



Back-to-School Kit for Parents of Students with Learning Disabilities

This toolkit includes the following items:

- “Building a Good Relationship with Your Child’s Teacher”
- “Essential Skills for Becoming Your Child’s Advocate”
- “Advocating for your School-Aged Child”
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Building a Good Relationship with Your Child's Teacher

By NCLD Editorial Staff

Your child is your number one priority, and in a perfect world you could give them everything they need. But let's face it — you cannot do it alone. The best way to support your child's needs is to build and maintain a strong, positive relationship with all the people at school who play a role in educating your child. And, make sure your child knows that this is a team effort — you're all working together to help him or her succeed!

Here are some tips on how you can foster a sense of partnership with the teacher and administration to support your child's education.

Connecting Before the School Year Starts

- Begin your relationship with teachers and other school staff members by letting them know that you look forward to working with them as a partner in educating your child.
- Exchange email addresses with your child's teacher and agree to keep in touch at least monthly, even if your child is doing well.
- Share information about your child that they might not otherwise learn during the course of the school day, such as:
 - o Your child's favorite books, movies, hobbies, and interests;
 - o Learning activities and techniques that seem especially helpful for your child, and
 - o Positive stories and anecdotes about your child, or important events in his or her personal life that may affect how they interact with others.

Maintaining the Connection During the School Year

- Stay involved! Make a point to show up and participate in events such as the annual science fair, back-to-school night, and open house.
- When your child tells you something they particularly liked or disliked at school (e.g., classmates, activities, etc.), share this information with the teacher.
- Be on time, positive, and prepared for school activities and meetings!
- Offer to volunteer your time in the classroom or as a chaperone on class trips.
- Consider donating classroom supplies or a gift certificate to a store where teachers can purchase materials for the classroom. (You'd be surprised how many supplies teachers buy with their own money!)
- Contribute fun extras to the classroom like prizes, disposable cameras, and extra snacks, and look for ways to help the teacher maintain a fun learning environment.

Remembering that the Teacher is a Person First

- Send cards for special events in the teacher's life, such as birthdays or the birth of a child or grandchild.
- Don't forget to say "thank you" for both the big things and the little things a teacher does for your child.
- Saying "thank you" can be more than just words — give gift certificates, bring a fruit baskets, or buy small gifts to give to the teacher "just because."
- Respect the teacher's schedule — what might be a good time for you to talk may not be such a good time for the teacher.
- Don't forget to acknowledge the teacher's co-workers — classroom aides, lunchroom and playground supervisors, secretaries and school nurses, custodians, and security personnel, bus drivers and crossing guards — anyone who helps to keep the school running and safe.



Sharing Your Appreciation with Others

- Let the administration know how much you appreciate your child's teacher: Stop by the office and speak to the principal or vice principal in person or send a letter to the superintendent, director of special services, special education coordinator or supervising teacher (with a copy to the teacher).
- Nominate your favorite teacher for Teacher of the Year! Many community newspapers offer contests like this. Your teacher may receive a reward!

Ending the School Year on a Positive Note

- Volunteer to organize an end-of-the-year art and writing project for students to introduce themselves to their next year's teacher.
- Send handwritten notes of thanks to all your child's teachers (and members of the IEP team), telling them once more how much you appreciated the special attention they gave to your child.
- Keep in touch — send a card every now and then to let your child's teacher know the lasting impact they had on your child's future.
- When you take your child to school in the morning, you're not dropping them off — you're handing them over to a trusted partner who is dedicated to making sure that your child has everything he or she needs to be successful now and throughout the rest of their educational career. And as with any partnership, communication is the key to success — get involved and stay involved!



Essential Skills for Becoming Your Child's Advocate

By NCLD Editorial Staff

Learning the essential skills to become your child's advocate and ensure your child receives an appropriate education does not require lots of money or even years of schooling. All it requires is learning five basic skills and consistently implementing them within the school community.

