



## Module Two | Special Education

### I. Introduction

PowerPoint Slide:  Handout: 

This workshop is designed to provide information for Service members and their families who may now or in the future be involved in the special education system. An overview of the law that regulates special education will be provided as well as a description of the special education cycle. Information will be presented on how parents can communicate clearly with education professionals and advocate successfully for their children.

### II. Learning Objectives

Upon completion of the unit, the participants will be able to do the following:

- Identify the federal law that regulates special education (IDEA) and demonstrate familiarity with the six major principles
- Understand the cycle of special education
- Describe components of a good IEP
- Identify three resources available to help parents as they navigate through the special education system

### III. Preparation and Procedures

*Target Audience:* The target audience for this workshop is military personnel and their spouses who have children with special needs and who may now or in the future be involved in the special education process. Marketing should be through the installation family center(s), the EFMP coordinators, military treatment facilities (MTFs), childcare centers, and schools. Remember that childcare may be an issue for participants. Consider this when scheduling a time, and if possible, have suggestions available for childcare arrangements.

*Module length:* Approximately 1.5 hours. Time may vary depending on the needs of the particular group and the amount of participant interaction.

*Registration:* Registration is recommended. All participants should receive a reminder phone call or email about three days prior to the workshop.

*Training Considerations/Options:*

- This can be a stand alone workshop offered to military parents of children with special needs, or it can be part of a series of workshops concerning parenting children with special needs while in the military.
- An interactive group discussion is favored since part of the purpose of the workshop is to help parents make personal connections as well as to gain knowledge.
- To help foster discussion, invite a group of parents who have experience with the special education services in your area. Try to include those with children in DoD schools (where possible) and those in other local school systems as well.

## IV. Training Materials and Tools

*Equipment and Materials:*

- Tables and chairs to accommodate all participants
- Separate table for resource materials
- Brochures from resources list
- Name tags and markers
- Projector and screen (PowerPoint capable)
- PowerPoint slides
- PowerPoint capable computer
- Microphone
- Sign-in sheet
- Extra pens

*Handouts:*

- A copy of the PowerPoint presentation, with room for notes. To do this open the PowerPoint file. Click on “File” from your menu. Choose “Print.” Under “Print What,” choose handouts and choose three per page.
- IDEA Information
- Sample Letters
- Creating an IEP Notebook
- Resource List

These should be handed to participants on arrival, or as they sign in. It is helpful to have them in the order in which they will be used. You may tell participants this so that they don't feel the need to read them in advance or shuffle them.

*Resource Materials:*

- State specific Parent Training Center brochures with training events flyers
- County/city school Parent Resource Center information
- Local area support group fliers
- Extended Care Health Option (ECHO) brochures
- Child Find brochure
- STOMP brochure
- DoDEA Parent Handbook on Special Education (if there is a DoD school on the installation)
- Have available CD's of the DoD Special Needs Family Tool Kit (This can be found at <http://www.militaryhomefront.dod.mil>. Type “DoD Special Needs Parent Toolkit” in the search box. Go to the “Service Provider Exceptional Family Member” area and create copies for workshop attendees.)

Materials may include extra copies of handouts or single copies of books or videos for participants to look at. Consider asking the local library to set up a display of relevant books that could be checked out at a later date.

## V. Key Terms

- **Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE):** Under the principles of IDEA, your child is entitled to an education at public expense, under public direction and supervision
- **Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA):** Special Education Legislation that guides school systems throughout the United States, its territories, and DoD schools in the education of children with special needs
- **Individual Education Program (IEP):** This is a written plan for a child with a disability that is developed and reviewed according to the standards detailed in IDEA
- **Least Restrictive Environment (LRE):** Because children with disabilities are most appropriately educated with non-disabled peers, they should only be separated if the nature of the disability makes inclusion in the regular classroom unsatisfactory
- **Related services:** Services that may be necessary to adequately educate a child with a disability
- **Section 504:** A civil rights law that applies to schools and other entities and prohibits discrimination against people with disabilities

## VI. Curriculum Outline for Special Education Workshop

### 1. Introduction

- a. Introduce yourself
- b. Icebreaker
- c. Define purpose of the workshop

### 2. Law Governing Special Education

- a. IDEA
  - Six major principles
    - Free and appropriate public education
    - Appropriate evaluation
    - Individualized Education Program
    - Least restrictive environment

- Parents play key role
  - Procedural safe guards
- b. Section 504

### 3. Special Education Cycle

- a. Referral
- b. Evaluation
  - Cognitive
  - Behavioral
  - Physical
  - Developmental
- c. Eligibility
- d. Writing an Individual Education Program (IEP)
- e. Placement
- f. Instruction and related services
- g. Annual review
- h. Triennial review
- i. Transition to adulthood

### 4. Becoming an Advocate

### 5. Additional Resources

### 6. Summary

## VII. Curriculum Detail

### *Introduction*

Welcome participants to the Special Education Workshop.

Introduce yourself to the participants, to include your name, position, and any relevant personal information.

Ice Breakers:

Option 1: Give participants a blank piece of paper and ask each person to write down one task they are dreading that is waiting for them at home or the office. Have them crumple up the paper and toss it to someone else. Then have participants introduce themselves and read the task on the page they received.





