

Getting the school to focus in on the unique needs of your child.....

When a child's disability is impacting her education, parents strive to act in the best interest of their child and ensure that the school understands their child, her disability, and how it affects her ability to learn and progress in the educational environment. A fundamental step in doing this is to request an evaluation to see if your child would benefit from special education services and supports. Ask for the evaluation in writing. If you have already had an initial evaluation, ask for a reevaluation (if you disagree with the initial evaluation, you can ask for an Independent Evaluation at school cost—more to come on that in the next article). Not a phone call, not a conversation, put it down in writing. At some point, you may have to prove that you made the request.

Your request can be as simple as: “Dear (Name of principal), We are the parent(s) of (name of student). We are concerned that our child's disability is impacting his/her progress at school. He/She is struggling with (give the information specific to your child. Examples are: difficulty with reading, inability to make friends, high anxiety in coming to school, unable to follow/understand directions, inability to focus, inability to reduce sensory overload—the list varies based upon the child's disability.) Please schedule evaluations/reevaluations to see how his/her disability related needs can be addressed in the educational environment. Please tell me/us in writing who will be performing the evaluation so that I/we may give our consent as soon as possible. Thank-you.”

Please note that if your child is having behavior related issues that interfere with his/her progress at school; you should also request a functional behavioral analysis as part of the evaluation. This should result in a Positive Behavioral Intervention Plan being put in place for your child and attached to the IEP. This will outline for the administrators, teachers, and staff how to intervene on behalf of your child when behavior issues arise.

An evaluation and follow-up meeting to review the evaluation is an excellent opportunity for the school administrators and personnel to focus in on the specific needs of your child and then create supports and services to be put into place to enable your child to make progress in his/her education. If your child is found eligible for services, the team (which includes the parent(s)) will create an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) which is a legal contract as to what services and supports will be provided to enable your child to reach the goals and objectives as stated in the IEP. This is the fundamental, basic, first step in getting your child's educational needs met at school.

Attorney Kristin Totten is a Parent 2 Parent board member who opened her boutique special education law practice, Children's Advocacy Resources for Education in 2010. C.A.R.E. is solely dedicated to helping children with disabilities learn to grow. You can learn more at www.kristintotten.com