The Mississippi Parent Training and Information Center is here to educate parents and families about the rights of children under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and the rights they have as a parent of a child receiving or needing Special Education services.

The following is a list of training topics available by presentation or as online trainings...

- IDEA Basic Rights and Responsibilities
- Individualized Education Programs (IEP’s)
- Mississippi First Steps: Understanding Early Intervention
- Transition from Early Intervention to School
- Autism Spectrum Disorders
- Conflict Resolution
- Getting and Keeping the First Job
- The Journey to Adulthood: What Parents Need to Know About Puberty, Adolescence and Sexuality
- Skills for Effective Parent Advocacy
- Working for Change: The Power of a Personal Story
- Procedural Safeguards and Complaint Procedures

Trainings can be developed or tailored towards other special education topics upon request.
3rd Annual Building Partnerships Conference To Be Held February 2011

Here at the Mississippi Parent Training and Information Center we are strongly dedicated to improving and fostering positive working relationships between parents of children with disabilities and the professionals who work with them on a daily basis. We are proud to announce that, for the third year, our partnership with the MS Department of Education’s Office of Special Education, Disability Rights Mississippi and the Mississippi Center for Education Innovation will provide a wonderful training opportunity to bring parents and professionals together to learn about practices that will improve outcomes for children in Mississippi receiving special education services.

**Topics for the 2011 Conference**
- Assistive Technology
- Autism
- Bullying Awareness and Prevention
- Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports
- Skills for Effective Parent Advocacy
- Transition from Part C to Part B of IDEA
  - and more!

School districts are strongly encouraged to invite and assist parents to participate with professionals they may be sending to the conference.

Parents!
We recommend writing your special education director to inquire about assistance to attend this training opportunity as a related service!
New National Parent Center Network Website Provides Portal to Resources

A new website, ParentCenterNetwork.org, allows parents and professionals to easily link to a national network of parent centers and a wide range of resources. Parent Centers provide training, information and assistance to families of children with all disabilities ages birth to 26 years and the professionals who work with them.

Launched at the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) Leadership Mega Conference in Washington, D.C. in August, the website is a convenient way for anyone to connect with:

- The ALLIANCE National Parent Technical Assistance Center, a project of PACER
- The six Regional Technical Assistance Centers
- Each of the 106 Parent Centers in the U.S. and its territories

From this new portal, parents and professionals can link directly to the websites of these partners and use an interactive map to find the local Parent Center in their state or community. The website features links to research based information, announcements about upcoming events, and other resources for Parent Centers, families and professionals.

The portal also includes an innovative Parent Center Network search function. Users can type in topical queries such as “alternative dispute resolution” or “individualized education programs” and instantly search the websites of all 106 Parent Centers and the National and Regional Parent Technical Assistance Centers across the country to find related content. Consolidating separate websites into one Parent Center Network presence was the vision of Larry Wexler, Director of Research to Practice at OSEP. The new portal, www.parentcenternetwork.org, is a collaborative effort of the National and six Regional Parent Technical Assistance Centers.

Try It Today!
www.parentcenternetwork.org

Students with Print Disabilities Are Eligible for Accessible Materials

Children who struggle to use traditional print curriculum at school may be eligible to receive Accessible Instructional Materials (AIM) from their local school district or state. AIM are specialized formats of printed textbooks and other core curriculum content that can be used by students with print disabilities. Students with sensory, physical or learning disabilities may be considered to have a "print disability." AIM may include such formats as Braille, audio, large print or electronic text.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires that school districts and states provide AIM to eligible students with print disabilities in a timely manner, so students may study the material along with peers.

For more information about the legal requirements and the wide range of alternative formats available, visit the website for the National Center on Accessible Instructional Materials at aim.cast.org today!
Regional Conferences Empower Parents and Improve Outcomes!

What do Ocean Springs, Natchez and Greenville have in common? Each of these cities were host to a series of regional parent conferences coordinated by the MS PTI and our co-sponsors from August to November this year. The “Empowering Parents...Improving Outcomes conferences were designed to bring training and networking opportunities for parents across the state in a convenient and accessible regional format.

The conferences were provided at no cost to parents and family members, and professionals attended for a very minimal registration fee. “We also wanted to provide families a chance to meet our staff and spend some personal time with each of us, and these conferences allowed us to do just that” said Pam Dollar, MSPTI Project Director.