Read the topics listed on slide two (Special Education) and ask them to think about one way the workshop might benefit them or their families. Have them write this benefit down or just share with the group. Point out that instead of being somewhere else doing something they don't want to do, they are in this class, actively gaining knowledge to help themselves and their kids.

Option 2: If the group is not too large, spend a few minutes on group introductions. Ask the participants to introduce themselves and share how many children they have, what ages their children are, what school system they are involved with, and any experience they have with special education.



The purpose of this workshop is to help parents become familiar with the special education system, identify which laws govern it, and learn where parents of special needs children can go for additional assistance. All of the contact information for the organizations and websites discussed today is included in your handouts.

### *Laws Governing Special Education*



*Say:* When your children attend school in the United States, its territories, or a Department of Defense school, the school system is required to have a system for educating all children: those who can learn in a regular classroom, as well as those who need additional assistance. The Individuals with Disabilities Act, which is known as IDEA, is the federal legislation that guides these school systems. IDEA Part B establishes educational requirements for children with disabilities between the ages of three to twenty-one.

#### Take Note:

Should anyone ask, Part A is concerned with general provisions of IDEA, and part C with Early Intervention.



*Say:* There are six major principles of IDEA:

- A Free and Appropriate Public Education - This means that your child is entitled to an education at public expense, under public supervision and direction.
- An Appropriate Evaluation - IDEA requires that each child suspected of having a disability receive an appropriate evaluation in all areas of suspected disability by a team of evaluators knowledgeable and trained in the use of tests and other evaluation materials. The team will use a variety of evaluation materials and procedures selected and administered so as not to be racially or culturally discriminatory. They will not subject children to unnecessary tests or assessments. Relevant information that is useful in planning for the child's education will be gathered from a variety of sources.

An appropriate evaluation provides information to be used to determine the child's eligibility for special education and related services and the educational needs of the child.

- The Individual Education Program (IEP) - This is a written educational plan for a child with a disability that is developed and reviewed according to the standards detailed in IDEA. It is a document written expressly for your child with input from you, teachers, and other professionals.
- Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) - Children with disabilities are most appropriately educated with their non-disabled peers and should only be educated separately from their peers when the nature of the child's disability is such that education in a regular classroom, even with supplementary aids, cannot be achieved satisfactorily.
- Parents Play a Key Role in Decision Making - Congress recognizes the importance of parental involvement. The following is a quote from IDEA 2004:  
"Congress finds the following...Almost thirty years of research and experience has demonstrated that the education of children with disabilities can be made more effective by...strengthening the role of parents and ensuring families of such children have meaningful opportunities to participate in the education of their children at school and at home."
- Procedural Safeguards - Procedural safeguards must be in place to ensure that the rights of the child and the child's parents are protected and that there are clear steps to follow in the case of a dispute.

*Say:* The purpose of this law is to ensure that all children with disabilities have access to a free, appropriate public education, to ensure that the rights of children and their parents are protected, and to ensure that teachers and parents have the tools they need to meet educational goals as well as ways to assess the effectiveness of the educational efforts being made for the child.

*Say:* Under IDEA school systems are required to have procedures that assure the rights of you and your child are protected. Here are some of your rights:

- You have the right to prior written notice for evaluations and placement. This means you must be notified in writing before any assessments or changes to your child's educational placement are made.
- Your written consent is required before any evaluations can be done or before your child's IEP is changed.



- Your child's educational assessment cannot be considered complete without parental input.
- Parents must have access to their children's educational records, including evaluation results.
- You have the right to seek an Independent Educational Evaluation.
- The child's evaluation must be free from cultural bias and the assessment should be given in the language most likely to give meaningful results.
- Your school system must have a procedure that gives your family access to due process hearings.



*Say:* Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act is a civil rights law that prohibits discrimination on the basis of a disability and applies to public schools. Section 504 has a broader definition of disability than does IDEA, so some children who do not qualify for special education under IDEA can qualify under 504. This is especially helpful for children with “invisible” conditions, such as learning disabilities, attention deficit disorder, or hyperactivity.

Take Note:

There is a link to more information about Section 504 in the resources section of this workshop.

### *The Special Education Cycle*



*Ask:* What is special education?

Special education is a system for meeting the needs of many different children. Your child may become involved in special education because of an obvious disability, or perhaps you or your child's teacher has noticed that your child is not progressing at the rate of his or her peers. Special education is more than a change in classroom instruction; it is a system of assessments, plans, and instruction that gives structure to the process of educating your child. We are going to examine this cycle, step by step.



*Say:* The special education cycle begins with the referral. The referral is simply a request, usually in writing, to have a child evaluated by the school system for special education services. The referral can be made by a parent, teacher, or doctor, or it can come from a child development program. Any of these people can contact the school system in writing and request that the child in question be evaluated. These requests are usually evaluated by a screening committee. If the child is attending a DoD school, a formal referral is made to the Case Study Committee (CSC). The CSC reviews the referral and develops the assessment plan. If the screening

committee decides an evaluation is warranted, you will be notified. IDEA law stipulates that children cannot be evaluated without the permission of their parents.

