



Module Five | Advocacy

I. Introduction

PowerPoint Slide:  Handout: 

This workshop is designed to provide Service members and their families whose children have special needs with information concerning how to advocate for their children. The workshop will primarily address educational and medical advocacy. However, information about accessing federal and state benefits and helping children to self-advocate will be introduced as well.

II. Learning Objectives

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

- Name three characteristics of effective communication
- Create a filing system for educational or medical records
- Prepare for Eligibility or IEP meetings
- Identify several resources available to help them advocate for their children

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 a special needs program or special education. Conduct marketing through installation family centers, military treatment facilities (MTFs), childcare centers, Early Intervention programs, and schools. 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 gain knowledge.
- Invite a panel of parents with some experience advocating for their children in your area. Try to include in your panel those with children with medical concerns and some with educational concerns. Look for parents with positive attitudes. Prior to the workshop, ask the panel about topics they have an interest in or experience with, such as writing a referral so it will be accepted or going through mediation with a school system to improve a child's IEP. Plan the workshop so that the experiences or illustrative stories of the panel are integrated with the topics of discussion. Look for areas of interest among panel and participants. Remember to pause to encourage discussion.

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 capable computer
- PowerPoint slides
- 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 then choose three per page.
- Sample Letter to Request Records
- How to Organize an IEP Notebook
- IDEA Information
- Sample Letter Requesting IEE
- Sample Letter Requesting IEP Meeting
- Resources List

Handouts should be given 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 Centers
- Local area support group fliers
- Extended Care Health Option (ECHO) brochures
- Child Find brochure
- STOMP brochure
- EFMP Brochures
- 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 on resource table 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.

Suggested Books:

From Emotions to Advocacy by Pam and Pete Wright

Writing Measurable IEP Goals and Objectives by Bateman and Herr

The Goal Mine: Nuggets of Learning Goals and Objectives for Exceptional Children
by Cahill and Cahill

V. Key Terms

- **Battery:** A group of evaluations that will be used to identify a child's achievement level
- **Cognitive:** Conscious intellectual activity such as remembering, reasoning, or learning
- **Composite Score:** The combination of the scores of all areas assessed
- **Criterion Referenced:** Tests that tell what score a child received, but do not compare the child to peers
- **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
- **Normed Tests:** Tests that compare a child's score to those of children in a similar peer group
- **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 Advocacy Workshop

1. Introduction

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

2. Parents as Advocates
3. Effective Communication
 - a. Listening and speaking
 - b. Writing
4. Getting Organized
 - a. Shopping list
5. Medical Advocacy
 - a. Organizing records
 - b. Learning about child's condition
 - c. Getting the referral
 - d. Appeal to TRICARE
 - e. Who can help?
6. Educational Advocacy
 - a. Organizing records
 - b. Special education law
 - c. Evaluation vocabulary
 - d. An accurate evaluation
 - e. Preparing for meetings
 - f. Components of IEP
 - g. Potential disagreements
 - h. Disagreements
7. Benefits Advocacy
8. Teaching Your Child to Self-Advocate
9. Legislation
10. Additional Resources
11. Summary

VII. Curriculum Detail

Introduction



Welcome participants to the Advocacy Workshop.

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

Ice Breakers:

Option 1: 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, and why they are interested in learning more about advocating.



Option 2: With slide two on the screen, ask participants to introduce themselves to the person sitting next to them and share two qualities on the slide best describe their advocating strengths and which quality they would like to improve. Then, if time is available, have them introduce each other to the group.



Say: The purpose of this workshop is to help parents become familiar with strategies of successful advocating 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.

Parents as Advocates

Say: Parents are busy people. Parents attached to the military who have children with special needs are especially busy. It might be a little overwhelming to realize that in addition to all the other jobs you do, you need to also act as an advocate for your child. But whether you are aware of it or not, advocating is a job you are already doing. Advocacy is learning about your child's condition, keeping track of records, and being in contact with doctors and teachers. How many of you are already doing these things?

