**Back-to-School Tips from Regional Center of Orange County**

Most children love the idea of going back to school, but many children with developmental disabilities are challenged by the changes in routine, environment and people a new school year brings. Here are some quick tips to help ease the transition and make this the best new school year yet for your child!

1. **Become an expert on your child’s IEP**. No one knows your child better than you do, so be sure to carefully examine your child’s Individualized Education Program (IEP), evaluations and progress reports, to ensure that these documents are still on-target with your child’s current needs. If you do not have copies of these records, you can email the school principal to request copies so that you can start organizing their file.
2. **Visit the campus before the first day of school, if it is accessible**. Connect with the school principal to see if you can set up a time to tour the school. Be sure to locate the playground, eating areas, restrooms, and any other buildings or facilities your child may encounter. This visit will be particularly important if your child will be attending a new school site on his/her first day.
3. **Create a One-Page Description**. Develop a profile that will capture all the important information about your child and how they need to be supported, to give to your IEP team on his/her first day. Your service coordinator can help you create your child’s one-page description. Visit <https://shefkids.co.uk/resources/> to access free templates.
4. **Gradually move towards the new school time schedule**.Start the morning routine a few weeks before the start of the school year to get your child comfortable with the new routine. Practice your at-home routine daily for getting up earlier, having breakfast and getting dressed.
5. **Be involved throughout the year**.

* Be sure to find out when Back To School Night will occur at your child’s school and put the date on your calendar; this is an important time to meet the teacher and talk briefly about how your child is adjusting to the classroom.
* When you are asked to complete all the enrollment forms, look for an invitation to join the Community Advisory Committee (CAC). Involvement in the CAC allows you to meet school administrators outside of an IEP meeting and can be very helpful; CAC meetings are for all parents of children who have an IEP and can be very informative about special education services in your district.

***RCOC has an Educational Consult Resource Group that can provide parents with support and expertise regarding their educational concerns. To schedule a phone or videoconference consultation, contact your RCOC Service Coordinator.***

**Special Educational Tips from Regional Center of Orange County**

1. **IEP team contact information**.It is important that you obtain the contact information (name, title and *email*) of your IEP team (principal, school psychologist, special education teacher & specialists providing the related services). It is highly encouraged for parents to communicate via email to ensure that appropriate follow-up is completed by the IEP team and to create a written record of your correspondence.
2. **30-Day IEP meeting**.It may be beneficial to hold an IEP meeting duringthe first 30 days of school, especially if this is a new school for your child and/or if you have any concerns. Having the opportunity to meet with your new IEP team at the beginning of the year will give you an opportunity to obtain an update on how your child is adjusting, agree on a regular communication system, obtain an update on progress and discuss any concerns.
3. **School observation**. School observations are beneficial if you want to get a better understanding of your child’s current classroom. You can email the school principal and copy the rest of the IEP team to initiate this request. Time of the observation matters!
4. **Ongoing Communication System**. It may be beneficial to arrange for a regular communication system with your child's teacher, especially regarding the areas of concern. You can email this request to your child’s teacher and copy the rest of your IEP team.
5. **Monitor progress**.It is important that you find out how often you should be receiving progress reports for your child. It is highly encouraged to request a meeting directly with the teacher and/or specific specialist if there are questions and/or concerns with progress.
6. **Timelines to consider**:

* **Parent-Requested IEP Meeting**

Parents can request an IEP team meeting. The meeting must be held within 30 days of receiving the written request.

* **Re-Evaluation/Triennial Eligibility**

School districts need to complete evaluations every 3 years, BUT parents can request in writing for an earlier evaluation, if there is a NEED.

* **Individual Transition Plan**

An Individual Transition Plan should be added in the student’s IEP by the time the student turns 16. The ITP must be reviewed annually.

* **Rights Transfer**

Rights are transferred from parents to students when the student turns 18 year of age. The *Assignment of Educational Decision-Making Authority* document provides parent permission to make educational decisions on behalf of their un-conserved adult. This is a free and fast way for a parent to represent an adult student at an IEP meeting.