Project EMPOWER, Mississippi’s Community Parent Resource Center (CPRC) co-sponsored the Greenville conference, the MDE Office of Special Education assisted with funding for the Ocean Springs conference and REACH MS co-sponsored the event in Natchez, MS. Topics included Basic IDEA Rights, Positive Behavior Supports, Children’s Mental Health, Effective Parent Advocacy Skills and much more.

The MS PTI is excited to announce that the MS Department of Education, Office of Special Education has committed funding to allow us to provide three annual regional conference in the coming year. Be sure to visit our website at www.mspti.org and check out our calendar of events for upcoming details! You don't want to miss these events.

Here are a few things parents had to say about the conferences:

“Thank you!”

Parent, Greenville

Parent, Ocean Springs

Parent, Natchez
¡Hablamos Español!
MS PTI Dedicated to Cultural Outreach

The state of Mississippi is very fortunate to be home to a growing population of diverse non-English speaking cultures. With diversity comes languages, cultural rituals and practices, art, music and food. The Mississippi Parent Training and Information Center staff has been working diligently to expand outreach efforts to provide services to these families who have children with disabilities. Families who need resources and training about special education and disability related topics are invited to contact our office for assistance.

We welcome Nancy Pearson, our Hispanic Outreach Coordinator, to our staff! Nancy is the daughter of immigrant parents, has a background in teaching and has worked at the MS Department of Education in the Foreign Languages Division. Please contact Nancy at 601-506-8570 if you know of Spanish speaking families needing assistance.

The MS PTI staff is also forging relationships with Vietnamese non-profit organizations on the MS Gulf Coast to improve resources and services to their population. We would like to thank the MS Center for Justice for recently providing staff time to help with translations!

Be sure to look for upcoming information about translated trainings coming to your area!

¡Bienvenidos al MSPTI!
El Centro de Información y Entrenamiento Para Parientes en Mississippi

Si usted es un pariente de un niño/niña con una discapacidad, nuestro trabajo es facilitar a su familia con información, recursos, el apoyo y la capacitación que le permita ayudar a su hijo satisfacer sus metas educativas.

También estamos aquí para ayudarle a aprender sobre los servicios para ayudar a que su niño lleve una vida productiva y independiente.

Para asistencia en español por favor llame el numero 601.506.8570 y pregunte por Nancy. Los servicios son gratis.

Chaøo møøng quyù vò ţneán vöûi Trung Taâm Thoâng Tin vaø Ňaøo Taïo Bang Mississippi

Neáu quyù vò laø phuï huynh cuûa moät ţnóøa treû bò maát naêng lôïc, tuoåi tôø sö sinh cho tôûi 26 tuoåi, coâng vieäc caûa chuùng tôûi laø cung çaåp cho gia ţnh quyù vò caûc thoâng tin, nguoân taøi nguyeân, sôï hòaô trôï, vaø Ňaøo taïo cho pheùp quyù vò giuûp ţnoø ço minh Ňaøo oûng caûc muïc tieûu giaûo duûc cuûa no.ù

Chuùng tôûi ţôû Ňaây Ňeàu giuûp quyù vò bieát veà caûc dôch vuï haàu giuûp con cuûa minh coù mát cuoäc soàng ngoôõi lòûn phong phuï vaø Ňoäc laûp.
Bullying Can Be Addressed Through the IEP

By Special Education Advocate Julie Swanson and Attorney Jennifer Laviano

Today's headlines are filled with news about bullying at school. The latest phenomenon "bulicide" is when kids who are being bullied commit suicide. Let's face it, bullying can be pretty scary and should concern most any parent who has a child attending school. However, it is especially worrisome for parents who have children with disabilities, because research shows that kids with disabilities are more likely to be targeted. This is especially so for kids with developmental disabilities like autism, because they are less likely to be able to navigate their way around social situations by the very nature of their disability.

As professionals who represent children with special needs, we help parents obtain appropriate special education services for their children with disabilities. Both of us have a particular interest in the rights of children with autism spectrum disorders. Julie is not only a special education advocate, but the parent of a 14 year child with autism whose practice is largely devoted to this disability. Jennifer has dedicated her law practice entirely to the representation of children and adolescents with disabilities whose families are in disagreement with their public school districts, and the majority are families whose children have autism spectrum disorders.

Almost every family we work with that includes a child with ASD reports that their child has been affected by bullying. Unfortunately, we both work with parents who tell us that their school team tells them that bullying can't be addressed through the special education IEP (Individualized Education Plan).

