

# CONNECTIONS



*A Quarterly Newsletter  
From the Parent Network of the Capital Region*



*The mission of the Parent Network of the Capital Region is to provide parents with the knowledge, skills, and resources to facilitate productive relationships with their school districts ensuring an appropriate education for their child. These services are offered free-of-charge.*

## WINTER 2013

### In This Issue

Visual Supports Within the Physical Education Setting for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders	2
ABC's of Behavior: Understanding & Addressing Challenging Behavior	3
Upcoming Events	4
The Scoop on Independent Educational Evaluations	5
Active Listening: A Valuable Skill for Productive CSE Meetings & Beyond	6

## Participating in Your Own CSE Meeting

*By: Mary Fornabia, Special Education Resource Specialist*

Transition planning begins at 12 years of age. Parents are encouraged to have their child participate in their own IEP meeting when the child is 15. While the concept of involving students in developing their own IEP can sound like a difficult task, in fact, students and families have much to gain by them being involved. During the process students can:

- Learn about their own strengths and skills
- Learn more about their disability
- Learn what accommodations are and what types of accommodations might help them succeed in the classroom
- Learn how to speak for themselves
- Develop some of the skills necessary for independent decision-making
- Become more involved in their own education
- Share with teachers how they learn best

Essentially, what these young individuals will be doing is learning how to advocate for themselves. Self-advocacy means taking responsibility for telling people what they want and need in a straightforward way. A great place to practice is in their IEP meeting.

Helping to prepare students for the IEP meeting takes time and consideration. Consider when and how to appropriately involve your child in the IEP process. Practicing or role-playing ahead of time what you want to say in the meeting can build confidence.

Before the meeting discuss with your child what will be covered at the meeting. Ask them what "level of participation" they want to have. Parents should then discuss this with the team ahead of time so as to adjust the timing and agenda if necessary.

*Continued, page 8*

---

# Visual Supports Within the Physical Education Setting for Students With Autism Spectrum Disorders

By: Adene Karhan, Special Education Resource Specialist



As a result of legislative changes and increased advocacy by parents and professionals within the field of special education, a growing number of children with disabilities are being integrated into general education classrooms. Within the school setting, Physical Education (PE) is the realm in which the majority of students with disabilities have been integrated. However, within the PE program, there are very few qualified professional and paraprofessional supports to help assist the teachers in carrying out successful inclusive programming.

According to legislative mandates, physical educators are now responsible for developing appropriate movement activities to address the specific needs of students with disabilities. In order to program effectively, PE educators often need to collaborate with other paraprofessionals to discuss the nature of the child's disability and the types of equipment and instructional modifications necessary to foster successful inclusion.

Given the rise in the prevalence of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), it is highly likely that most PE educators will be responsible for programming for one or more children with ASD during their educational career. Therefore, it is beneficial for PE staff to have at least a basic level of understanding of the nature of ASD and the various ways that it can impact students within the PE setting. The following chart shows some of the characteristics of the typical PE setting, and the challenge that this may pose to children with ASD:

<b><u>Physical Education Setting</u></b>	<b><u>Characteristics of Students with ASD</u></b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Incorporates cooperative partner activities.</li><li>• Consistently changes with regard to class organization, tasks given, and equipment used.</li><li>• Relies on use of verbal instruction and feedback.</li><li>• Environment with excessive noises due to acoustics and buzzing from florescent lights in gymnasiums.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Demonstrate absence or minimum of cooperative play.</li><li>• Desire sameness.</li><li>• Difficulty comprehending spoken language.</li><li>• Display hypersensitivity to sounds and light which cause self-stimulatory and disruptive behaviors.</li></ul>

In response to some of the challenges that students with ASD face within the environment, special education professionals recommend the use of visual supports within the PE setting. Visual supports provide students with clear expectations and a predictable schedule. They also promote independent transitions and preset students for changes that may take place during the day. The following visual supports have been shown to be helpful for students with ASD within the PE setting:

- Using visual support tools with students with ASD allows educators to communicate basic tasks and directions, using words and or symbols. The pictures or drawings show a skill or object, paired with descriptive words. These cards can easily be laminated and placed on a lanyard or key ring with commonly used commands and tasks placed on them (for example: sit, stand, throw, etc.)
- PE educators can also use visual tools to create an activity schedule for students to follow while they are in the PE setting. These can be easily made by attaching Velcro to a white board and PECS pictures. An envelope can be placed at the bottom so that the child can remove each picture and place it in the envelope after the task is completed.
- Visual warning devices such as a timer or stopwatch to let students know when an activity is over.
- Boundaries made with cones or tape that designate specific areas where tasks are to be performed.
- Headphones or ear buds to block out excess noise.

