

Smoothing the Bumps in Moving to a New School: Tips for a Child With Special Needs

Changing schools is often daunting for the child and for the parent. If the child has special needs, a change to a new school can be downright terrifying!

Here are some tips for reducing the level of terror and anxiety, and smoothing the bumps when your child is about to make a school change:

VISIT:

While it may seem like a “no brainer,” it’s still worth mentioning. Take time to visit the school. You know your child, so you will know best if you should visit the school first and then take your child, or if you can plan the first visit together. Contact the new school as early in the process as possible and speak with personnel in the Principal’s office. Know that the folks in the head office might direct you to someone in the special education department. That’s okay. In fact it might be better.

If you believe it’s necessary, don’t be afraid to ask for more than one visit. Consider visiting at different times of the day or different days of the week. That way, your child and you can get a clear idea of how the new school “feels.”

SHARE INFORMATION:

Adequate planning to meet your child’s unique needs will require you to share information about your child. Be prepared to share copies of the most recent Individual Education Plan (IEP) or 504 Plan. If possible, provide copies of the documents to the school before your visit. If you choose to withhold information it may slow the process and delay the provision of the supports and services your child needs in order to be successful in the new school.

DESIGNATE A CONTACT:

When you meet personnel in the new school be sure to arrange a designated contact person (sometimes referred to as an IEP or 504 Case Manager or Teacher of Record, “TOR”). This will be the person you will try to reach first when you need to contact the school to share important information about your child. This should also be the person from the school who will contact you when necessary.

Once you have arranged for a consistent contact person, monitor their effectiveness. Don’t be afraid to speak up if the person isn’t following through on the communication you agreed to initially. The bottom-line; trust your “gut.” Never be afraid to speak out if you feel that something isn’t going right.

ASK QUESTIONS:

Do not be afraid to ask questions. It’s common to resist speaking out or asking questions when you’re in a new situation and dealing with new people. Do the best you can to overcome your fear and ask those questions. Again, the more open you can be when meeting personnel from the new school, the better the communication will be.

By asking questions and providing information about your child, you are letting the school know that you expect to be involved and active in planning for your child’s success, and there’s nothing wrong with that.