Skill 1: Become informed about your child's learning disability.

Understand your child's strengths and weaknesses, as well as the strategies that enable your child to compensate for weaknesses or deal with challenging activities. Example: Your child has a great deal of difficulty organizing his materials. You have found that color-coding all of his school materials, as well as keeping everything in a single zippered binder, allows him to keep track of his work. When he is rushing between classes, he can simply throw papers into his binder and zip it up. You can help organize the papers at home, keeping papers from getting lost in the bottom of the backpack or — worse still — in the black hole!

Skill 2: Learn about your child's educational rights.

Three federal statutes guarantee your child's access to a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) as well as accommodations as a person with a disability. The three federal laws are:

- [Individuals with Disabilities Education Act \(IDEA 2004\)](#)
- [Section 504 of the 1973 Rehabilitation Act](#)
- [The Americans with Disabilities Act](#)

By becoming knowledgeable about your parental rights, as well as those of your child, you become an informed consumer. Remember: knowledge is power! Parents who understand how schools are run, what schools are required to provide, and how services should be provided find much less resistance in securing appropriate services for their child.

Example: Your son has a writing disability. The very act of handwriting is laborious for him. In lecture classes, he often missed 75 percent of the information presented because he was focused on trying to copy down what was on the board. Through his educational plan, you requested that he receive copies of classroom notes, be able to tape record his lectures, and have access to a word processor. This has increased his ability to participate in classroom discussions and to focus on the information presented because he is no longer worrying about copying information off the board.

However, had you not known you could make requests for accommodations through the school child study team or IEP team, he would have continued to struggle and fail in his classes. With these three simple accommodations, he is able to excel in his academic classes and compete with his peers who are not learning disabled.



Skill 3: Learn to become a clear communicator.

Be sure to document all conversations in writing, especially verbal conversations and meetings with any member of the school community. It is essential for you as a parent to have accurate records and written documentation. These summarize all conversations and document your understanding about the next steps or follow-up actions to be taken concerning your child.

By requesting written information, by documenting in writing, and by allowing others to respond in writing clarifying your interpretations, you create a paper trail that can be used in court, if necessary. More often, it provides a reminder about what has been agreed upon and who is responsible for ensuring that your child's needs are met.

It is strongly recommended that parents organize their child's school records in a binder to ensure they have it all in one central location. Include the following sections in your binder:

- Medical/diagnostic information
- Educational plans (Individual Education Program [IEP] or 504 accommodation plan)
- Report cards
- Educational assessments and state testing results
- Communication log and copies of all emails
- Requests for services
- Assessments
- Meetings
- Teacher notes (positive and negative)
- Any other written documents pertaining to your child's education
- Work samples

Example: You have found that by clarifying all conversations in writing, as well as keeping copies of all written communications, you are able to eliminate forgotten conversations or he-said/she-said situations. This is particularly helpful when you have to advocate for your child during a time of stress or conflict.

Skill 4: Learn to work collaboratively with your child's school.

Remember to focus on the positives. It is vital to recognize efforts of individuals and provide support, encouragement, and recognition of the difficulties involved in working with your child. Teachers and school personnel are human beings with their own personal lives. As parents, we may at times become so focused on our child's needs that we unintentionally present ourselves as insensitive or demanding. This can create barriers to communication.

As your child's primary advocate, you must refrain from making personal comments or attacks toward the school or any school personnel. When a staff member has acted inappropriately or insensitively towards your child or yourself, put your concern in writing. Address it to the individual involved, with a copy going to the district office. Share your point of view, as well as your suggestions for remedying the situation.

When a staff member has acted kindly towards your child, it's equally important to put your compliments in writing. Send a note to the individual, with a copy to the district office. Research clearly shows that all humans like to be appreciated and respond to positive reinforcement.

Example: Over the years, you have found that making the extra effort to work collaboratively with the school and school administration has paid off. When your child is faced with a difficult teacher, or when a member of his child study team is not working in his best interest, you are able to voice your concerns and have them heard and addressed as valid rather than being pushed to the side as complaints from a pushy parent.