For more information about these supports and the use of visual supports for children with ASD in the PE setting, you can consult the following articles (or contact the PNCR to view a copy of the original article):

Fittipaldi-Wert, J., & Mowling, C. M. (2009). Using visual supports for students with autism in physical education. *The Journal of Physical Education, Recreation, & Dance*, 80(2), p. 39.

Webb, D., Webb, T., & Fults-McMurtery, R. (2011). Physical educators and school counselors collaborating to foster successful inclusion of students with disabilities. *The Physical Educator*, 124-129.

---

# The ABC's of Behavior: Understanding & Addressing Challenging Behavior

By: Marianne Simon, PsyD., Licensed Psychologist

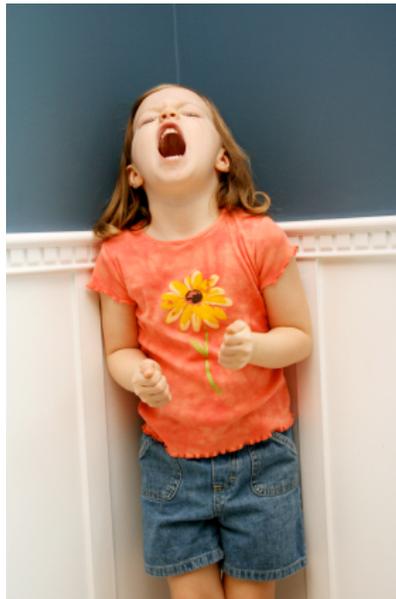
We all engage in “behaviors” each and every day...we also all exhibit “challenging behaviors” from time to time. However, many of us are able to regulate our emotional or behavioral reactions and are equipped with fairly well developed coping strategies (some of us better than others!) that allow us to move through difficult situations without impacting our ability to function, or impacting those around us. Yet, many children with developmental disabilities may exhibit challenging behaviors that impact the child, as well as his/her families in a variety of ways. For example, challenging behaviors may delay learning and development, they may cause disruption within the family system and community life, and they may alienate the individual and his/her family. Given the serious consequences of such behaviors it is imperative to develop ways to prevent or reduce the occurrences of such difficulties.

Traditionally, disciplinary approaches have been used to address challenging behavior. This would involve waiting until a behavior presents itself, and then react by applying negative consequences, aka “punishing” (e.g., taking favorite items away) in hopes that the child will “learn” and not repeat the behavior again. However, research has shown that these traditional approaches don’t teach new skills to replace the problem behavior with more appropriate, positive ones. Further, children with deficits in executive functioning (higher level cognitive skills-include planning, organizing, flexibility, etc), which are often associated with many developmental disabilities (e.g., ADHD, Autism Spectrum Disorders, Intellectual Disabilities) are not able to plan out what potential consequences may occur following a behavior, and therefore consequence-based strategies are not effective. However, Positive Behavior Supports (PBS) is a research-based approach that provides an alternative framework for understanding behavior. PBS focuses on determining the purpose of the child’s behavior, situations that set the stage for the behavior, and finding more effective ways to prevent, teach, and respond (Hieneman, Childs, & Sergay, 2006).

The first step in applying PBS is to understand that **all behavior is communicative**. We use our behavior to get our needs met and we will continue to act in a certain way if the behavior “works “ for us and the outcome is what we want. Simply stated, “people do not *have* behaviors; rather they *use* behaviors for very specific reasons” (The ARC of NC, 2012). Therefore, we need to determine what purpose the behavior is serving. Is the child engaging in the behavior to avoid someone, a task/activity, or an unwanted sensory input (e.g., hitting oneself when something hurts or is uncomfortable)? Or is the child using his/her behavior to obtain a preferred item/activity, or is he/she gaining attention from others, or

obtaining a desired sensory input (e.g. rocking back and forth, tapping items, etc)?