There are many different types of advocates, but parental advocates are arguably the most persistent, committed, and devoted. You have a unique perspective on your child because you see things your child's doctors and teachers will never see. Part of your job as an advocate is to share this perspective with the professionals who are working with your child in order to help them better understand your unique child.

This class is intended to help you become a more effective advocate for your child.

Effective Communication

Say: The cornerstone of good advocacy is effective communication. Listening actively, speaking clearly, and expressing your concerns in writing well will not only help you better understand the professionals working with your child, but will also help them to understand your viewpoint as a loving parent and advocate for your child. The better you can communicate with others, the less often misunderstandings will occur.



Also, remember that your purpose is two fold: to learn as much as you can and to get your own message across. Every bit of credibility you can bring to the table will help your cause. If you are organized, punctual, and informed, you will set a positive tone for interactions with health care and educational professionals. Dress appropriately. Be on time for appointments and meetings. Remain calm, even when you are rightfully frustrated. Be polite. Remember that being polite to someone does not mean that you have to agree with them.

Ask: What is good listening?

Say: It starts with hearing what someone else is saying. But beyond hearing, you should check to be sure you understand what is being said. You might ask, “Are you saying that...” or say, “I understand you to say...”



Be sure your body language is open and positive. If you are listening with a scowl on your face and your arms crossed over your chest, you are clearly sending the speaker a negative message. Use good eye contact and remain attentive even if you do not agree with the speaker.

Before you speak, organize your thoughts. Take your time. As with good listening, smile and use direct eye contact and open body language. Try to keep your voice clear and evenly modulated. And again, ask questions. If you don't understand what the doctor or teacher or insurance claims person has just said, say so and ask for another explanation. It is your job as a parent to understand all that you can about your child, and it is the job of the professionals you are working with to help you.

Say: Should you need to write letters to insurance companies or school systems, use clear everyday language. State your purpose in the first paragraph and explain clearly what action you would like to see. Keep your letters short and to the point. Be sure you finish politely and include contact information.



Remember that once a letter or email has been sent, there is no getting it back. If you are angry when writing, wait a day or two before sending the letter. You may be rightfully upset, but the expression of your anger might ultimately hurt your cause - to help your child.

If two weeks have gone by and you have not received a reply to your letter, write again and include a copy of your first letter. If this letter brings no response, go higher up the chain of command.

Getting Organized



Say: As you may already realize, routine contact with a school system or health care organizations will soon leave you with a mountain of papers and letters. To complicate things further, military families relocate every few years which means new contacts with medical professionals and school systems. Unfortunately, with each move comes the possibility of lost paperwork. However, a good system for organizing your child's records will not only save you time and frustration, but will ultimately help you to be a more effective advocate for your child. With well organized records you will be empowered as you go into meetings concerning your child's health or education.



Say: This shopping list shows the basic supplies needed for the creation of both a medical file as well as an educational file. If you are creating both educational and medical files you should have a phone log in each.

Medical Advocacy



Say: To advocate well for your child in the medical arena, you should first organize your correspondence and records and gather information about your child's condition from professionals as well as other parents.

Specialized Training Of Military Parents (STOMP) is a valuable resource. They provide support and advice to military parents without regard to the type of educational or medical condition a child may have.

On STOMP's listserv you can correspond with and learn from other military parents of specially challenged children.



Say: Here are some components of a good medical file for your child. You may want to divide the sections like this:

- Phone log
- Research on your child's disability
- Copies of correspondence to and from TRICARE
- Other insurance information

- Important pages from medical and dental records
- Immunizations

You may want to include key pages from your child's medical records. You will have to ask for copies from your MTF.

TRICARE has developed a system called SCOR to help parents keep track of their child's health care record. More information about SCOR is available on the resources page of your handouts.

Say: Learning about your child's diagnosis can be empowering and overwhelming. Your first source of information should be the medical professionals you are working with. Other parents and the participants on the STOMP listserv can also be valuable resources. Listen to what other parents have to say, but trust yourself. You know your child better than anyone else.