**Take Note:**

Before the workshop, find out what the referral process is in the schools in your surrounding area. Be aware that each school system may handle referrals differently. Contact your school district's special education coordinator or superintendent's office for information. If there is a specific form used by a certain school system, have copies available with the handouts.

Some school systems have special forms for this, but you may need to write a referral letter requesting an evaluation for special education. You will find either a sample letter or the appropriate form in your packet. It is a good idea to use certified mail to send your evaluation request to the school. We will talk more about letter writing later in the workshop.

*Say:* The next step in the special education cycle is the evaluation. The evaluation is a series of tests and assessments used by the school system to determine whether a child qualifies for special education and related services. Before the evaluation is given, you should have received a copy of your procedural safeguards and should have provided informed consent or permission for the evaluations to be conducted. The initial evaluation for special education must be completed within sixty calendar days of parental consent unless your state has established a different time frame. It is important to be sure your child is available for the evaluation. Should your child be transferred to another school district before the evaluation is completed, the timeline may be changed if parents and the new school district agree on a new timeline.

**Take Note:**

Before the workshop, find out what the time limits are for your area and incorporate this information into the text above.

*Say:* IDEA law requires that evaluations be conducted in the language and form most likely to yield accurate results. This may be Braille, American Sign Language, or the language spoken in the child's home.



*Say:* Your child's evaluation may assess functioning in several areas:

- Cognitive functioning refers to the ability to reason, remember, and understand.
- Behavior is assessed as the child may have issues paying attention or relating well to others. The child's behavior at home, school, and other settings is also of interest.
- Physical health may be assessed to include vision, hearing, and the ability to communicate and move purposefully.
- Developmental levels may be assessed to note the child's progress in such things as understanding and responding to language, social and emotional abilities, mobility, and the ability to be organized.

The evaluation must consist of a variety of tools. No single measure can be used to determine if a child is eligible for special education.

**Take Note:**

Encourage your group to pause and discuss these questions.

- Can any description of your child be complete without your input?
- What do you know about your child that no formal assessment can show? (e.g., Maybe homework reduces him to tears almost every night, or that she loves music and sings all the time.)
- How do you feel about speaking with others about your child's areas of weakness?



*Say:* For some children with disabilities, disruptive behavior is a concern. Your child's behavior may be assessed as part of the special education evaluation. The child's behavior at home, school, and in other settings is also of interest. If behavior is a concern, a Functional Behavioral Assessment may be appropriate. The Functional Behavioral Assessment is a process for addressing a student's problem behavior. A Functional Behavioral Assessment should be completed and a Behavioral Intervention Plan should be drafted prior to the IEP team meeting. The Behavioral Intervention Plan takes the observations made in the Functional Behavioral Assessment and turns them into a concrete plan of action for managing a student's behavior.

*Say:* Disruptive and dangerous behavior at school typically results in serious consequences, ranging from the child's suspension from the class for several days to a full expulsion from the school. If a child with a disability has been determined to have committed an offense that violated school rules and could result in expulsion for longer than ten school days, the IEP team must meet to determine whether the misconduct resulted from the disability. This is referred to as a manifestation determination hearing and it must be done within the first ten days of the child's suspension.



If the behavior is a manifestation of the child's disability, the child must be returned to the current placement, unless the parent and IEP team agree otherwise. If a child has behavior problems that interfere with his or her learning or the learning of others, the IEP team must consider whether new strategies are needed to address the behavior. If the IEP team determines that such services are needed, they have to be added to the IEP and provided.

If the behavior is not a manifestation of disability, the child may be disciplined, suspended, or expelled to the same extent as a child without disability. As a result, no specific and necessary services for a disabled child will be offered.

*Say:* You are an expert on your child. Recognizing this, the law requires that you be involved in the assessment process.



Many parents have mixed feelings about discussing their child's areas of weakness. It may feel unloving or disloyal to call attention to your child's struggles. However, part of parenting is advocating for our children. Honest observations about a child's struggles will benefit the child as the educational team will better know your child and his or her special circumstances.

*Say:* The evaluation conference is where the results of the assessment will be discussed. If you are not notified about such a meeting you should request one.



Sometimes there will be one meeting to discuss the results of the evaluation and another meeting to determine if your child is eligible for special education. Sometimes the evaluation conference is combined with the eligibility meeting.

Think about whether you are satisfied with the assessment. If you are, the next step is to determine if the results of the assessment qualify your child for special education. If you are not satisfied with the assessment, you can ask informally for more testing to be done. If the school system does not agree to more testing, you may request an Independent Educational Evaluation (IEE) of your child at public expense. You don't have to prove that the school's evaluation was faulty. You are entitled to an independent evaluation if there is reason to believe the initial evaluation was incomplete or inaccurate. If the school system does not agree to this new evaluation, they may choose to hold a due process hearing during which they will try to show that the initial evaluation was valid and complete. Unless they hold this hearing

and prove their point, the school system cannot deny your request for a new evaluation. You also have the option of obtaining an IEE at your own expense. IDEA law requires that the school system consider independent evaluations when planning your child's education.