We can answer the above questions by examining the environment and social setting prior to the behavior occurring, as well as looking at what happens following the behavior. These aspects of the environment or situation that occur before and after the behavior, are referred to as the *antecedents* and *consequences*. Once the antecedents and consequences are identified you can look for patterns as to when the behavior is most likely demonstrated. For example, lets take “Jimmy” who hates completing any chores at home. One night, Jimmy is asked to clear the table following dinner. In response he yells and bangs his head on the kitchen table. His mother asks him to go to his room to calm down, and while he is there she clears the dinner table so she can put the dishes in the dishwasher and move onto her next task. Looking at this situation it appears that Jimmy’s behavior “worked for him.” It appears that when presented with an undesirable activity, Jimmy used his behavior to “avoid or escape” the demand.



What could Jimmy’s mother do differently the next time she needs to place a demand on Jimmy? Once she is able to take her “best guess” as to the purpose of Jimmy’s behavior, she would implement strategies that prevent the challenging behavior, teach new skills or a replacement behavior, and establish consequences that increase the likelihood Jimmy would demonstrate the positive behavior. Proactive or preventative strategies would involve altering the antecedents to the behavior. For example, maybe Jimmy would respond better to a written/visual prompt as opposed to a verbal preset, or maybe the use of a “first-then” phrase may be effective (“first you clear the table, then you can go play your video game”). Jimmy may also respond better when he feels he has some control, such as offering him choices which may result in him

responding more positively when he is asked to engage in undesirable tasks (“do you want to clear the table or take out the garbage?”). A key strategy would be to teach a more appropriate replacement behavior. Instead of Jimmy banging his head and yelling to communicate he doesn’t want to do something, his mother could work with him on learning to say “not now.” In the beginning this response of “not now” would be seen as more acceptable and he should be praised and this response should be reinforced and accepted. Over time, Jimmy should also be taught better coping strategies for when “not now” won’t be an acceptable answer.

*Continued, page 7*

# CARD Launches New Evidence-Based Group Social Skills Program

The social skills difficulties that are characteristic of autism spectrum disorders (ASD) often lead to problems with peers lack of social support, and increased loneliness. Furthermore, these difficulties tend to become more pronounced among adolescents on the autism spectrum as social demands increase and social interactions become more complicated to master. For adolescents, social impairments can lead to problems with friendships, romantic relationships, daily living, and vocational success (Gantman, Knapp, Orenski & Laugeson, 2011; Gillis, Callahan, Raymons, & Romanczyk, 2010). Social interventions for adolescents with ASD remain a critical area to research given the significant impact that social difficulties have on the quality of life for adolescents and young adults.

The Program for the Education and Enrichment of Relational Skills (PEERS) is a manualized social skills training intervention that was developed at the University of California, Los Angeles (Laugeson, Frankel, Gantman, Dillon, & Mogil, 2012) which offers a promising way to help adolescents with ASD address their social difficulties. This program provides concurrent parent training and adolescent skill-building sessions in a group format, and targets a variety of practical conversational, relational, and social problem-solving skills. Previous research evaluating the PEERS intervention indicates that individuals who participated in treatment showed significant social gains, which were sustained over time according to data gathered at 14-weeks follow-up, compared to individuals who had not yet received intervention (Laugeson, et al., 2012).

Beginning in early 2013, the PEERS intervention program will be offered through the Center for Autism and Related Disabilities at the University at Albany as part of a research program to further assess its effectiveness in improving social functioning for adolescents with ASD. Individuals who are eligible for this program include adolescents, ages 12-17, who have been previously diagnosed with an ASD and have social difficulties as a primary area of concern.

If you are interested in participating in this program, please contact Laura Hiruma, at [lhiruma@albany.edu](mailto:lhiruma@albany.edu). Space will be limited at parent participation is also required.

