

POLICY ADVISORY

Policy Foundations Related to Gaining Emotional Well-Being through Parent to Parent Support

Overview

It makes good sense for laws and other policies to support families to be emotionally strong. Strong families usually are more able to care for their children with disabilities. But only a few federal laws authorize state and local agencies to offer programs to support families' emotional well-being. The law that addresses your rights in early intervention and preschool services is the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

Beach Center on Disability

Making a Sustainable Difference in Quality of Life



Federal Laws

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (www.ed.gov; go to Office of Special Education mini-site)

Early Intervention – IDEA assists states to offer programs for infants and toddlers (birth to three years of age). The part of the law that creates these early intervention programs is known as “Part C.” 20 U.S.C. Sec. 1431.

Part C requires an IFSP – individualized family services plan – for each child and family. The IFSP must state the family’s concerns and the supports and services necessary to meet the family’s capacity to meet their child’s needs. It also must state the family’s resources, priorities, and concerns related to their child’s development. Finally, it must state the services the family will receive. 20 U.S.C. Sec. 1436.

These services can include family training, counseling, and social work. 20 U.S.C. Sec. 1436.

- Family training and counseling includes services by social workers, psychologists, and other qualified personnel to assist the family to understand their child’s needs and enhance their child’s development.
- Social work services includes individual and group family counseling.

Preschool – Another part of IDEA assists states to offer pre-school and school-age programs (called “Part B” programs). 20 U.S.C. Sec. 1419. Each child who has exited from early intervention services (called Part C) programs and entered preschool must have an “IEP” – individualized education program. 20 U.S.C. Sec. 1414(d).

The IEP describes the nature of the special education the child will receive and the “related services” that are necessary to enable the child to benefit from special education services. You will have to satisfy your child’s preschool that your child needs the services. You will have a chance to do this because you have the right to be a member of the team of people who develop your child’s IEP. The other team members will be preschool staff.

Although all related services benefit the child, some may benefit the child’s family. 20 U.S.C. Sec. 1402(26). Those are:

- Parent counseling and training offered by qualified social workers, psychologists, or other qualified personnel.
- Psychological services, including counseling for parents by qualified personnel.
- Social work services, including counseling with the child and family by qualified personnel.

You may find that early intervention programs are far more family-centered than pre-school programs. The reason is that IDEA requires the early intervention programs to develop a “family service” plan (the IFSP), but IDEA does not require pre-school programs to do that. Instead, it requires pre-school programs to develop an “education program” for the child. It also provides that

your child must “need” related services in order to benefit from special education. 20 U.S.C. 1414(d).

Tips for Taking Action to Secure a Parent to Parent Program

- Learn whether the early intervention and preschool programs offer a Parent to Parent. If they do, find out how you can enroll in it.
- If the early intervention or preschool program does not provide Parent to Parent, tell its staff that the kind of parent counseling that you would find the most helpful would be a match from an experienced parent. Let them know that the “lived 24/7 experience” of other parents who have “walked in your shoes” is the qualification that you think is most important in your receiving services from “qualified personnel” (remember that this is the term used in the law).
- Emphasize how your own emotional well-being helps you support your child’s development and also enables you to partner with the early intervention and preschool staff as an empowered decision-maker. Tell them you believe that supporting your child’s development and being an educational partner are directly tied to ensuring that your child will benefit from special education services.
- Consider the fact that it may be easier to work through local or state parent organizations to find a parent match than to convince your early intervention or preschool program to start a Parent to Parent service if they do not currently do so.

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