Say: Getting the referral you need can be difficult. Even though your doctor is working sincerely to help you and your child, he or she may not know how to word a request for a referral so that it is approved. Other parents can be an invaluable resource here. Find out what has worked before. Ask the parents on the STOMP listserv how their referrals have been written. Share this information with your health care provider.



Say: If an application for Extended Care Health Option, known as ECHO, or Extended Home Health Care (EHHC) has been denied, the letter of denial you will receive in the mail will include specific information concerning whether the decision is eligible for appeal. Pay special attention to where to send your letter of appeal and to any time limitations. Should the letter state that the decision is not eligible for appeal, you may want to question it anyway. Does the letter state the reason for the denial? Is it accurate? Can your child's circumstances be described in such a way as to make things more clear to TRICARE?



Take Note:

Please alter slide thirteen to include your current contact information for the TRICARE Regional Contractor as well as the Beneficiary Counseling and Assistance Coordinator. Also include this contact information in the handouts provided to participants.

Say: Even if your letter says no appeal is available, don't give up quite yet. Ask your TRICARE representative to explain the denial. Post a description of your problem on STOMP to learn how other families have handled similar problems. You can also contact the Beneficiary Counseling and Assistance Coordinator (BCAC) at the TRICARE regional office or MTF.



Educational Advocacy



Say: Now we will shift gears a bit and discuss advocating for your child in the educational arena. Organization is important, as is a familiarity with the law that regulates special education. We will discuss the cycle of special education, the importance of a thorough evaluation, the components of a good IEP, and what to do should disagreements arise.



Say: Keeping school records safe and organized is a good idea for any family, but for military families whose children have special needs it is of special importance. You will find as you move from area to area that different systems offer different levels of service. However, until your new school system has conducted an evaluation for continued eligibility for special education and has written a new IEP for your child, they should honor the old IEP. You will need to have a copy on hand.

Your educational file should have a phone log inside the front cover. You may want to follow up any important phone calls with an email or letter. Emails to your child's school should be saved, but know that they may not be legally binding. Certified mail is a good option for letters to school systems as you will have verification of receipt.

It is a good idea to have a list of important contacts, along with phone numbers and addresses, in your file as well. You will want a section for copies of any assessments of your child and sections for old IEP's, discipline reports, report cards and interim reports, correspondence to and from school, and finally immunizations and other health related information.

You will find sample letters requesting your child's full educational records with your handouts.



Say: The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, known as IDEA, is the legislation that guides school systems throughout the United States, its territories, and the Department of Defense in the education of children with special needs. The purpose of the law is to ensure that children with disabilities have access to a free and appropriate public education, to ensure the rights of children with disabilities and those of their parents are protected, and to ensure that teachers and parents have the tools they need to meet educational goals and to assess the effectiveness of the educational efforts being made on behalf of the child.

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act is a civil rights law that prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability and applies to public schools, as well as other public entities. Some children who do not qualify for special education under IDEA do qualify for help under Section 504. This is because 504's definition of disability is broader than IDEA's definition of disability. This is especially useful for children with "invisible" conditions, such as learning disabilities or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder.

You have a handout with more detail on special education law and resources to contact for more information.

Say: 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. It begins with a referral which usually comes from a teacher or parent. The evaluation is the series of assessments that will identify a student's strengths and weaknesses. The eligibility meeting is where the results of the evaluations are discussed and the decision about whether a child qualifies for special education is made. From there the Individual Education Program, the IEP, is written. This truly is an education plan that is unique to your child. Placement refers to the location of instruction or special services your child will receive as part of his or her education. Instruction is when the plan is put into action.