Skill 5: Learn to be in charge of your emotions.

As Kenny Rogers says, "know when to hold 'em and know when to fold 'em." As parents, we need to learn to step back and bring in others to help us when we are having difficulty with our child's school. Oftentimes, our natural reaction is to push harder and scream louder, thinking that the school will then do what we want. Unfortunately, more often than not, what occurs then is a "battle of wills," with both parties expending emotional energy to be right. They may lose focus on the real issue — a child's success in life and school. It is vital, as a parent advocate, that you learn how to step back, reflect, rally your troops, and encourage others to think outside the box, be creative, and find common ground. Compromise does not mean one is "giving in" or losing. It means meeting one another half-way.

Example: Your son is gifted in the area of science, and his educational team recommended that he take Advanced Placement Biology in tenth grade. When the teachers made this recommendation, your first response was to stand up and scream, "Are you kidding me? No way! It will be too hard for him, require too much time, and our entire existence will be homework." Instead, you took a deep breath, paused, and said, "WOW! That is a really wonderful opportunity, but I am concerned about how much writing and reading will be required with an AP course."

Together, you were able to discuss his learning needs and develop some strategies and supports that you are happy to say have allowed him to participate in an AP Biology class. It has done wonders for his self-esteem! If you had allowed your fears of his failing to control the meeting, you would have missed out on watching his excitement, this year, learning about proteins and biogenetics!

Advocating for your School-Aged Child

By NCLD Editorial Staff

Your child has the right to a free and appropriate public school education. Getting involved in his or her education is among the most important things you can do as your child's advocate. As you'll see below, you have a right to be a part of every decision regarding your child's education, including the process of finding out if your child needs special services. You know your child best, and your input should be considered at every opportunity.

In order to make sure that your child with learning disabilities gets the help he or she needs throughout his or her school career, you should familiarize yourself with your child's rights. These rights are federally mandated by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

Your child's rights in determining eligibility for special education and related services

- You have the right to request in writing that your child be evaluated to determine if he or she is eligible for special education and related services. This evaluation is more than just a single test. The school must gather information from you, your child's teacher and others who would be helpful. An assessment of your child must then be conducted in all the areas that may be affected by the suspected disability.
- If the public school agrees that your child may have a learning disability and may need special help, the school must evaluate your child at no cost to you.
- Teachers or other professionals can recommend that your child be evaluated, but the school must get your explicit written consent before any part of the evaluation is started.
- If the public school system refuses to give your child an evaluation, they must explain in writing the reasons for refusal, and must also provide information about how you can challenge their decision.
- All tests and interviews must be conducted in your child's native language. The evaluation process cannot discriminate against your child because he or she is not a native English speaker, has a disability or is from a different racial or cultural background.
- Your child cannot be determined eligible for special education services only because of limited English proficiency or because of lack of instruction in reading or math.
- You have the right to be a part of the evaluation team that decides what information is needed to determine whether your child is eligible.
- You have the right to a copy of all evaluation reports and paperwork related to your child.
- Once you give parental consent to the evaluation, it must occur within a specific timeframe established by the school, which varies, or within 60 days if your state had not designated a timeframe prior to July 1, 2005.

Your child's rights once determined eligible for special education and related services

- A meeting to design an Individualized Education Program (IEP) must be held within 30 days of your child being found eligible for special education services. An IEP should set reasonable learning goals for your child and state the services that the school district will provide.
- You and your child have the right to participate in the development of the IEP, along with a team that will include: your child's teachers, a representative from the school administration who is qualified to recommend and supervise special programs and services as well as representatives from other agencies that may be involved in your child's transition services (if your child is age 16 or older). You can also request an advisor to help you better understand your rights and responsibilities as a parent, and request that this person be present.