In your packet you will find a sample letter requesting an Independent Educational Evaluation.



*Say:* Eligibility refers to the decision about whether a child qualifies for special education services based on established criteria. A committee will make this decision. The job of the committee is to compare the results of the child's evaluation with the definitions of various disabilities as defined in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).



*Say:* You may want to ask for a copy of the evaluation to look over before the meeting, but be aware that IDEA law does not require schools to provide this information until the actual evaluation meeting. As you look over the results of the evaluation, write down your questions, as well as your hopes and concerns for your child. You may want to bring a photo of your child with you to help remind the committee that the meeting is not about a set of test scores, but a child.



*Say:* Most of the time parents and school systems agree about the eligibility decision, but what if you think your child qualifies and the school doesn't? What if you don't agree with the school about the nature of your child's disability? Should any of these issues come up, you may request an administrative review within the school system. This is simply asking the school to take another look at your child's case. If you are in a DoD school, your first step is to ask for a Resolution Meeting. If an administrative review or Resolution Meeting is not available to you or you are unsatisfied with the results, you may request mediation or a due process hearing. Mediation is a way to resolve the dispute without litigation and may preserve your relationship with the school system. Due process hearings offer you the chance to have your case heard in an impartial hearing.



*Say:* Once a child has qualified for special education, it is time to write the Individual Education Program, the IEP. Before your child's IEP meeting it is a good idea to speak with other parents who have been through the same process, or whose children are similar to yours. The IEP must be developed within thirty days of the eligibility determination. However, the IEP written for your child will be unique to your child. The IEP will be written with input from you, your child's teacher, a special education teacher, and an administrator able to commit the school's resources. You may also want the input of others you know who have special insight concerning the needs of your child, such as a therapist or an advocate. Under IDEA law there are only two reasons why an IEP team member can be excused from the IEP meeting: if the member's area of the curriculum or related services is not being modified or discussed in the meeting or if the member submits written input to the parents and the team prior to the meeting. Parents must provide informed written consent for either type of excusal.

IDEA requires that the IEP team take into consideration the academic, developmental, and functional needs of the child, to include social skill development, behavioral, and attention issues. The findings of evaluations should be a key part of the discussion. Remember that the IEP is a needs driven process. You must help define your child's needs or the school system will do it for you.

*Say:* These are the elements of a good IEP:

- A description of your child's present level of performance
- Consideration of parental concerns
- Goals that are measurable, specific, and structured for reporting progress toward goals
- A list of related services, modifications, accommodations, and transportation needs
- Detail of special education placement
- A list of methods that will be used to assess your child's achievement
- Projected date that services will begin along with details about frequency and location of services

It is important to remember that the goals listed in the IEP must be measurable and specific. For example, a goal stating that your child will improve her reading skills is not sufficient. The IEP goal must state your child's current reading level, and the level she is expected to reach in a specific time as well as what programs or services will be used to improve your child's reading skills. The projected beginning date for all services, as well as how progress will be measured, must also be included. It is a requirement of IDEA that the methods used to assess your child's progress and the services or teaching methods listed in the IEP are determined to be effective by scientifically-based research. The IEP should also address the specifics of your child's participation in state-wide assessments and list necessary accommodations.

*Say:* What if you are not satisfied with your child's IEP?

If you are not satisfied with your child's IEP you have several courses of action to choose from. Initially, you may want to ask for a few days to think about it. If you find only certain parts of the IEP objectionable, you can sign it but indicate the parts you feel do not meet your child's needs. Or, you can sign it but indicate the parts you object to in an addendum and state your plan to dispute those parts. Finally, you can refuse to sign the IEP and state that you plan to dispute it. You must state your disagreement with the IEP in writing on the IEP. The next step is to exercise dispute resolution options of mediation, resolution sessions, and a hearing.



If you refuse to sign the IEP in its entirety, your child will probably be denied services until the dispute is settled.



*Say:* Parents care deeply for their children, and for this reason some parents find IEP meetings to be emotionally charged. Be aware of how you are feeling as you walk in. You may feel worried, nervous, hopeful, or defensive.

Be aware of your emotions, and keep them in check. Remember that words spoken in anger may undermine your credibility and ultimately hurt your cause, which is a good education for your child.

Many parents will tell you that you should never go into an IEP meeting alone. If your spouse is working or deployed, ask a friend or family member who is familiar with your child to accompany you. You will have some moral support during the meeting and someone who was there to discuss it with afterward.

Another excellent resource is STOMP, which stands for the Specialized Training of Military Parents, a National Parent Training and Information Center for military families with special needs. If you are concerned about your child's IEP, ask the experienced parents at STOMP or your state Parent Training and Information Center for more information. Contact Information for STOMP and your state PTI is with your handouts.

Many parents find that the better they are prepared, the more confident they feel. One way of staying ahead of the paperwork and organizing the information about your child's education is to create an IEP notebook. You have a handout with suggestions about how to start an IEP notebook in your packet.



*Say:* Placement refers to the setting in which your child will be educated. This may include time in a regular classroom, in a special education classroom, or receiving related services. The details should be defined in the IEP.