Say: Your child will be evaluated using a variety of tools or assessments. Here are some of the terms you may hear:



- A **battery of tests** refers to a group of assessments intended to be used together to evaluate your child.
- **Cognitive** refers to conscious intellectual activity such as thinking, reasoning, imagining, and remembering.
- A **composite score** is the combination of all subjects assessed. Composite scores can be misleading, however, as they do not show variation between subjects. If your child has an obvious strength in one area and a weakness in another, the two scores may form a blended score that looks quite average and offers no explanation for your child's educational frustration. Often a look at sub test scores might explain much more.
- **Criterion referenced** describes tests that will tell you if your child achieved a certain score, for example that your child can identify twenty of the twenty-six letters in the alphabet or can add two digit numbers. It will not tell you, however, how your child compares to his or her peers.
- **Normed tests** are those that compare your child's score to those of other children within the same peer group. This is usually age-based, but may be grade-based as well. Tracking your child's progress as compared to his or her peers will give you an additional piece of information about how well the child's IEP is functioning.

Say: Once the evaluation is complete and you have had time to read and understand the results, consider whether you think the evaluation is accurate. If you are satisfied with the evaluation the next thing to consider is the eligibility meeting or the IEP meeting. If you are not satisfied with the results of the evaluation or if you feel the evaluation is incomplete or out of date, you have several choices:



- You may ask informally for the school to do additional testing.

- You may ask for an Independent Educational Evaluation (IEE) to be done at public expense. You do not 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. The school may not agree to this IEE and may hold a hearing during which they will try to show that the initial evaluation was valid and complete. Unless they do this they cannot deny your request for a new evaluation. You have a sample letter requesting an IEE in your packet.
- If after a hearing the school system is not required to pay for an independent evaluation, you may still choose to have your child evaluated independently at your own expense. Private evaluations are not inexpensive, but they can be helpful and IDEA requires that independent evaluations be considered when writing an IEP.



Say: There are several things you can do to prepare for an Eligibility or IEP meeting.

Although IDEA does not require schools to provide parents with a copy of new evaluations prior to the eligibility meeting, you may want to ask for one. It can be difficult to try to read and understand complex test results at the same time you are trying to be a meaningful participant in a meeting.

Have your questions, concerns, and ideas for your child's education written down before you go to the meeting.

Speak to other parents who have had similar experiences.

Bring a photo of your child and family with you.

Bring any relevant files with you. This will demonstrate to the school that you are an organized and serious advocate for your child and will also limit questions about your child's educational history.

Many parents find Eligibility and IEP meetings to be emotionally charged. Even when you have a good relationship with your child's school, learning that your child is lagging behind his or her peers can be a devastating blow. Trying to convince a school system that your child needs additional services can be profoundly frustrating as well. Keep your focus on your child, not the school system's resources or individual personalities in the room. Be prepared for possible tension between what you want for your child and the school system's resources.

Many experienced parents recommend that no parent go to an Eligibility or IEP meeting alone. It is a good idea to bring your spouse, a friend familiar with your child, or a family member to the meeting with you.

Take Note:

Before the workshop, find out about state and local regulations concerning the taping of Eligibility and IEP meetings.

IDEA law does not address tape recording meetings; however, many states do have regulations concerning this. If you would like to tape the meeting for your records or for a parent who is deployed or unable to attend, call your state parent training center for information. Some schools will give you permission to record only if you provide them with a copy of the tape for their records.

Say: Now that you understand your child's current level of achievement and functional performance, you will have a clearer idea of what goals you wish to set for your child. It is time to write your child's Individual Educational Program, the IEP. This document will be unique to your child. The IEP cannot be a vague statement. For example, "Sarah will improve her reading" is not specific enough.



The IEP must be a specific statement of your child's current level of achievement and must identify areas where growth is needed. It should list which activities or related services will help your child to learn along with details about where and when the activities will take place. Also included should be the assessments that will be used to measure your child's progress.

Take Note:

Consider pausing here to offer participants an opportunity to ask the panel about their experiences with IEP meetings.

Say: Usually schools and parents collaborate well to write an IEP everyone can sign off on. However, sometimes there are disagreements.



