



Parents' Connection

Helping Students Adjust to School

The honeymoon is over. By now, it is clear to teachers and parents alike if a student is experiencing difficulties adjusting to the new demands of the school year.

Whether those demands are related to a new school, new coursework, new teachers, new classmates or a combination, it is important not to take a 'wait and see' approach. If difficulties are not addressed in a proactive manner, student motivation for school can dwindle, and behavior problems may increase.

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Parents and teachers should begin by talking about the issue and building a positive working relationship with the student. Discussions should focus on the student's assets, strengths, and interests. Begin by trying to learn what the student dislikes and his/her reasons those dislikes. Are assignments too hard? Are long-term projects overwhelming? Is a new teacher's style more challenging? Is the student being bullied or alienated by friends?

Start by making adjustments based on information about what is causing the problem. In the short term, it may be helpful to deemphasize areas that are not of high interest and instead, focus learning and enrichment options on areas that the student wants to - and can successfully - pursue.

Is distractibility a challenge? Try to identify environmental factors that might be problematic. Consider the location of the student's work space at school (e.g. too far from the teacher, too near a loud fan, too near a window or open door), and at home (e.g. near a television or radio; in a busy kitchen or dining room; with easy access to phone or internet.) If possible, make the environmental changes to minimize or eliminate the distraction.

At school, consider having the student work with a group of peers, or designate a classmate to help during transitions from one activity to the next. At home, a homework buddy, or a peer tutor might be helpful.

At school and at home, adults should interact with the student in ways that will minimize confusion and distractions, by keeping conversations relatively short; talking quietly and slowly; using concrete terms; and expressing

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ASAHA's Annual Conference

ASAHA's 33rd Annual Conference is set for November 13, 2009, Atlantic City, New Jersey. The theme of this year's conference will be "Opening the Door to Success." For more information, log on to www.asah.org.

From the Executive Director

Dear Parents:

The school year is well underway, and all across New Jersey students (and their parents) have settled into a new school routine. But if your child is one of the more than 280,000 students with disabilities, he or she may still be settling in. In fact, some parents tell us that it seems to take half the school year to find any continuity in the day-to-day.

At ASAH, we know that adjustment to new things can take a little longer for our students. It may require a little more effort, a little more planning, and a lot more patience. We know that any changes in your child's services or program can be very disruptive, and in some cases, cause regression and trigger challenging behaviors. These unnecessary changes must be avoided.

Last spring, ASAH and other advocacy groups across our state, were flooded with calls from parents with children with disabilities whose services and programs were being stopped, changed, or interrupted for reasons that seemed inappropriate and unnecessary. And, you told us your children were suffering as a result.

In response, ASAH is taking a very proactive advocacy role. For the first time in our 35-year history, we are offering a new service designed to assist parents directly—a parent advocate is now available to help you.

For instance, now, if you have a question about your child's IEP, or need someone to help you write a letter or review your IEP, our parent advocate can help. When searching for a program or placement for your child, contact our parent advocate. If you plan to transfer to a new program—or return to the public school—we can help ensure the supports

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and services your child needs have been considered and are in place.

ASAH will also offer speakers and regional advocacy training throughout the year. Our goal is to be an unbiased advocacy and information resource—whether you are looking for a private school placement or an inclusive placement in a public school classroom.

Since 1974, when ASAH was founded, we have taken very seriously our role as advocates for your child. We have been in Trenton, working to ensure that services for children and adults with disabilities in New Jersey are more readily available to all who need them.

We will still be in Trenton, and now we will be in your neighborhood, too—offering you direct support as you advocate on behalf of your son or daughter. We extend this helping hand to you—the parents of the children we serve—to help you navigate a system that is less than perfect, and avoid changes in your child's educational program.



Gerry Thiers, Executive Director

Health Insurance and Student Education Programs

Schools Cannot Require the Parent's Health Insurance to Pay their Child's Educational Program

For more than 25 years, school districts have been forbidden from requiring parents to use private insurance to pay for required special education services. Even if there is no cost to the parent, the use of private insurance must be voluntary. This issue became more important in New Jersey, when Governor Jon Corzine signed legislation requiring insurance companies to cover treatment for autism and other developmental disabilities.

According to the U.S. Department of Education, 73% of health insurance policies have lifetime dollar caps; 71% have limits on coverage for specific services. In addition, claims use affected future insurability and raise future insurance costs.

"Cost" associated with use of an insurance policy can be both explicit and implicit. For

example, a policy may cover durable medical equipment, or other IDEA-related services. However, the policy also may include caps on coverage, deductibles, co-payment responsibilities, or other limitations that would constitute a "cost" or "financial loss" to the family if the policy were used for services in school.

Parents should ensure that their private insurance policy does not have such a limitation before agreeing to use it to pay for durable goods or services that would otherwise be the responsibility of a local school district.

Nothing precludes school districts from *asking* parents whether they have insurance coverage, but they have no authority to require parents to disclose those policies, or to allow school authorities to review them.

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warmth and confidence in the student's ability to adapt.

Is disorganization part of the problem? Teachers and parents can provide prompts and multisensory cues such as oral, written, and/or pictorial and color-coded guides to help the student organize the learning activity, the materials, and plan a work schedule.

If the student has difficulty finishing work, teachers might consider modifying the length and time demands of assignments and tests. Teachers can also allow students to demonstrate mastery or competence

through oral, audio-visual, arts and crafts, graphic, and computer generated projects.

Both at home and at school, adults should check in with the student frequently to offer support and concrete guidance (e.g., model, demonstrate, coach). Even when the student's work product is less than perfect, parents and teachers should support and encourage the student's efforts related to self-monitoring and self-evaluation, and provide nurturing feedback keyed to the student's progress and next steps.

**Adapted from materials provided by The Center for Mental Health in Schools at UCLA. For more information, go to <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/websrch.htm>*

Success Story: Julia

Julia came to Youth Consultation Service in the ninth grade labeled as a troubled, frustrated, and aggressive teenager, but once at YCS, she blossomed into an intelligent, athletic, creative, and beautiful young woman.

Julia was living in a stable, loving foster home environment and, with the guidance of her family and her own self-determination, she transformed herself into a well-liked, well-rounded individual, capable of taking on any challenge.

Academically, Julia excelled and became the 2008 salutatorian of her senior class and participated in basketball and track, winning 32 gold, silver, and bronze medals. Julia also participated in H'Olympics for four years, winning gold and silver medals in track and field, basketball, and volleyball.

Julia won recognition and awards for her artwork and poetry. One of her artworks, "Building the Future One

Student at a Time," was selected for the program cover of the 2008 ASAH Conference in Atlantic City. Julia was also awarded a scholarship as a result of her participation in a local art exhibit.

Today, Julia attends her local community college and plans to transfer after two years to the Fashion Institute of Technology in Manhattan for Interior Design.



Parents' Connection is distributed by ASAH to help provide a link between and among parents of students enrolled in ASAH member schools and programs. The views and opinions in this publication do not necessarily reflect those of the editor, ASAH, its staff, or its member agencies.

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