## UPCOMING PNCR EVENTS

Please visit "Upcoming Events" on our homepage at [www.pncrny.org](http://www.pncrny.org) to register for these events

### Helping Parents and School Districts Become More Effective Partners

Tuesday, February 26, 2013  
10:00am-12:00pm  
Latham, NY 12110

### IEP as a Strategic Plan for Students with Disabilities

Monday, February 4, 2013  
5:30pm-8:30pm  
Glens Falls, NY

Thursday, February 7, 2013  
5:30pm-8:30pm  
Latham, NY

Tuesday, February 26, 2013  
9:30am-12:30pm  
Latham, NY

### Impact of Early Childhood Trauma on Brain Development & Learning

Thursday, February 7, 2013  
10:00am-11:30am  
Latham, NY

### Progress Monitoring: What it Means for Students with Disabilities & What Parents Should Know

Wednesday, February 6, 2013  
10:00am-12:00pm  
Latham, NY

Tuesday, February 26, 2013  
6:00pm-8:00pm  
Latham, NY

### Preschool to School Age Special Education Services

Thursday, February 28, 2013  
Latham, NY  
6:00pm-8:00pm

### Transition to Adulthood: A Two-Part Workshop Part 2: Community Agencies

Thursday, February 28, 2013  
9:30am-12:00pm

### De-Mystifying Special Education: IEPs, 504 Plans and Response to Intervention

Friday, February 8, 2013  
9:30am-11:30am  
Saratoga Springs, NY

Thursday, March 7, 2013  
6:00pm-8:00pm  
Latham, NY

### Preparing for Your Annual Review CSE Meeting

Tuesday, February 12, 2013  
10:00am-12:00pm  
Clifton Park, NY

Monday, March 18, 2013  
10:00am-12:00pm  
Latham, NY

### Speak for Yourself! Participating in Your Own CSE Meeting

Saturday, March 9, 2013  
10:00am-12:00pm  
Latham, NY

---

# The Scoop on Individual Educational Evaluations

By: Julie Keegan, Special Education Resource Specialist

A parent's right to an Independent Educational Evaluation (IEE) is a vital procedural safeguard and advocacy tool for parents. Through the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Congress provided the right to an IEE at district expense as option for parents who disagree with an evaluation completed by a school district for special education purposes.

## What is an Independent Educational Evaluation?

An IEE is an individual evaluation of a student with a disability conducted by a qualified examiner who is chosen by the parents and paid for by the school district. Parents of an unclassified student who has been referred to the CSE also have the right to an IEE even if the student is found ineligible for classification based on the school's evaluation. In addition, the right to an IEE applies to all types of special education-related evaluations including, but not limited to: initial evaluation, psychoeducational evaluation, triennial evaluation, speech, OT, and PT evaluations, psychiatric evaluation, neuropsychological evaluation, and functional behavior assessments.

## When Can I Request an IEE?

You can request an IEE only when the school district has conducted an evaluation that you disagree with. Think of the IEE as a "second opinion"; the school district always has the first opportunity to evaluate your child in any area of known or suspected disability. Once the school district has completed the evaluation and has shared it with you, your right to an IEE is triggered.

Although there is no regulation that specifically limits the time within which you must request the IEE, it is best to request the IEE as soon as you have reviewed it and decided you disagree with the results and/or recommendations. Parents are entitled to only one IEE per year for *each* type of evaluation conducted by the school district. For example, if the district completed a speech-language evaluation and an occupational therapy evaluation, the parent would have a right to an IEE for both types of evaluations within the same year. However, the parent could not request a *second* IEE for speech or OT in the same year.

## Why Would I Want an IEE?

Common reasons a parent may disagree with the school's evaluation include the belief that the school's evaluation is inaccurate; the evaluation was not conducted properly or by a qualified professional; the evaluation was not thorough enough or did not look at all areas of disability; the evaluation is not consistent with student's performance; and/or the evaluation is not consistent with prior evaluations. These concerns can often be resolved by having an independent, qualified professional conduct an evaluation.

In addition, most independent evaluators will make recommendations for specific interventions that will be beneficial to the student. Although the district does not have to agree with or adopt the conclusions and

Recommendations of the independent evaluator, the CSE must consider the evaluation when developing and/or revising the IEP. Having an independent opinion may also assist parents in better understanding their child's strengths, weaknesses and needs so parents can more meaningfully participate in the development of an IEP.

## How Do I Request an IEE?

You must request an IEE in writing. You should identify which evaluation you disagree with and request an IEE at district expense. If you know who you want to complete the evaluation, you should include his or her name and contact information. The district can ask you why you disagree with its evaluation and you may respond, but you are not required to provide a response. Sample IEE request letters can be found on the PNCR website at <http://www.pncrny.org/index.php?s=4&b=7> and in the publication *Special Education in Plain Language* which can be found at <http://www.nyspecialtaskforce.com/Staff.html>.

