use his fingers to count the number of people in the family and how many apples to buy. Have him count the apples as you put them into the bag.

Look for **shapes** (e.g., circles, rectangles, or triangles) as you go through the store. Play a game with your child. Find a **shape**, such as the **rectangle** on the front of a cereal box, and then look for other items with the same **shape**.

You don't have to do all of these things each time you're at the store, but while you're there, find creative ways to turn your grocery store into a fun place of learning.

# Assistive Technology - Try Before You Buy

Assistive technology can be a powerful tool to help students with learning disabilities succeed in the classroom, but not every assistive device is right for any given child. This develops a problem for parents who want to help their child but do not want to waste money on high or low tech solutions that do not work or that their child refuses to use.

The Nebraska Department of Education funds a loan bank called Assistive Technology Partnership/Education (ATP/Education) that allows parents to test assistive technology solutions with their child for 30 to 60 days.

Patti Neill with ATP/Education defines their role as one of training, technical support, funding and equipment loan pool. ATP/Education serves children (birth to twenty-one) with special needs and their families.

ATP/Education has created a website (AT4ALL.com) to help families buy, sell, and borrow assistive technology. After completing a simple registration process, one can borrow about almost any high or low tech solution. These include, but are not limited to, elastic shoelaces, Children's talking dictionaries, DANA, NEO and Fusion Keyboards, Reading Pens in a variety of versions, book stands, leapfrog games, See N Solve Visual Calculator, and ball chairs.

ATP/Education loans items out for 30 days. If no one else has requested the item, the loan may be extended for an additional 30 days. This is plenty of time to ensure that the assistive technology is worth buying.

Loan items are sent via UPS, mail or delivered to an ATP Office. ATP/Education requests that items be returned in a timely fashion. If using more expensive items, they request them to be insured and have a

tracking number when mailed or be returned to an ATP Office.

The website also includes links to a source where one can purchase high or low tech solutions if the trial run is successful.

Some items can not be loaned out but are available for demos. These include programs such as Dragon Naturally Speaking and CoWriter. To try these programs, contact an educational specialist based out of an ESU. The educational specialist will come to the student's home or school to demonstrate the software and help decide if it is a good solution.

Patti urges parents to checkout the ATP website ([www.atp.ne.gov](http://www.atp.ne.gov)) which is filled with useful information. It includes copies of newsletters, a service map showing which office to call first and lots of links to explore. Also contacting the educational specialist at a local ESU is an excellent resource for parents.

The five ATP service area offices are:

- Phylis Graney/ESU 16, 308-284-8481 - western Nebraska,
- Dixie Trevarthen/ESU 3, 402-597-4894 - eastern Nebraska,
- Scotty Nelson/ESU 17, 402-387-1420 - northeastern Nebraska,
- Ann Rodhouse/ESU 10, 308-784-4525 - central Nebraska,
- Marcy Stallbaumer/ESU 10, 308-784-4525 - south central Nebraska
- Leah Merkwon/ESU 1, 402-287-2061 - early childhood

Before trying assistive technology, take a few minutes and explore AT4ALL.com. This will save money to spend on the tools that will help your child find success in the classroom.

Thank you to Patty Neill, the ATP/Education Coordinator, for the information she provided for this article.

# Parenting Teens with ADHD Made Simple

By Mary Fowler (2002)

Despite what they may say, adolescents want parents in their lives and care about what you think. Input and boundaries provide security and fewer freedoms to master at one time. As teens mature, they must take on added responsibilities. Parents need to know when to let go and when to pull in the reins - a tall order made even more challenging by AD/HD.

Teens with AD/HD don't necessarily require different parenting, just more of it from skilled parents. Most parents can slip by with occasional sloppiness, but not with AD/HD in the picture.

## Parenting by drowning

University of Massachusetts researchers identified four strategies parents fall into which may fuel ADHD behavior problems. Rather than using thoughtful, planned responses, the parents seem to drown in emotion. They take action based on their feelings at the moment, which may have nothing to do with the teen.

- "All talk, no action" means parents yell, scream, argue, threaten, and use voice escalation as discipline, but do not follow through with consequences.
- "Tit for tat" means the teen determines the parent's behavior. If the teen is civilized, then so is the parent. If the teen is bitchy, the parent gets ugly.
- "Be nice and forget" grows out of tit for tat. Tired of getting into snarls, the parent disengages. This "whatever" attitude is a poor way to deal with important issues and conflicts.
- "Russian roulette" means parents inconsistently use harsh or extreme discipline, mainly when they've had enough. Then, kaboom!