- Your child has a right to the least restrictive environment possible. Unless members of the IEP team can justify removal from the general education classroom, your child should receive instruction and support with classmates that do not have disabilities. Also be sure that special education services or supports are available to help your child participate in extracurricular activities such as clubs and sports.
- During an IEP meeting, the IEP team will develop goals for any related services, such as occupational or speech therapy, which could help your child. Be sure the team specifies how often and for how long these services will be provided as well as in what setting the services will be provided. This team will also identify behavioral strategies to support your child's learning in school and at home.
- Be sure to discuss what kind of assistive technology devices — such as speech recognition software, electronic organizers or books on tape — could help your child. Assistive technology services include evaluating your child for specific devices, providing the device and training your child to use the device. Also discuss any accommodations such as extra time and/or privacy and whether these are for all tests.
- You have the right to challenge the school's decisions concerning your child. If you disagree with a decision that has been made, discuss it with the school and see if an agreement can be reached. If all efforts don't work, IDEA provides other means of protection for parents and children under the law. These other ways of settling your dispute allow parents and school personnel to resolve disagreements. Options include mediation with an impartial third person, a due process hearing or a formal hearing in a court of law.
- An IEP meeting must be held once a year and comprehensive re-evaluation must be done every three years unless you and the school agree it is unnecessary. However, you may request an IEP meeting at any time.

Other tips for advocating for your child

Collect as much information as possible.

Be sure to keep copies of all reports and paperwork. Also, keep a log of all the people you speak to, their phone numbers and other pertinent information, as well as the time and date of your call and the details of the conversation. After making a call, you can send a follow-up letter reminding the person of the important points, such as any information they promised to provide you or information you think should be in that person's files. Also learn as much as possible about IDEA and other laws that could help your child.

Talk to your child about school.

Find out what he/she likes and dislikes and what kind of frustrations he/she is experiencing. Understanding what your child is going through is an essential part of being an advocate.

Don't be afraid to ask questions or say no.

It's important to work together with the school to plan your child's education, so make sure you know to what you are agreeing. Don't be afraid to ask for clarification, request further testing, or challenge the school's decision regarding services.

Stay level-headed.

Being involved in a process where lots of people are talking about your child can be very emotional. Remember that the people involved are there to help, even if you disagree with them. You will be most helpful to your child, if you hear everyone out and express yourself calmly and specifically.

Get support from others.

Talking to other parents with children who have similar difficulties may give you ideas and tips you can benefit from. It's also good to team up with other parents to bring your concerns to the school system or agencies.



Making the Most of Your Parent-Teacher Conference

By Kristin Stanberry

The first parent-teacher conference of the school year provides a great opportunity for you and your child's teacher to share insights and information. At this meeting, you can develop a relationship with the teacher and present yourself as a team player in your child's education. If your child has a learning disability and receives special education services, it's essential that you make the most of the conference with the general education teacher. Because most teachers schedule 30 minutes or less for each conference, planning ahead can help you maximize the experience.

The Planning Process

You may have met with your child's teacher when the school year began. By the time the conference rolls around, several weeks will have passed; this means you, your child, and his teacher should all have a better sense of your child's struggles and strengths. How can you organize your comments and concerns? Here are factors to consider:

Gather Information

Ideally, you'll start preparing during the first few weeks of the school year. What should you pay attention to?

- Ask the teacher to give you information about the planned curriculum, how she assigns and evaluates work, and what her teaching philosophy is.
- Look for patterns in your child's school work. What subjects (such as math or reading) seem difficult? Are certain tasks (such as writing or computing math problems) more difficult than others?
- Listen to what your child says about his school work, as well as his relationships with his teacher and classmates.
- Note any classroom accommodations and techniques previous teachers have used to help your child succeed.

Organize and Prioritize

From the list of concerns and observations you create:

- Select the most important points to discuss with the teacher.
- Prioritize your concerns so you'll be sure to cover the most critical topics before "your" time is up at the conference.
- Summarize your top concerns on paper to take with you to the conference.