## What Happens After I Request an IEE?

Upon receiving your written request for an IEE, the school district has two options:

1. The district can agree to fund the IEE or
2. The district can initiate an impartial hearing to defend the appropriateness of their evaluation. This means that the school district would have to demonstrate to an impartial hearing officer that the school's evaluation met the requirements of all relevant laws. Typically, school districts will not choose this option because the district may believe the information gained from the IEE would be helpful and/or an impartial hearing may cost much more than the IEE.

Procedural Safeguards and state and federal regulations clearly provide that the school **may not unreasonably delay** either providing the independent educational evaluation at public expense or filing a due process complaint notice to request a hearing to defend the public evaluation. If the District is refusing to choose an option, parents may contact their Regional Associate in the Quality Assurance Bureau at the NY State Education Department for assistance (<http://www.p12.nysed.gov/specialed/quality/regassoc.htm>) or pursue other procedural safeguards such as filing a complaint with the State Education Department or filing for an impartial hearing. However, in most instances the school district and a parent will be able to resolve the issue without resorting to more formal remedies.

*Continued, page 8*

---

# Active Listening: A Valuable Skill for Productive CSE Meetings & Beyond

By: Heather Loukmas, Special Education Resource Specialist



We all think we know what the act of “listening” is but can you honestly say that you are a “good listener”? Being a “good” or “active” listener can have a positive impact on so many aspects of our lives from marriages, to work relationships to relationships between parents and schools. Being an active listener can also help reduce and resolve conflict in a variety of situations. Research has shown that a conflict typically arises when parties don’t listen to and understand each other. Active listening can help to build and maintain relationships. If those we interact with perceive us as good listeners, this will strengthen their desire in wanting to establish a lasting and positive relationship and it can help us make better decisions. If we actively listen in conversations we are engaged in, we can be better informed and prepared to make the right

choices we need to make in life.

The beginning of CSE annual review season seems like the perfect time to review some of the critical elements of being an active listener. There will no doubt be numerous conversations between parents and school districts over the next few months that will test the limits of all parties involved but if both sides engage in this dialogue as active listeners, there is a high probability that these conversations will include less conflict, more positive relationship development and ultimately better decisions and outcomes for the students who are at the heart of these conversations.

Being an active listener is admittedly not an easy task. In order to be effective at active listening, a conscious decision has to be made to not only hear the words that others are speaking but most importantly, understand them. To be effective at active listening, you cannot allow yourself to become distracted, either physically by noises, sounds or activity around you or subconsciously by tuning out what the other person is saying and focusing on your own rebuttal or point of view. Sometimes during CSE meetings, things can be said that may be difficult to follow or understand but is important to not lose focus or drift away from the conversation. Asking questions to get clarification when something is being said that you don’t understand is an important component of active listening.

In CSE meetings, parents and schools typically come to the table with specifics about what they want to accomplish at the meeting. Employing the following 10 skills of active listening can ensure both sides leave the meeting feeling satisfied that the result is what they had hoped for. It can initially be difficult if only one party is actively listening, however, in time, others may witness the positive benefits of active listening and take steps to become better listeners themselves:

- 1) *Be legitimately interested:* drop whatever you were or are doing or thinking about and focus on the person speaking. Look at them directly. Put yourself in the speaker’s place and try to make his or her problem or issue your own. Pay attention to the speaker’s body language and nonverbal cues as well.
- 2) *Be honest about your time:* if you do not have enough time to devote to the speaker or the conversation that needs to take place, be upfront and honest about this. Apologize and plan for another meeting at a time when adequate time can be devoted to the conversation. This lets the speaker know that what they have to say is important and that you want to be able to devote your full attention to the matter. This approach is better than pushing forward with a conversation that you won’t be able to fully listen to or understand which can result in increased conflict.
- 3) *Accept the speaker’s point of view:* Well, at least until he or she is done speaking! Active listening doesn’t mean we have to relinquish our positions but it does require us to be open-minded, to hear and make an effort to understand other points of view. Some of us feel the need to get out point across and a word in for every sentence spoken. However, even if you disagree with the speaker’s position, allow him or her to finish his though fully before voicing your opinion or disagreement. Think VERY CAREFULLY about whether the situation truly calls for you to state your disagreement at that time.
- 4) *Use body language, eye contact, and repetition:* Using body language and eye contact in the right way can have a positive impact on the speaker. To show the speaker that you are truly listening to him or her, lean slightly forward in your chair, make consistent eye contact (but do not stare!) and make verbal noises such as “mm-hmm” or “yes” or “I see”. It may also be helpful to repeat what was said. This has the dual effect of not only showing the speaker that you were indeed listening to them but can help you process and understand the message they are trying to convey.
- 5) *Go beyond words:* people who are good active listeners often go beyond just the words that are being spoken by thinking about the *why* and *how* of the words that are being spoken. Ask questions to yourself such as “why did this person want to speak with me today?” What is the tone of the speaker’s voice, do you hear things such as resentment, jealousy, anger, and frustration in their voice? Once you know the speaker’s motivation, you can react more appropriately to them.
- 6) *Get rid of distractions:* whether environmental such as closing the door or turning off your phone, or internal such as putting other thoughts out of your mind, focus on the speaker!