We are here to say it most certainly can! Here are a few practical tips as you tackle the problem:

1. Ask for your school district's bullying policy and procedures.

2. Screen your child at home. Talk to him or her and explore what's happening at school and with peers. Set up a data collection system at home that tracks any changes in behavior.

3. Screen your child at school. Have a team meeting with your child's special education team (examples: the special ed teacher, regular ed teacher, case manager, social worker, guidance counselor, school psychologist, speech pathologist, principal) and make them aware of the situation. Ask the school team to monitor your child over a period of time and set up a data collection system among the team to track any changes. Make sure that monitoring takes place across all structured and non-structured school settings (the classroom, hallways, lunch room, bathroom, school bus and at recess).

4. Document the issue and request that the documentation be placed in your child's educational file.

5. Determine if what is happening is a reportable offense in accordance with school policies.

6. Put a (written) plan in place with the school team.
7. Recognize the difference between a school-wide approach to bullying and a child-centered approach. School-wide approaches include getting other kids involved in resolving the bullying issue like pairing the student with an ASD with a peer buddy. A child-centered approach involves the child with an ASD gaining a skill or learning to change their own behavior like recognizing a bully or having a bank of responses to say to a bully.

8. Consider what is making your child vulnerable to being bullied. If you don’t identify the specific problem your child is having then it is more difficult to address it and help remediate it through the IEP. For example, is it your child’s inability to read / recognize social cues (shunning, teasing, gesturing, etc.), inability to respond effectively (lack of a strategy bank), or inability to self-advocate. Once you’ve identified these type of issues, you can argue that these social skill deficits should be addressed as social skill goals and objectives in the IEP.

9. Develop a plan targeting your child’s level of ability. Set up a buddy system in unstructured settings (school-wide). Develop incentives for other kids to participate as buddies (school-wide). Develop classroom lessons to raise awareness of bullying, that will be taken seriously and there will be consequences when students bully (school-wide).

10. Develop IEP goals to address each individual social skill deficit (student-centered). Develop IEP goals to address each individual pragmatic language deficit (student-centered).

11. From a legal perspective, one of the most difficult challenges in addressing bullying in our public schools is that, while many states do have laws on the books regarding bullying, they generally do not include what is called a “private right of action.” In English, and summarizing a very complicated legal premise, this means that while the law exists, there is no right to sue someone who violates it under that specific statute. Therefore, parents whose children are being routinely tormented at school who are faced with an administration who elects not to properly address the situation are left to utilize other state or federal laws if they want to find justice in our courts.

Therefore, when a parent is considering what rights their child has if their child with autism is being bullied, first and foremost they should ask themselves whether changes need to be made in the IEP. Be prepared to hear your IEP Team grumble that bullying is “not a special education issue,” but indeed it is. If a student’s disability is causing them to exhibit behaviors which are making them particularly vulnerable to harassment by their peers, or to fail to understand appropriate social interaction in the "mainstream" (as is often the case with autism spectrum disorders), then absolutely this needs to be addressed in the student’s special education program.

Without appropriate special education support and instruction for students with disabilities within our public school settings, we are setting our kids with autism up for being targeted, humiliated and excluded within the regular education environment, in direct contravention of one of the key purposes of the IDEA, which is to include children with disabilities in their public schools. What is happening as a result of our failure to adequately scaffold special education programs and instruction for students whose autism spectrum disorder places them at even greater risk for bullying is that we are returning to the days of segregation of children with disabilities, as a matter of fact, if not as a matter of law.
Tips for Parents

- Be open and honest.
- Limit care giving responsibilities of siblings.
- Use respite care and supportive services.
- Accept the disability
- Schedule special time with your child who does not have a disability.
- Let siblings settle their own differences.
- Welcome other children into the home.
- Involve all siblings in family events and decisions.
- Require the child with the disability to do as much for himself or herself as possible.
- Recognize each child’s unique qualities and family contribution.
- Recognize special stress times for siblings and plan to minimize negative effects.
- Teach siblings to interact.
- Provide opportunities for normal family activities.
- Join sibling-related organizations.

From the National Information Center for Children and Youth with Disabilities, News Digest, Number 11, www.nichcy.org

Siblings of Children With Disabilities Experience Unique Challenges, Opportunities

By Julie Holmquist– adapted from Pacesetter

The dynamics of any sibling relationship are complex, but the mix of siblings with and without disabilities in a family can create a unique set of challenges for parents and siblings. Research has documented several concerns voiced by siblings of children with disabilities, including loss of parental attention, the need for information about the disability, increased caregiving demands and concern about the future. Yet research has also shown that these siblings have a unique opportunity to develop insight into the human condition, maturity from coping with their special-needs sibling, appreciation for good health, and other positive characteristics.