If you are presented with an IEP that has been written before the IEP meeting, you may want to refer to this document as a draft. You have the right to participate in the development of your child's IEP. If you feel pressured to sign it, you may want to remind the other members of the committee that you need time to read and digest such an important document and that you will need a copy to take home with you.

If you have any serious concerns about the IEP, you can outline them in writing, include them as an addendum to the IEP, and return the IEP unsigned. You may want to request another IEP meeting. A sample request letter is in your packet.

If you are satisfied with certain aspects of your child's IEP, you may sign those parts and attach a letter identifying the parts you find objectionable. This way your child can begin to receive the agreed upon services.



Say: If you cannot come to an agreement with your school system, you have a couple of options:

- Mediation is a process of resolving disputes that has two goals: to resolve the dispute and to protect your relationship with the school system.
- Should you choose to hire an attorney, find one who specializes in education issues. You can also seek legal assistance from the Protection & Advocacy agency in your state.
- In DoD schools disputes are handled in a three-step process beginning with a Resolution Meeting, where an attempt is made to bridge the differences between the child's parents and the school system. Should the Resolution Meeting fail, the case goes to mediation, and if mediation is unsuccessful you may ask for a due process hearing by petitioning the Director of Defense Office of Hearings and Appeals.

You may request mediation or a due process hearing, or both at the same time. This may accelerate the process and limit the amount of time your child must wait for an appropriate education.

Even if you plan to ask for a due process hearing, avoid threatening to ask for it. The school has heard this many times before, and the threat is unlikely to have the effect you would like. Also, on further reflection you may decide that you do not want to file for due process after all.

Benefits Advocacy



Say: In addition to the benefits available to military families, there are federal and state benefits your child may be eligible for.

Supplemental Security Income, known as SSI, is a monthly payment to those with low incomes and few resources who are sixty-five or older, blind, or disabled. Children may qualify. If you think your child might qualify, visit your nearest Social Security Office.

If your application is denied, it is a good idea to appeal the decision. Keep in mind that appeals should always be timely, in this case no later than thirty days from the date of the notice. As you move from state to state, you will find that eligibility requirements vary.

Medicaid is a program that pays for health care for some individuals with low incomes and few resources. This is a national program with broad guidelines, but each state sets its own eligibility rules and decides what services it will provide. Many states qualify children through a Medicaid waiver program. This is the Tax Equity and Fiscal Responsibility Act Of 1982, known as TEFRA. TEFRA gives states the option to provide home and community-based services to children with disabilities who would otherwise not qualify for Medicaid because of their parents' income. TEFRA is also known as the Katie Beckett waiver.

Take Note:

At the workshop, have contact information for your nearest Social Security Office available for the resources table. Also, find out if your state offers a program like TEFRA, and alert participants to look for further information on the resources table if applicable.

Military families who are struggling with the costs associated with caring for a disabled family member should consider applying for Medicaid or the Medicaid waiver as the benefits may exceed those offered by TRICARE.

Teaching Your Child to Self-Advocate

Pause and let participants read the quote on slide twenty-five.

Say: What can parents do to help their children learn to advocate for themselves? As a parent, you know how important it is to teach your child as much as possible about taking care of him or herself. This may mean teaching him or her about hygiene, personal safety, or how to stay away from the group of kids who always get in trouble. Teaching self-advocacy is not very different.

Say: Self-advocacy begins with helping your child to speak for him or herself and to take responsibility for his or her actions. It means encouraging your child to speak out when something is upsetting, and it may begin with helping your child to order food at a restaurant or use public transportation.

Between the ages of fourteen and sixteen your child's educational plan will shift toward learning life skills in order to prepare for life once public school services end. This is called Transition. If your child has not already begun to participate in his or her IEP meetings, this is a good time to start.



Be aware that after a child graduates or leaves the school system there is no guaranteed program to pick up where special education leaves off. Contact the state you will retire to and ask about their vocational rehabilitation services. Be aware that waiting lists can be quite long, so early planning is important.