## Mindful parenting

Nothing fancy, just 10 simple, time-honored, effective principles that get emotions out of the picture and the thinking, reasonable brain into it.

1. The peace pilgrim: Not too strict or too lenient. Use problem



solving and negotiation to give everyone input and responsibility. Identify the problem, brainstorm solutions, write down who agrees to do what, try, evaluate, redesign as needed.

2. A time to speak: Let emotional over-ages soothe down before communicating. Listen more than you speak. Be brief and be gone.
3. United we stand: Both parents are on the same page and support other. (Stops manipulation and pitting parents against each other so the teen does what he or she pleases.)
4. Plan ahead: Know which issues matter, don't matter, and are non-negotiable. Discuss them and your expectations - and have preset consequences.
5. I'll think about it: four little words to tone down the "have to have an answer right away" mode.
6. Eyes wide shut: Homes become combat zones when parents get on the teen for everything. Ignore minor misbehaviors.
7. Don't beat a dead horse: If the teen has already paid handsomely by a natural consequence or by someone else's input (police, teacher, coach), ask yourself, "Is another consequence needed or am I just ticked and out for vengeance?"
8. Roving eye: Ignore "you don't trust me" protests. Monitoring is a parent's job. Expect flak. Don't take it to heart.
9. Network: To know what's going on in your teen's world, step into it. Go to events. Talk to other parents.
10. Eyes light up: When your teen walks through the door, do your bark or smile? Let your eyes fill with light and your words be loving and courteous. Let issues wait a moment.

## About the author

Writer, educator and advocate Mary Fowler is author of *Maybe You Know My Kid*, and *Maybe You Know My Teen*. Visit ADDitude on the web at [additudemag.com](http://additudemag.com) for more parenting principles.

Article excerpts from the March/April 2002 issue of ADDitude Magazine

## Five Guidelines for Learning to Spell: A Handout for Students

by Susan Jones, M.Ed.

1. Practice makes permanent. Did somebody tell you practice made perfect? That's only if you're practicing it right. Each time you spell a word wrong, you're "practicing" the wrong spelling. So, if you're not sure how to spell the word, find out, then practice that spelling. Keep an ongoing notebook of words, so you've got your own personal dictionary and you can see your progress. Start small, though!
2. Don't try to learn all the words at once. Even if you learn them all in one sitting, practice them a few at a time. Find out what works best for you - it may be one or two words or as many as three or four. Then, add another word to your list, or start on different ones. Each time you learn another word, go back and practice the ones you learned before it, because, after all, practice makes permanent.
3. Review the words you know. If you already know some of

- the words on your list, practice them once or twice each before you start tackling the ones you don't know yet. It's a good confidence booster (and besides, practice makes permanent!).
4. Practice spelling as if you expect to spell those words right when you're writing. There's more to learning to spell than passing a spelling test. There are lots of ways to get from guessing to knowing what to write down on a test, and spelling words right when you're writing sentences and paragraphs. You want to train your hands to write the correct letters in the right order when you think a certain word.
  5. Use the words you've practiced. That's the point to learning them anyway. Have a list of words you're learning handy in a notebook, and you can look them up to make sure you're spelling them right. Besides, using them is practicing them and practice makes permanent!

# The Importance of Planning and Organization Skills

A few children seem to be born organized, even as toddlers they prefer their toys to be arranged in a certain way, they keep their rooms tidy, and they always know where their belongings are. Other children must learn organizational skills and how to plan tasks. Parents can start early to teach children these skills. Involve young children in planning a place for their toys and clothes and help them learn to return things to their proper places. Let children in on how you plan your day, what errands you need to do, how you plan meals and make a grocery list, and how you organize household chores. Children learn best by observation and imitation. If your household isn't organized, take time to do more planning and become better organized. It will simplify life for you and your child.



For school-age children organization becomes even more important. Permission slips for field trips, due dates for assignments, band instruments, gym clothes and lunch money are lost or forgotten in families where organization and planning are neglected. Parents must provide enough structure and teach organizational skills early so older children can stay on top of their increasingly busy schedules. Mary Sigmann, a professional organizer, says organized kids feel more in control and competent. That goes for organized adults also.