*Say:* There are a range of options available to meet the individual needs of children. Remember, the law states that children should be educated in the least restrictive environment. The goal is to keep children in a regular classroom whenever possible and to keep kids with their peers.

The least restrictive option is to have the child remain in the general education classroom full-time. However, when more individual help is needed in certain subjects, the child may be “pulled out” of the general classroom at specific times to receive help with an area of need. The next option is for the child to be placed in a self-contained special education classroom. When appropriate placement cannot be provided by the public school system, a private day or residential school must be paid for at public expense.

When a child cannot go to school because of medical problems, such as recovery from an illness, chronic illness, etc., the school district will pay for educational services. This is different from home schooling. If a school receives a referral and determines the child is eligible to receive special education services but the parent decides to home school instead of placing the child in a public school, then there is no legal requirement for the school to provide special education services.

*Say:* After all the evaluations and meetings have been held, your child's instructional time should be organized in such a way that his or her educational needs are being met. Remember that parents have an important role to play in support of the educating that is going on at school. One way to do this is to structure your child's learning time at home, perhaps by creating a homework routine that works for your child.



*Say:* Depending on the needs of your child, here are some of the related services that are generally available; however, there may be other services identified by the IEP that are not on this list:



**Take Note:**

You may want to read all descriptions or ask the parents there which services they have questions about. You should read several of the descriptions.

- Assistive technology is any piece of equipment that improves your child's ability to communicate, to be independent, and to learn. Examples may be an augmentative communication board or a wheelchair.
- Audiological services are those that help identify children with hearing loss and help with language improvement.
- Counseling may be used to help your child improve his or her social skills or increase self-esteem.
- Some medical services may be available for diagnostic reasons or to make recommendations for special education services based on the child's disability.
- Occupational therapy focuses on fine motor skills, such as writing or eating.
- Orientation and mobility refers to assistance for any child who needs to be taught how to travel around the school building, perhaps because of a visual impairment.
- Parent counseling and training helps parents whose children have special needs to understand how their child learns and is developing.

- Physical therapy focuses on gross motor functioning (i.e., large body movements like sitting, standing, walking, or climbing).
- Psychological help may be offered by the school psychologist who may provide testing and an interpretation of the results.
- Rehabilitative counseling teaches children independence and prepares them for employment and integration into the work place.
- School health services are services available from the school nurse that are necessary to assist a child so that he or she can benefit from his or her education program. These services may include administering medication, catheterization, or breathing therapy.
- A social worker may provide group or individual therapy and help with problems in a child's home that may affect the child's adjustment in school.
- Speech therapy diagnoses speech and language disorders, provides therapy, and counsels parents and teachers about speech problems.
- Transportation refers to the school's responsibility to transport special education students to and from school and in and around the building.



*Say:* Now that you are past the evaluation and have a written plan and some familiarity with the new routine, you can relax a little. You deserve it. Once the teachers have had a chance to get the program up and running, discuss with them the best way to keep communication open between home and school. This may be a notebook that is sent home with your child each day or regular telephone calls. Be sure to let your child's teachers know that you appreciate the work they do on behalf of your child.



*Say:* Your school system is required to review your child's IEP once a year. You should be notified in writing about this meeting. This meeting is attended by the student's parents, teachers, and a representative of the school system who can allocate resources. Any specialist who works with your child may attend as well. As with the earlier meetings, it is a good idea to have your notes and thoughts organized as you go into the meeting. Whenever possible, bring a spouse or friend with you.

**Take Note:**

There is an option in some states to replace the annual review with a review every three years. If your state is participating in this program, say the following: There is an option in this state to replace the annual review with a review every three years. The benefit of this may be that teachers spend less time with paperwork. However, a child's needs can change a lot in three years. If you are not comfortable with the three year review option, you may opt for an annual review.

*Say:* Every three years the school system is required to conduct an extensive review of your child's progress. This is called the Triennial Review. There may be new evaluations done, and there will be a new eligibility decision concerning whether to continue with special education for your child. A thorough review of your child's progress will be made to determine whether new evaluations should be done. If you suspect a new area of disability, you may request new evaluations.



*Say:* Part of being in the military is relocating. If your child is changing school districts within the same state, the new district must provide the same or comparable services as those listed in the previous IEP until it either formally accepts the previous IEP or develops and implements a new one according to the process described earlier in this chapter.



If your child transfers to a school system in a new state, IDEA 2004 requires that the new district must continue comparable services until it conducts an evaluation of your child, if necessary, and develops a new IEP, if appropriate, that is consistent with federal and state laws.

When a student transfers to a DoD school with a current IEP from a non-DoD school, the Case Study Committee (CSC) will promptly convene an IEP meeting to address eligibility and special education services. The Case Study Committee may:

- Accept the child's current IEP by notifying and obtaining consent of the parents to use the current IEP and all elements contained in it.
- Initiate a CSC meeting to revise the current IEP, if necessary.
- Initiate an evaluation of the child, if necessary.

When a student with a current IEP transfers from one DoD school to another, the CSC will accept the child's eligibility and current IEP by notifying and obtaining consent of the parents to use the current IEP and all elements contained in it.