Legislation



Say: With day-to-day life as full as it is, keeping track of new and proposed legislation may be low on your list of things to do; however, you have the power to influence legislation that will impact your child's education, health, and quality of life.

What can a busy parent do? Keep informed. Join listservs that are geared to your child's specific disability. Frequently they not only share tips about daily living, but also track information about public issues that may affect the group.

When an issue of importance comes up, contact your representative with a phone call, email, or letter. Introduce your family and put a face on the effects of the issue at hand as well as explaining why the additional legislation is needed.

Take Note:

Please include local support group information as well as contact information for your state's Parent Training and Information Center.

Additional Resources



Say: Parenting a child with special needs is challenging, and the additional challenges associated with becoming an organized advocate may feel overwhelming. Remember that you are not alone. There are military and civilian families and services available to help you.

Join the Specialized Training of Military Parents, or STOMP, listserv. It is made up of people like you who are military parents of children with special needs.



Contact local support groups for valuable information about available community resources and to make a personal connection with other families experiencing similar challenges. Again, all of the contact information for the organizations and websites we have discussed can be found in your handouts.

Contact your State Parent Training and Information Center.

Summary

Say: We have discussed many topics important to parent advocacy today: effective communication, organization, and medical and educational advocacy. Your presence here is a demonstration of your commitment to your child. Parents make formidable advocates, and your children are lucky to have you.

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
- *Special Education*, which has information about the special education system
- *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)
- *Resources and Support*, which is an extensive look at the resources available to military families with special needs children

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: _____

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.

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 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: _____

Additional Resources

Advocacy

Section 504 of the Civil Rights Act

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act is a civil rights law that 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 these school systems. IDEA establishes educational requirements for children with disabilities between the ages of three and twenty-one. For more information about IDEA, go to <http://www.idea.ed.gov>.

Installation Family Centers

Your family center has information and referral specialists who can provide information about the EFMP, as well as local organizations with interests in certain disabilities. The Army and Marine Corps have dedicated EFMP personnel in their family centers. The following link will help you find an installation family center(s) near you: <http://www.militaryinstallations.dod.mil/ismart/MHF-MI/>

NICHCY

The National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities (NICHCY) offers a wealth of information in both English and Spanish on a variety of special needs related topics, such as Early Intervention, Special Education, Section 504, Housing Options, Transitioning, Special Needs Trusts, and more. Go to www.nichcy.org.

STOMP

STOMP (Specialized Training of Military Parents) is a federally funded Parent Training and Information (PTI) Center established to assist military families who have children with special education or health needs. STOMP is funded through a grant from the U.S. Department of Education. The staff of the STOMP Project is made up of parents whose children have disabilities and who have experience raising children in military communities. STOMP serves families by providing information and training about laws, regulations, and resources for military families of children with disabilities. STOMP assists parents and professionals in developing their own community support groups and providing a forum where families can connect and discuss issues faced by military families whose children have disabilities. Go to <http://www.stompproject.org> or call 1(800)-5-parent.

SCOR

TRICARE has a Special Care Organizational Record (SCOR) that you will find is a helpful tool to use when organizing your child's medical records. It can be found at <http://www.tricare.osd.mil/OCMO/download/SCOR.doc>.

State Parent Training and Information (PTI) Center

Each state has at least one Parent Training and Information Center. Parent centers serve families of children and young adults from birth to age twenty-two with a variety of disabilities. They educate families about how to obtain an appropriate education and services for their children with disabilities, work to improve educational results for all children, train and inform parents and professionals on a variety of topics, and connect children with disabilities to community resources that address their needs. Go to <http://www.taalliance.org/centers>.

Books:

From Emotions to Advocacy, second edition by Pam and Pete Wright
(This is an excellent source of advocacy information.)

Writing Measurable IEP Goals and Objectives by Bateman and Herr

The Complete IEP Guide, 4th Edition; How to Advocate for your Special Ed Child
by Lawrence Siegel