The type and severity of the disability, the number of siblings, how far apart they are in age, and how a family deals with the disability are among the many factors that can shape the experience of siblings.

According to a 2006 National Adult Sibling study conducted by the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center’s National Sibling Research Consortium, siblings of adults with disabilities are doing very well overall. In that study, siblings reported that as a group, they spend a fair amount of time with, feel very affectionate and closer to, and have benefited greatly from their brother and sister with a disability.

Jodee Kozlak, executive vice president of human resources at Target Corporation, and her younger sister, Amy Stapleton, would agree with that positive viewpoint. They share their perspectives on the impact a child with a disability can have on siblings.

Prepare for the Best

Jodee was 10 years old when her brother John, at 15 months old, had a brain injury. He now functions at a preschool level. “My parents were told they couldn’t predict anything about John’s future and to prepare for the worst,” Jodee says. “They said if you cant predict anything, then we’ll prepare for the best!” Her parents’ philosophy set the tone for this big Greek family. “My three sisters and I responded to John as a hero. I believe I was deeply influenced by my family and their viewpoint of looking at the situation as a positive one. You never give up and our parents didn’t give up on our brother. They believed in human capability and undying love, and being proud of John, not being embarrassed but celebrating life.”

That philosophy meant including John as much as possible in family life. “It was very important to us as a group to include John,” Jodee says. “I remember taking him to the grocery store and the looks we got from people because of his unpredictable behavior. As a family our response was to say, ‘tough! We deliberately included him.’

As the oldest of five children, Jodee had a different experience then her sister Amy, who at age 38 is only one year older than John. He was “more of a playmate” for her, Amy says, but she also remembers the public reactions to her brother’s behaviors.

“I remember our parents taking us out to the movie theatre,” Amy says. “John was hyperactive and would make noises and clap his hands. I remember getting so upset about the way people looked at us and wishing he had a physical disability so they would know.”
John’s disability did not stop Amy from inviting her friends to her home, however. “My best friends all just loved John. Even to this day they ask about him.”

Restrictions, Responsibilities

While both sisters remember their childhood years with John in a positive light, there were also certain restrictions and extra responsibilities that came with being John’s sister. “For me it meant very much taking on additional responsibilities so my parents had time with John,” Jodee says. “We arranged things so we all had time with him and our mom would have a break.” She remembers having to quit her first job so she could be home to care for her sisters and start dinner.

“I’m sure there were times when I thought ‘bummer,’ but we all did our part,” Jodee says. “As a family we came together and believed in the power of hope, love, and attention.” She also remembers her sisters feeling disappointed when they couldn’t do something because of John but said they never dwelled on it.

“Because there were four of us older sisters, there were two others who helped immensely,” added Amy. “Even though it was difficult at times, we all just naturally pitched in and shared in helping care for John.”

During John’s middle school years, his bus trip home from school took one hour. “I remember being at home after school waiting for his bus,” Amy says. “I couldn't be in after-school activities for that time period. That stands out. I had to be home to help get John off of the bus.” There were other inconveniences, Jodee recalls. “Sure, there were places you didn’t go or vacations you didn’t take, and we really had to respect his routines. But our home was the hang out place for our friends—that wasn’t an issue. His disability was never something behind the scenes.”

Positive Influences

Despite these limitations and responsibilities, both Jodee and Amy attribute many positive character traits to growing up with John. “It causes you to be really resilient and less judgmental and gives you a wider scope of experience,” Jodee says. “I’m just not fazed by things. I have a huge tolerance and a righteousness that everyone belongs.”

The time spent babysitting her siblings during her childhood, she notes, probably would have been her fate even if John had not been her brother. “We are a big Greek family, so we had grandmothers, cousins, aunts and uncles around and in and out of the house all the time. As the oldest of five and often the one taking care of other cousins, I think I would have ended up in charge anyway.”

Being John’s sister helped Amy be more accepting and to appreciate others who were unique or who were cognitively challenged. “It definitely helped me to become a more patient person and also competitive in a sense,” she says. Both sisters remember how hard John worked, and how much he had to focus to accomplish something. “Here was a person with a disability, and there was nothing stopping him,” Amy says. “Watching him encouraged me to try harder and not give up.”