*Say:* Between the ages of fourteen and sixteen a child's IEP will begin to address the transition process. Transition refers to the period of time toward the end of your child's public education. The focus of your child's education may change to explore what skills are needed for your child to learn a job or live on his or her own. During transition planning, students and their families find out about community agencies and programs that provide services to people with disabilities after high school.

Transition services are a coordinated set of activities that will aid a child as he or she moves from school to post school activities. Schools are responsible for involving representatives from state agencies such as Vocational Rehabilitation or post secondary education in the IEP transition plan. These activities may include learning how to fill out a job application or read a menu. It may be appropriate for your child to begin attending his or her IEP meeting at this point.

Remember that once a child graduates or leaves the school system, there is no guaranteed program to pick up where IDEA leaves off.

Once your child has left the public school system, there are still options available. However, the time to begin thinking about your child's future is when your child is still young, as waiting lists for some programs can be years long. Contact the state you will retire to and ask what services are available.

**Take Note:**

You may choose to read some or all of these options. You may want to ask participants which they have interest in.



*Say:* These are several options for grown children:

- Both two and four year colleges have opportunities for students with disabilities to continue their education. Because of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), colleges cannot discriminate against otherwise qualified students with disabilities.
- Continuing adult education classes cover subjects from computer skills to cooking and can be a challenging way to expand your child's horizons.
- Vocational training prepares students for specific occupations, such as beautician or electrician, and usually requires a high school diploma to attend.
- On-the-job training is short-term training that allows a child to learn a job while working on site. Many vocational rehabilitation agencies, disability organizations, and large companies provide this sort of training.

- Competitive employment refers to jobs in the main stream of everyday life. These are jobs for which your child would be paid the going rate. The law prohibits discrimination and requires reasonable accommodation to be made if the person is qualified to do the job.
- Supported employment is paid employment for people with severe disabilities who have a job coach who provides guidance by helping with job skills and is especially helpful as the employee adjusts to the new position.
- Adult day programs provide a work environment in a supervised setting with other disabled workers. Individuals in these programs usually receive training in life skills and recreation.
- Centers for independent living help people with disabilities to develop self-help and advocacy skills like balancing a checkbook, cleaning, and cooking nutritious food.

### *Becoming an Advocate*

*Say:* Parents are natural advocates for their children. Advocacy is an organized and thoughtful activity; parenting is an active and emotional activity. Blending the two can be difficult. However, educated, organized, and loving parents are formidable advocates. School systems have many children to educate, but you have only yours to focus on. Remember that your child may not be entitled to every program from which he or she might benefit.



*Say:* The best advocates are thoughtful communicators both in person and in writing. Attentive listening lets others know that you are paying attention to their ideas. When others are talking, give them your full attention and use open body language. Ask questions and if you don't understand the answer, ask again.



If you are pleasant to work with, you will draw more people to your way of thinking. Be courteous, and remember there is a difference between being polite to someone and agreeing with them.

When you are speaking, make eye contact and keep your voice even and modulated. Be polite and don't rush.

*Say:* You may need to write letters to request meetings, to request copies of school records, or to document a problem.



When you are writing letters, use clear language and keep it brief. You should state the purpose of your letter in the first paragraph, identifying the issues you are concerned about and the

action you would like to see taken. Always include your own contact information. Be sure to keep copies of the letters you send to your child's school system.

Be sure to send your letters to the school system via certified mail. This will provide you with documentation of the date on which your letter was received. This may be helpful if the school system is not following the established timeline.

Remember that letters cannot be unsent, so if you are angry you may want to wait a day or two to mail your letter.

You will find several sample letters in your packet of information.

### *Additional Resources*



*Say:* Navigating through the maze of special education may be confusing or frustrating at times. It can also be rewarding and fulfilling when you see your child getting an appropriate education. Knowing that you are looking after your child's interests can be deeply satisfying. You are not in this alone. There are many agencies with a strong desire to aid you as you help your child get the education he or she is entitled to. More information about these resources and contact information can be found in your packet.



#### Take Note:

You should include contact information for the following local resources with the handouts and on slide thirty-one: State Protection and Advocacy Agency, State Parent and Information Training Center, and local and DoD school systems.

The National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities, known as NICHCY, offers a wealth of special education and related information in both English and Spanish (<http://www.nichcy.org>).

Specialized Training of Military Parents (STOMP) provides support and advice to military parents who have children with special needs. STOMP conducts workshops and has many excellent publications on their website, as well as a listserv which you may join to correspond with other military parents of specially challenged children (<http://www.stompproject.org>).

Learning Disabilities Association of America (LDA) is the largest non-profit volunteer organization advocating for individuals with learning disabilities. The membership, composed of individuals with learning disabilities, family members, and concerned professionals, advocates for the almost three million students of school age with learning disabilities and for adults affected with learning disabilities. For more information, go to [http://www.ldaamerica.org/aboutld/parents/special\\_ed/principles.asp](http://www.ldaamerica.org/aboutld/parents/special_ed/principles.asp).

