

Back-to-School Tips from the Regional Center of Orange County (RCOC)

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 that 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 may request them from the school site or district office, so that you can start organizing your child's file.
2. **Schedule a campus visit before the first day of school, if it is accessible.** You may consider contacting the school principal to request to schedule a time to tour the school campus. Be sure to locate areas your child will regularly visit, such as: the playground, eating areas, restrooms, and any other buildings where he/she will receive educational services. This visit will assist with your child's transition if he/she 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 of the important information about your child and how he/she needs to be supported to provide a copy to your IEP team on his/her first day of school. Your RCOC Service Coordinator can help you create your child's one-page description. Visit <https://sheffkids.co.uk/resources/> to access free templates.
4. **Gradually move prepare for the new school time schedule.** Start the morning routine a few weeks before the start of the new school year to get your child comfortable with the new routine. Practice your daily at-home routine for waking up earlier, having breakfast and getting dressed.
5. **Involvement throughout the year.**
 - Find out when "Back To School Night" is scheduled at your child's school and put the date on your calendar. You may want to meet with the teacher to briefly talk about how your child is adjusting to the new classroom.
 - When you are asked to complete all of the enrollment forms, look for information about joining the Community Advisory Committee (CAC) meetings. CACs are required under California law and provide opportunities for parental input on educational services. Involvement in CACs can be very helpful and allows you the opportunity to meet school administrators outside of an IEP meeting.

RCOC has an Educational Consult Resource Group that can provide parents with information and resources. To learn more, contact your RCOC Service Coordinator.

Educational Services Tips from the Regional Center of Orange County (RCOC)

1. **IEP team contact information** (*IDEA – Parent Participation Rights, 34 CFR §300.322 & §300.501*) You may want to obtain the names, titles, and contact information for your IEP team members- principal, school psychologist, special education teacher and specialists providing related services.
2. **IEP meeting** (*California Education Code §56343.5*) If this is a new school for your child and/or if you have any concerns about educational services, you may consider requesting an IEP meeting during the first 30 days of the new school year. Having the opportunity to meet with your new IEP team at the beginning of the school year helps the team to work collaboratively towards a regular communication system, including updates on progress and discussing any noted areas of concern.
3. **School observation** (*California Education Code §49091.10*) You may consider requesting to schedule a school observation if you want to gain a better understanding of your child's current classroom setting. You can email the school principal and copy the rest of the IEP team to initiate this request. Observations are subject to district policies and scheduling availability.
4. **Ongoing Communication System** (*IDEA – Parent Participation & Procedural Safeguards, 34 CFR §300.501*) It may be beneficial to arrange for a regular communication system with your child's teacher.
5. **Monitor progress** (*IDEA – Progress Reporting Requirements, 34 CFR §300.320(a)(3)(i)*) You may want to ask about how often you will be provided with progress reports regarding your child.
6. **Timelines to consider:**
 - **Parent-Requested IEP Meeting** (*California Education Code §56343.5*)
Parents may request an IEP meeting at any time. The meeting must be held within 30 calendar days of a written parental request (excluding school breaks longer than 5 days).
 - **Re-Evaluation/Triennial Eligibility** (*34 CFR §300.303*)
School districts are required to complete evaluations every 3 years, but parents may make written requests for an evaluation to be completed sooner if there is an identified need.
 - **Individual Transition Plan** (*IDEA – Transition Services, 34 CFR §300.320(b)*)
An Individual Transition Plan (ITP) should be added to your child's IEP by the time he/she turns 16-years-old. As with the IEP, the ITP must be reviewed annually.
 - **Educational Rights Transfer** (*34 CFR §300.520*)
Rights are transferred from parents to students when the student turns 18-years-old. Completing the Assignment of Educational Decision-Making Authority form provides parents with permission to make educational decisions on behalf of their adult child that is not conserved. This is a free and fast way for parents to represent their adult child during IEP meetings.