*Continued, next page*

## Behavior - continued

Lastly, Jimmy's mother should manage the consequences of Jimmy's behavior so he is rewarded for showing positive behavior, and she does not inadvertently reward his challenging behavior. By sending him to his room and finishing the chore for him, she reinforced the challenging behavior. Therefore, a more effective approach may be to have him take space to calm down, but then when he returns he is still expected to complete the chore. When attempting to understand any challenging behaviors, it is imperative that we question whether the challenging behavior is due to a "skill-deficit" as opposed to an unwillingness to not perform the more appropriate behavior (i.e., a performance-deficit). For example, if anytime Johnny is provided with negative, constructive criticism he reacts aggressively, it may be that he has not gained the skill of being able to accept negative feedback. Therefore, the interventions chosen should be focused on teaching him this skill.

By engaging in the process of analyzing the antecedents and consequences surrounding challenging behavior, and determining what might be the purpose of one's behavior, what results is a set of strategies that prevents challenging behaviors from occurring, teaches more effective ways of behaving, and improves the quality of life for the child and his/her family.

### **The ABC's of Challenging Behavior**

A= Antecedent, events that occur before a challenging behavior  
B= Behavior, the challenging behavior  
C= Consequence, events that immediately follow the challenging behavior

#### Steps to Address Challenging Behaviors:

- 1) Identify antecedents and consequences surrounding the challenging behavior
- 2) Take a best guess as to the "purpose" or "function" of the behavior
- 3) Change the antecedents (e.g., provide choices, use visual schedules, presets, "first-then" statements), teach new behaviors, and change the consequences (e.g., provide positive reinforcement for replacement behaviors)

#### References:

Hieneman, M., Childs, K., & Sergay, J. (2006). *Parenting with positive behavior support: A practical guide to resolving your child's difficult behavior*. Brookes Publishing: Baltimore.

The ARC of North Carolina. (2012). *Functional behavior assessment and positive behavioral support*. [www.arcnc.org](http://www.arcnc.org).

## Active Listening - continued

- 7) *Avoid planning your counterarguments while the speaker is talking:* we all do this and it is difficult not to. There is a natural response to being formulating your retaliation as soon as something that you disagree with or don't like is said. As hard as it is may be, try to mentally record your disagreement until the speaker is done and hold off on a response until the full message is delivered. Waiting for the speaker to complete their thoughts not only ensures that your response is appropriate and thorough but shows them that you are interested in listening to them and understanding their position.
- 8) *Be aware of your history with the speaker:* This can be particularly important in a CSE meeting. Similar to tip number 5, go beyond the words and think about how your history with the speaker may impact what is being said. Is there a potential for conflict? Sympathy? Fear? Anger? If you have awareness and understanding of the history involved, this can help you better understand from where the speaker is coming.
- 9) *Ask questions:* This seems like such an easy one but SO important to active listening! Conflict often resolves when parties don't listen to each other but also when they don't understand or misunderstand what is being said to them. If something is not clear, ask questions for clarification. This shows the speaker that you are actively listening and making an effort to understand their message. Be careful to not ask questions in a way that represents your point of view or disagrees with their point of view, simply ask questions to help you understand the message of the speaker.
- 10) *Watch and learn from other "good listeners":* we all know people in our lives that are good listeners. These are likely good friends or colleagues we look up to. The next time you have a conversation with them, pay attention to how and what they do. There is a reason you think they are good listeners so why not take some cues from those who do it well!