The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act was passed by Congress on January 8, 2002. The law identifies specific steps that states, school districts, and schools must take to reach the goal of proficiency in reading and math for all students. Every state is required to develop and administer annual assessments in grades three through eight in reading and math and once in grades nine through twelve. Children in special education will be included in all general state and district wide assessment programs with appropriate accommodations (as indicated on their IEPs) that are necessary to measure academic achievement and functional performance. The NCLB does not apply to DoD schools because the schools are funded entirely by the DoD. However, the DoD schools have implemented a strategic plan that implements the intent of NCLB. For more information, go to <http://www.ed.gov/nclb/landing.jhtml>.

Insert contact information for the base EFMP coordinator.

Insert contact information for your State Parent Training Center with a brief description of available services.

Insert contact information for local support groups.

### *Summary*

We have discussed many aspects of special education today, from the law governing special education to the emotional aspect of advocating for our children. What is your next step? It might be to learn more about IDEA or to organize an IEP notebook. Explore the resources provided to you and talk to others who have similar challenges.

Please stop by the resource table for more information, and thank you for coming.

Take Note:

Alert participants to other workshops that are available, such as the following:

- *Birth to Age Three*, which has an emphasis on Early Intervention
- *Health Care for Children with Special Needs*, which has information about TRICARE programs for families with special needs
- *Families in Transition*, which has information about the special challenges of military life with a special needs child (included are tips for moving, dealing with deployment, evacuation, and helping special needs children transition to adulthood)
- *Advocacy*, which has an emphasis on effective advocating for your special needs child while serving in the military
- *Resources and Support*, which is an extensive look at the resources available to military families with special needs children

### ***Section 504 of the Civil Rights Act***

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act is a civil rights law that also applies to public schools and prohibits discrimination on the basis of a disability. Section 504 has a broader definition of disability than does IDEA, so some children who do not qualify for special education under IDEA, can qualify under 504. For more information about Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, go to <http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/index.html>.

### ***The Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA)***

The Individuals with Disabilities Act, which is known as IDEA, is the legislation that guides how states and school districts provide special education and related services to children with qualifying disabilities. IDEA establishes educational requirements for children with disabilities between the ages of three and twenty-one. For more information about IDEA, go to <http://idea.ed.gov>.

### ***Family Center (or replace with appropriate term used on your installation)***

Information and Referral Specialists are located in the installation family centers and can help connect you with resources that can help. The Army and Marine Corps have dedicated Exceptional Family Member Program Coordinators/Managers in their Family Centers that can specifically help military families with special needs.

### ***NICHCY***

The National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities (NICHCY) offers a wealth of information in both English and Spanish. For more information about special education, transitioning, post secondary education and vocational rehabilitation visit NICHCY's website: <http://www.nichcy.org>

### ***Specialized Training Of Military Parents (STOMP)***

STOMP, Specialized Training Of Military Parents is a valuable on-line resource. They provide support and advice to military parents without regard to the type of medical or educational condition the child may have. You can join their listserv and correspond with other parents of specially challenged children. Go to <http://www.stompproject.org> or call 1-800-5-parent.

### ***State Parent Training and Information Center***

Each state is home to at least one parent center. Parent centers serve families of children and young adults from birth to age twenty-two with various disabilities: physical, cognitive, emotional, and learning. They educate families about special education and related services for their children with disabilities; work to improve education results for all children; train and inform parents and professionals on a variety of topics; resolve problems between families and schools or other agencies; and connect children with disabilities to community resources that address their needs. Go to <http://www.taalliance.org/centers>.

### ***Learning Disabilities Association of America (LDA)***

LDA is the largest non-profit volunteer organization advocating for individuals with learning disabilities. The membership, composed of individuals with learning disabilities, family members, and concerned professionals, advocates for the almost three million students of school age with learning disabilities and for adults affected with learning disabilities. For more information, go to [http://www.lidaamerica.org/aboutld/parents/special\\_ed/principles.asp](http://www.lidaamerica.org/aboutld/parents/special_ed/principles.asp).

### ***No Child Left Behind***

The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act was passed by Congress on January 8, 2002. The law identifies specific steps that states, school districts, and schools must take to reach the goal of proficiency in reading and math for all students. Every state is required to develop and administer annual assessments in grades three through eight in reading and math and once in grades nine through twelve. Children in special education will be included in all general state and district wide assessment programs with appropriate accommodations (as indicated on their IEPs) that are necessary to measure academic achievement and functional performance. The NCLB does not apply to DoD schools because the schools are funded entirely by the DoD. However, the DoD schools have implemented a strategic plan that implements the intent of NCLB. For more information, go to <http://www.ed.gov/nclb/landing.jhtml>.

# Sample letter for Request for Evaluation

## Referral for Special Education Request for Evaluation

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Director of Special Education

\_\_\_\_\_  
School District

\_\_\_\_\_  
School

Dear: \_\_\_\_\_:  
(Director of Special Education)

Re: (Child's name) \_\_\_\_\_

(Date of Birth) \_\_\_\_\_

I am writing to refer my child to the Committee on special education. I am requesting a special education assessment in all areas of suspected disability and specifically in the following areas: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Some of my concerns are based on: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

If the school district agrees to evaluate my child, I understand I will be presented with a written evaluation plan within fifteen (15) days and that the plan will identify for me the tests to be given, dates for the tests and the names of the persons who will administer the tests, as well as explanations of the tests and their purposes.