Amy believes that her parents were good at not letting John’s disability become an obstacle for their other children. She recalls the once-a-year vacations to places such as Disneyland that would have been impossible without respite care for John. “I did not feel like I had less attention,” Amy says of her childhood. “I almost felt that John being a special needs child pulled the family together.” Today, their 37-year-old brother lives in a group home with three other men near their parents’ house and works five days a week. Every Sunday he visits his parents, and his siblings call or visit on a regular basis.

Because John has a normal life expectancy and their parents are growing older, Jodee and her sisters are beginning to think about John’s future care. “Just recently we’ve agreed that we need to get my parents out of the winter for a few weeks. They have been reluctant to travel because of John, but we are committing to taking care of John when they are on vacation.”
U.S. Education Secretary Arne Duncan today released the U.S. Department of Education's plan for transforming American education through technology, a process that would create an engaging state-of-the-art, cradle-to-college school system nationwide.

"We have an unprecedented opportunity to reform our schools," Duncan said during the State Educational Technology Directors Association Education Forum today. "With this technology plan, we have laid out a comprehensive vision for how teachers working with technology can transform student learning in classrooms across America. We must dramatically improve teaching and learning, personalize instruction and ensure that the educational environments we offer to all students keep pace with the 21st century."

The National Education Technology Plan (NETP) was written and refined over 18 months by leading education researchers, with input from the public, industry officials, and thousands of educators and students from across the country. Development of the NETP was led by the department's Office of Educational Technology and involved the most rigorous and inclusive process ever undertaken for a national education technology plan. It is a crucial component of the administration's effort to have America lead the world in college completion by 2020 and help close the achievement gap so that all students graduate from high school ready to succeed in college and careers.

The plan, titled "Transforming American Education: Learning Powered by Technology," presents a model with key goals in five areas: learning, assessment, teaching, infrastructure and productivity. Each core section outlines concepts for using technology to holistically transform education, with the aim to achieve each goal by 2015.

- Learning: Change the learning process so it's more engaging and tailored to students' needs and interests.
- Assessment: Measure student progress on the full range of college and career ready standards and use real time data for continuous improvement.
- Teaching: Connect teachers to the tools, resources, experts and peers they need to be highly effective and supported.
- Infrastructure: Provide broadband connectivity for all students, everywhere—in schools, throughout communities and in students' homes.
- Productivity: Use technology to help schools become more productive and accelerate student achievement while managing costs.

"Our nation's schools have yet to unleash technology's full potential to transform learning," Duncan said. "We're at an important transition point. We need to leverage technology's promise to improve learning."

Overall, the plan addresses technology trends that could transform education, such as mobility and accessibility, the rise of digital content, and the rise of online social networks for information, collaboration and learning. Importantly, it stresses that technology in the classroom only works when paired with effective teaching.

"Technology will never replace good teachers," Duncan said. "We all know that the most important factor in a student's success is the teacher leading the class. That will not change."

The Mission of the T.K. Martin Center for Technology & Disability is to ensure that persons with disabilities are able to continually benefit from technological solutions and advances in the field of assistive technology.

In order to empower individuals with disabilities through leading edge technologies the T.K. Martin Center for Technology & Disability maintains a state of the art clinical, research and training program focusing modern technologies, in a comprehensive and integrated manner, to the needs of persons with disabilities.

The services of the T.K. Martin Center are made available to persons with disabilities regardless of age or diagnosis. Impairment has many limiting effects, which can be broadly categorized into the following, none of which is mutually exclusive:

- mobility
- dexterity
- communication
- seeing and hearing (sensory function)
- learning and understanding (cognitive function)

The T.K. Martin Center provides comprehensive, multi-disciplinary evaluations to remove these limitations through the application of assistive technology, allowing individuals to participate in educational, vocational and leisure activities to the fullest degree they choose. The comprehensive nature of the services offered ensures that the correct solutions are achieved efficiently and effectively, with needs being met in a one-stop shop.

The staff of the T.K. Martin Center consists of a specialized team of Speech-language Pathologists, Occupational Therapists, Special Educators, and Rehabilitation and Biomedical Engineers. Facilities at the center include adaptive computer laboratories, design and fabrication workshops, a vehicle augmentation lab, a seating and mobility center and specialized evaluation rooms. The fusion of modern facilities and resources with a staff dedicated to the realization of untapped human potential ensures a comprehensive approach with integrated, composite outcomes for persons with disabilities.
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