Get Perspective

As the conference date draws near, remember the meeting is an opportunity for you and the teacher to collaborate. Remember that you're the expert about your child, while the teacher is the expert on teaching kids at his grade level. You'll both come to the table with ideas and opinions. Remember, too, that collaboration sometimes requires compromise; striking a balance of ideas is often in the best interest of your child.



At the Conference

Now, you're ready to meet with the teacher. Here are some guidelines to keep in mind during the conference:

- Let the teacher "lead" the conference. Be friendly, open, and appreciative of the positive things she does for your child.
- Allow the teacher to express her views, but make sure your priority concerns are addressed. This should be a give-and-take exchange. Hear the teacher out before you make any final requests or suggestions. What she says (new information, insights, or ideas) may alter the approach you take.
- For concerns you and the teacher agree on, ask how you and she can work together.

If you haven't already done so, ask the teacher how and how often the two of you will stay in touch. Will you make contact daily, weekly, or only as needed? Will you communicate by notes, telephone, email, or in person? Making such arrangements sends the message you're a team player in your child's education. It also helps you and the teacher plan for two-way communication throughout the school year.

At Home After the Conference

Whether or not your child attended the conference with you, it's helpful to sit down with him the same day to discuss what occurred. Depending on his age and maturity level, he may need help understanding what problems and solutions were covered. Most kids also want to have a clear idea of what's expected of the teacher, the parent(s), and, most importantly, from him. Be sure to point out his strengths along with his struggles. "Closing the loop" with your child will assure him that you, the school, and he are on the same team!

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About the Author

Kristin Stanberry is a writer and editor specializing in parenting, education, and consumer health/wellness issues. Her areas of expertise include learning disabilities and AD/HD, topics which she wrote about extensively for Schwab Learning and GreatSchools.



Creating Great Expectations for an Effective Meeting Worksheet

Instructions: This worksheet is intended to facilitate communication and clarify the opinions of each person who will participate in a discussion or meeting. Each person should fill in **ALL** of the boxes from their perspective. For example; a parent would insert information about what they perceive to be the needs, expectations, fears, etc. of each other person listed. BE HONEST and try to be as specific as possible. Having examples and a rationale to support your answers can also be very helpful.

COMPLETED BY:	<input type="checkbox"/> STUDENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PARENT	<input type="checkbox"/> TEACHER	<input type="checkbox"/> ADMINISTRATOR	<input type="checkbox"/> SUPPORT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER
NEEDS						
EXPECTATIONS						
FEARS						
ROLES						
SKILLS & RESOURCES						
OUTCOMES						

Related Back-to-School Content on LD.org

- [Types of Records a Parent Needs to Keep](#)
- [How IDEA Can Help You Help Your Child](#)
- [What is FAPE and What Can it Mean to my Child?](#)
- [NCLD's Resource Locator](#)
- [IDEA Parent Guide](#)
- [Knowing Your Child's Rights](#)



LD.org — Designed with Parents in Mind

The National Center for Learning Disabilities' LD.org Web site offers busy parents a “one-stop shop” — answering questions about learning disabilities (LD) and providing free, helpful resources for the entire family as you move along the “LD journey.”

Visit these sections on LD.org to find the LD information you need.

LD Basics

“The basics” about various types of learning disabilities.

In the Home

Real-life suggestions to help parents manage the day-to-day challenges and expectations of having a child with LD.

At School

Information that teaches parents how to advocate for their child by explaining their child's rights.

College and Work

Strategies and tools for parents whose children are transitioning from high school to work or college.

On Capitol Hill

Highlights education and civil rights legislation that directly impacts students with LD and their families.

NCLD's free high-quality resources include:

- Parent & Advocacy Guides
- Exclusive NCLD policy-related publications
- Checklists and worksheets
- Online newsletters
- LD Insights Blog
- Legislative updates, and more

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