## PLANNING CALENDAR

One of the most important organization tools in any household is a central calendar where each person's activities, appointments and long-term assignments are written. If there are more than one or two people in the family, there is usually not room on a regular calendar for this kind of information. Office supply stores have large, laminated yearly calendars. Use different colored wipe-off markers for each member of the family.

At first children will need coaching to remember to write their activities on the calendar, but if they know they will not get to participate in an activity that is not on the calendar, they will soon remember to keep their schedules current. This is also a great tool for busy parents who can transfer everyone's schedules to their daily planners and see at a glance that dad will be out of town on business a certain week, so mom should not commit to a business trip the same week.

Children should learn to write their sports events, school activities and social plans on the calendar, along with information about long-term assignments such as book reports or term papers. Using the planning calendar will also show if a child is getting over-scheduled and involved in too many activities.

## ROUTINES

Children need consistency and routine. It makes them feel more secure when they can predict what comes next. With young children it is up to parents to establish routines. Older children should have input in the routines, and some say about what works best for them. Some children prefer to get homework completed as soon as they get home from school so they can spend the rest of the evening doing what they want, others need a break after school before they sit down to do homework. Having a consistent time for homework, for chores and for family activities helps children stay organized.

It is also important to establish routines for where children should put school papers and a time to talk them over with parents, a place for backpacks, homework, sports equipment and uniforms, and any other items that must go to school with the child. It is helpful to establish a routine of laying out clothing for the next day before the child goes to bed at night. This helps make the mornings less hectic, and allows time for ironing or repairs that might need to be made.

## CHORES

All children should have age-appropriate chores and responsibilities. Getting into the routine of doing chores such as making their bed and keeping their own rooms tidy, taking out the trash, helping with meal preparation and clean-up helps children participate in keeping the home running in an organized way. We don't do our children any favors by always picking up after them and not giving them responsibilities at home. The day will come when they leave home and won't know how to cook, clean or do their own laundry. Doing chores also teaches children responsibility and pride of accomplishment.

## GOAL SETTING

Teach children to set realistic goals and talk about how they can achieve them. For young children it may be a goal for the morning, or the day. Older children can set goals for the term or the year. Goals can be written on cards or in the front of notebooks where the child will see them frequently. Children who learn about goal-setting early will be better prepared for long-term assignments later. They will know how to break a long term assignment down into manageable pieces.

## DECISION-MAKING SKILLS

Children should be taught to look at how each decision impacts the lives of themselves and their family. One good way is to ask "who, what, when and where." If a child wants to sign up for an activity, he should look at the family planning calendar, see if the activity interferes with the activities already written there, think about how much the activity will cost, who will provide transportation, and if special equipment will be needed. Children who learn to weigh the decisions they make will make better choices as they get older and face more difficult decisions.

*reprinted from: PIC'S -N- PIECES,  
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2004) Parents Helping Parents of  
Wyoming, Inc.*

## The Client Assistance Program

(CAP) is a free statewide service for individuals who are applying for or receiving services from the following agencies: Vocational Rehabilitation, Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired, and the Centers for Independent Living.

CAP helps consumers understand agency rules, regulations, procedures, and their benefits under the Rehabilitation Act. CAP is also an advocate who can communicate concerns and help resolve problems.

If you have further questions or need assistance, contact Vicki Rasmussen at 800-742-7594 or 402-471-3656.

## Join LDA of Nebraska Today!

Includes National, State and Local Membership and Newsletters

### LDA-NEBRASKA Membership Application

Please make your check payable to LDA for \$30 and mail to:  
LDA-Nebraska, 3135 North 93rd Street, Omaha, NE 68134

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

CITY \_\_\_\_\_ STATE \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

PHONE \_\_\_\_\_ NEW MEMBER \_\_\_\_\_ RENEWAL \_\_\_\_\_

PARENT \_\_\_\_\_ PROFESSIONAL \_\_\_\_\_ LD ADULT \_\_\_\_\_ FRIEND \_\_\_\_\_

E-MAIL: \_\_\_\_\_

If you have a change of address, please inform an LDA Board member.  
It costs almost one dollar per newsletter when they are returned  
and have to be remailed.