Sincerely,

\_\_\_\_\_  
Parent/Guardian Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Parent/Guardian Printed Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Address

\_\_\_\_\_  
City, State, Zip Code

\_\_\_\_\_  
Telephone Number

Received by: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

# Sample letter for

# Independent Educational Evaluation

## Request for an Independent Educational Evaluation

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Director of Special Education/Principal

\_\_\_\_\_  
School District

\_\_\_\_\_  
School

Re: (Child's Name) \_\_\_\_\_  
(Date of Birth) \_\_\_\_\_  
(School) \_\_\_\_\_

Dear: \_\_\_\_\_:  
(Director of Special Education)

I am requesting an Independent Educational Evaluation because I believe the results of my child's School District Assessments are inaccurate or incomplete. Because the results of these assessments are flawed in their accuracy or completeness they are not sufficient to guide the IEP team to an appropriate identification of disability, services or placement.

On my child's current assessments, I disagree with: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Sincerely,

\_\_\_\_\_  
Parent/Guardian Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Parent/Guardian Printed Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Address

\_\_\_\_\_  
City, State, Zip Code

\_\_\_\_\_  
Telephone Number

Received by: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

# Sample letter for

# Request for IEP Meeting

## Request for IEP Meeting

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Director of Special Education

\_\_\_\_\_  
School District

\_\_\_\_\_  
School

Re: (Child's name) \_\_\_\_\_  
(Date of Birth) \_\_\_\_\_

Dear: \_\_\_\_\_:  
(Director of Special Education)

Because I am concerned about my child's lack of progress I am writing to request an Individual Education Program meeting to develop, review, or revise my child's current program.

Some of my concerns are based on:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

I understand that a meeting must be developed within 30 days from the date of receipt of my written request.

Sincerely,

\_\_\_\_\_  
Parent/Guardian Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Parent/Guardian Printed Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Address

\_\_\_\_\_  
City, State, Zip Code

\_\_\_\_\_  
Telephone Number

Received by: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

# Sample letter for

# Request for School Records

## Request for School Records

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Director of Special Education or Principal

\_\_\_\_\_  
School District

\_\_\_\_\_  
School

Re: (Child's name) \_\_\_\_\_  
(Date of Birth) \_\_\_\_\_  
(School) \_\_\_\_\_

Dear: \_\_\_\_\_:  
(Director of Special Education or Principal)

I am developing a personal home file for my Child's Special Education information. I am requesting a complete copy of all school records cumulative and confidential within the school district that contain my child's name, \_\_\_\_\_.

Please include copies of all evaluations and actual test scores, the Cumulative Record, Health Record, Discipline Record, Psychological Record, Confidential Record, Assessments, Individual Educational Plans and Teacher Record.

If the school district charges a fee for this service please alert me as soon as possible. If you have any questions about my request contact me at \_\_\_\_\_.

Sincerely,

\_\_\_\_\_  
Parent/Guardian Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Parent/Guardian Printed Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Address

\_\_\_\_\_  
City, State, Zip Code

\_\_\_\_\_  
Telephone Number

Received by: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

### **Supplies:**

A three-ring notebook  
A three hole punch  
Highlighter  
Sticky notes  
#10 envelopes  
Stamps  
Dividers for binder  
Calendar  
Phone log

1. First request a complete copy of your child's school records. See the form letter included in this packet.
2. You may want to start a photo record of your child on or in this binder, adding a school picture to the record as each year goes by.
3. Label dividers and organize information in the following way:
  - Assessments
  - IEP
  - Report Cards/Interim Reports
  - Health Records/Immunizations
  - Discipline Records
  - Calendar
  - Phone Log
  - Correspondence to School System
  - Correspondence from the School System
  - Addresses

- **A Free and Appropriate Public Education**—This means that your child is entitled to an education at public expense, under public supervision and direction.
- **An Appropriate Evaluation**—This is the gathering of information about your child that will be used to determine whether he or she qualifies for special education and, if so, what must be done to help your child be involved with and progress through the general education curriculum at your school.
- **Individual Education Program, known as the IEP**—This is a written educational plan for a child with a disability that is developed and reviewed according to the standards detailed in IDEA. It is a document written expressly for your child with input from you, teachers, and frequently other professionals.
- **Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)**—Children with disabilities are most appropriately educated with their non-disabled peers and should only be educated separately from their peers when the nature of the child’s disability is such that education in a regular classroom, even with supplementary aids, cannot be achieved satisfactorily.
- **Parents Play a Key Role in Decision Making**—Congress recognizes the importance of parental involvement. The following is a quote from IDEA 2004:

“Congress finds the following...Almost thirty years of research and experience has demonstrated that the education of children with disabilities can be made more effective by...strengthening the role of parents and ensuring families of such children have meaningful opportunities to participate in the education of their children at school and at home.”
- **Procedural Safeguards**—Procedural safeguards must be in place to ensure that the rights of the child and the child’s parents are protected, and that there are clear steps to follow in the case of a dispute.