Want to learn more about active listening for conflict resolution? Join us for a workshop on February 26 *Helping Parents and School Districts Become More Effective Partners* from 10:00am-12:00pm at Wildwood Programs in Latham, NY. Visit the "Upcoming Events" section of our website for more information. [www.pncrny.org](http://www.pncrny.org).

(Information for this article came from The website [PersonaDev](http://PersonaDev.com) offers [10 Tips to Be a Better Listener](http://PersonaDev.com))

---

## *Independent Educational Evaluations - continued*

### Who Chooses the Evaluator?

Parents have the right to select the independent evaluator. The only restriction on this right is that the chosen professional has the appropriate qualifications (that is, they are licensed, certified or otherwise qualified) to conduct the type of evaluation you are seeking. For example, the person conducting an independent speech and language evaluation would need to be a licensed speech pathologist. Sometimes school districts will provide parents with a list of evaluators for the IEE. Parents can choose one of these professionals but they also have the right to choose a qualified person who is NOT on the list.

### Can My School District Limit the Amount it will Pay for an IEE?

The school district is required to pay up to the "going rate" in the geographic area where the school is located. For example, the local rate for a psychoeducational evaluation might be \$1800- \$2200. If the parent wants an IEE by an expert in another state who charges much more, the school district is not required to pay the higher rate. However, the district cannot insist that it will pay only \$1200. Typically the district will contact the professional conducting the IEE and negotiate a rate and contract.

### Choosing the Right Evaluator for Your Child

Parents should be careful in choosing the right evaluator for their child's IEE – not all evaluators are the same. In addition to having the correct qualifications, you should be sure that the professional you select understands that you are looking for a **thorough** and **objective** assessment of your child. For most evaluations, it is also very important that the evaluator observes your child in the school environment. Many kids act and perform differently in a one- on-one situation outside of school than they do in the classroom or in the school cafeteria. Because the purpose of the IEE is to address concerns at school, observations at school are essential.

It is also important to find out if the independent evaluator is willing to make specific recommendations for interventions at school to address areas of weakness and capitalize on strengths. Likewise, it is usually vital that the evaluator is willing to participate in the CSE meeting at which the evaluation is discussed. Participation can be in person or by phone, but in both cases, ample time should be set aside for the evaluator to explain his or her findings, support the recommendations in the evaluation report, and address any concerns and questions from other CSE members. Without the professional input of the independent evaluator, parents may find themselves unable to explain or support the findings and recommendations of the evaluation report.

## *Participating in CSE Meetings - continued*

Before the meeting parents/teachers should ask students:

- What do I want to learn or work on?
- What are my special concerns for the school year?
- How do I learn best?
- What do I need to be successful?  
What would make learning easier for me?
- What positive information about myself can I share at the meeting?
- What are your goals for the future after high school?

There are a variety of ways that students can best advocate for themselves in an IEP meeting. They can:

- Come prepared with questions, concerns and either read them at the meeting or have someone else read for them
- Create a power point presentation or use a video presentation to describe themselves
- Speak at the beginning, for a bit or come in toward the end as the meeting is nearing its completion.

There are many resources and web sites available to parents, students and teachers that can help in creating the best way for students to participate effectively in their IEP meetings. These include:

<http://www.imdetermined.org>  
[www.nichcy.org](http://www.nichcy.org) search: Technical Assistance Guide  
[www.pacer.org/parent/php/php-c149.pdf](http://www.pacer.org/parent/php/php-c149.pdf)  
[www.tslp.org/docs/TipsForParentsSelfAdvocacy.pdf](http://www.tslp.org/docs/TipsForParentsSelfAdvocacy.pdf)

Helping your child or student find a voice of their own in their IEP meeting is the beginning of them learning how to advocate for themselves.

To learn more about how students can effectively advocate for themselves in their own CSE meetings, plan to attend our workshop "Speak for Yourself: Participating in Your Own CSE Meeting" on Saturday, March 9, from 10:00am-12:00pm. Visit the "Upcoming Events" section of our website at [www.pncrny.org](http://www.pncrny.org) for program details and registration information. This workshop is for parents AND their transition-age children!

Resources used for this article include: [www.pacer.org](http://www.pacer.org), and [nichcy.org](http://nichcy.org)