# Membership Memo

**CHECK OUT  
Our Website**  
<http://www.ldanebraska.org>

*It is still under  
construction . . . .  
but you can check for  
Events, Library List, etc.*

## Everybody Wins: How to Be an Effective Member

(Continued from Page 1)

### Be a Team Member

No one knows your child as well as you do. The insight that you bring to an IEP team is invaluable, providing a three dimensional view of your child that enables the development of a truly "individualized" plan. The great thing about the IEP process is that it provides a wide range of perspectives, as each person brings a piece of the puzzle to get a complete picture of a student's strengths and needs. You will have the opportunity to find out where your child is relative to his or her peers in a number of areas.

During the evaluation process and the development of an IEP, the person developing these documents should ask for your input. Feel free to share things that you know are particularly helpful for your child, as well as areas that are particularly challenging. If you have additional information, such as medical records or outside evaluations, be sure to provide them to the team so that this information can be taken into account. Similarly, if there are things that really motivate your child, share them with the team. This insight can greatly accelerate the progress that your child makes. For example, one of the occupational therapists (OT) with whom I work was treating a boy with severe attention issues. He was not able to finish an activity without repeated cueing to stay on task. His mom shared with the OT how much he loved Pirates of the Caribbean, so the therapist started doing handwriting activities about pirates by, for example, having the child dig for treasure in therapy putty to earn the "prize" of gold-covered chocolate coins. Suddenly, the child who had literally been running out of the therapy room was asking if they could play just one more game.

A frequent point of contention between parents and the IEP team is the amount of services a child should receive. When it comes to therapeutic and special education supports, people often assume that more is better. But keep in mind that it's important to balance your child's entire educational experience. For example, it may not make sense for a child who is 15 years old to be pulled out of a core academic subject to work on handwriting. Try to work with your team to keep the focus on the "big picture." Encourage your team to find ways to carry over therapeutic strategies and activities into the overall academic program so that progress is not dependent up on a 30-minute treatment session once per week. Not only will your child likely make progress faster, but will also have a better attitude throughout the process.

### When to Bring in Reinforcements

In my many years of experience working with IEP teams, I have found that it is generally best to attend your initial team meeting without an attorney or advocate, as their presence causes the process to begin with all

parties in a defensive posture, limiting open dialogue and creative problem solving. Like all people, your IEP team members have the tendency to rise and fall with your own expectations, so try to let them know that you expect the best from them. If you have questions or concerns that the members of your IEP team are not able to answer, don't hesitate to look elsewhere for input and information. The school district should provide you with contact information for the department of education in your state so that you can get an independent, outside opinion.

In the event that you are not able to come to an agreement with your child's team, it may be necessary to bring in outside support. When choosing someone to assist you in advocating for your child, always look for someone who is respected for their expertise and credentials, not for their reputation as a fierce opponent. A good advocate provides additional input to your child's program that brings clarity, not contention.

There are times when this process can become very emotionally charged. However, keeping your cool and keeping communication positive and respectful is one of the best ways to ensure a successful outcome. Do your part to ensure that your son or daughter's situation doesn't become notorious for being riddled with angst and adversity. The most talented educators and therapists are often "scared off" by situations in which their actions will routinely be under a microscope, regardless of their professionalism and good intentions. Over the years, we have seen more than one child go without services because her "high profile" status caused the most talented therapists and educators to keep their distance. Even the most confident and dedicated clinicians are sometimes unwilling to take on the complexity and exposure of being drawn into a potential battle.

### Keep your Eyes on the Prize

Seeing your child progress is the reward for working together to put an IEP in place that is truly effective. Open communication, working toward shared goals, and a willingness to "tweak" things when a child is not moving forward as quickly as expected are the hallmarks of a successful IEP team. I have been privileged to work with some of the most gifted, child-focused professionals imaginable. No one goes into special education in search of fame and fortune. No matter how challenging the process becomes, try to remember that everyone at the table has given their lives to helping children with disabilities, including you.

Pamela G. Hackett, MPT is a managing partner of Pediatric Therapeutic Services, Inc., a company providing advanced therapy staffing solutions to school districts, charter schools, and early intervention programs. To learn more, visit [www.pts-inc.net](http://www.pts-inc.net).



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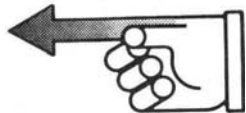
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*We provide support, information and advocacy for our members.*

*Letters to the Editor may be sent to:*

**Maureen Penton**  
**5702 Mason St.; Omaha, NE 68106**  
[omahamoe@yahoo.com](mailto:omahamoe@yahoo.com)



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