Navigating the School System

This section specifically addresses the topic of obtaining services in the classroom. Some families we have worked with have run into issues with IEPs, special education teams, etc. This section includes suggestions from families and others on how to best navigate this system.

Navigating the school system

♦ “Being well informed, developing a good relationship with [the school] all-around, and approaching the situation formally. That is, I made an appointment to meet, and appealed to their professional pride - I went with the assumption that they would find this situation an unusual and interesting challenge - and they did.” - Parent w/ Secondary School Student

Resources

Special Ed Parent Organizations

♦ “Usually most public school systems have a Special Ed Parent Organization. They usually meet nightly once a month (has to do with education evaluation). They are usually terrific resources that are in your community and they know who to talk to.” – Parent w/ 14-year-old

Special Needs Team

♦ “The team leader was superb, and instantly got her head around what was a new condition to her. She came up with a list of potential difficulties, and possible strategies to cope with them (for example a substitute teacher walking in and not introducing themselves). We decided to wait and see how my son coped before implementing anything that would single him out - and as it happened he coped fine, and it was never needed. It was a great relief though to know that there was a team of supportive and imaginative people to turn to if he was struggling.” - Parent w/ Secondary School Student

Education Programs

What are they?*

♦ They are plans or programs developed by the school for children who have a disability identified under the law. The Individualized Education Program (IEP) provides specialized instruction and related services, while the 504 plan provides accommodations to ensure the student’s academic success. Both should be updated annually to best accommodate the child as he/she develops.

*Information from by https://www.washington.edu/doit/Stem/articles?52

IEP

What an IEP could include, as stated by a Parent w/ 1st Grade Student:
1. In-service at the beginning of the school year provided to staff
2. Check-in meeting approximately six weeks into the school year to assess transition; after winter break
3. Designated adult during evacuation/emergency drills
4. Visual familiar adult contact maintained during field trips
5. Release from school with designated pick up individual
6. Pictures of staff sent home for familiarity
7. Typical daily schedule sent home
8. Pictures of classmates who are not on Do Not Photograph list
9. Name plates on tables/desks
10. Self-regulation strategies/anxiety strategies: gum/candy, water bottle, social stories, cuing for ways to calm down, thermometer, color indicator for emotional regulation, timer, face/emotion cuing, peace corner, finish later folder, oral sensory aides-pencil toppers, chewy bracelets,
11. Social interaction support during unstructured play opportunities
12. Incentive chart, as needed.

504
- “I would definitely advise looking into a 504 plan.” - Parent who works in the school system
- “My child has a 504 for mild autism but not prosopagnosia. I have never been able to get an official diagnosis of prosopagnosia, so it is not included in the 504, but incorporated through the other official diagnosis.” - Parent

Meeting with teachers
- “During middle school I started meeting with teachers as a group. I would bring in as many articles, ‘face to face,’ medical journals, articles with me. I am not able to answer all questions and would write them down and email any of the many resources and try to get the teachers’ questions answered. I now have meetings up with the high school, it is harder to do a group meeting but I use email most of the time.” – Parent w/ 14-year-old, and works in the school system
- “I found it helpful to meet with the head of the primary school, his year teacher, and the Special Needs leader in secondary school, and talk about him and the situations that have arisen in the past. I think if people are to go out of their way to help and think for your child in an already overstretched working life, they need to be on board and really understand. And personal experience is so helpful here I have found.” - Parent w/ Secondary School Student
- “All staff teaching our son that year are ‘reminded’ of his failure to recognize faces at the start of each year and special training for all staff is given. I have given a list of websites and reading matter. Also several meetings with Head of Year and Form tutor. If all else fails, our son just says ‘sorry but who are
you?' The staff member then remembers the training and everything is sorted.” - Parent w/ Secondary School Student

♦ “Before they have started working with him, I have sent each of them an email or talked with them about his prosopagnosia. I have explained it to them, offered them sources of more information (online) if they wanted to read more, and offered ways that they might see his prosopagnosia impact him in their class. I’ve also offered suggestions for what I thought might help him and offered to help in any way that I could to make those happen (like making class nametags). The teachers have implemented the suggestions on their own though and haven’t asked me to support in that way.” - Parent w/ 10-year-old

♦ “I provide an in-service to all those that interact with [my daughter] (librarian, gym teacher, classroom teacher, therapists etc.) before school starts... I made it very professional and treated the in-service as an opportunity to have the staff ask questions before they meet [my daughter].... They don’t often see the effects of prosopagnosia, or see her behavior as result of something else. Discussion about the targeted behaviors and reminders of how prosopagnosia can affect these behaviors have to occur.... In addition to the in servicing, I have a 6-week team follow up meeting after the start of school and after the holiday break written into her IEP. Parent-teacher conferences also occur in the fall and spring, so all together, I have regular team meetings scheduled for the year. This is on top of routine communication or additional meetings at my request.” – Parent w/ First Grader

Advice

♦ Uncooperative teachers
  o “I find that if a teacher... does not want to learn, or try to help out the student, or [address] your concerns, go up the chain. Teacher, supervisor, principal, Special Ed Department head, superintendent, State...By the time you have the state involved, you will get [the help you need].” –Parent w/ 14-year-old
  o “We had an appointment with the one staff member not on board and when this did not make progress had another one with a senior staff member there to ‘bridge the gap’ and find a solution. We have always been calm, polite and willing to see others point of view.” – Parent w/ Secondary School Student

♦ Be sure you and your child are willing to go the extra mile
  o “Be proactive and involved parent. Be a team player in a school setting. Model respect for teachers and administration for your child and respect for your child to teachers and administration. Empathize with teacher's or your child’s frustration, but be careful of over simplifying a situation and blaming one person for a problem.” – Parent
  o “Parents need to understand that they will have more work to help their child in this area than other parents. Parents who are seen by
teachers or administration as parents who simply want to blame others or a label for their child’s difficulties will be met with roadblocks and resistance. Parents who show teachers/Administrators that they will work toward the solution and they expect their child to work toward a solution, usually get more accommodations and response." – Parent

- Do not expect the school, administration or other students to do all the accommodating or change. The child with prosopagnosia should be expected to make an effort (that is appropriate for them) to adjust to the world around them." - Parent

♦ Educate yourself as much as possible.
  - “You’ll have to convince people that this is a real thing…. I think this is especially true for a disorder that’s invisible. You would never guess that this was going on with our son if you just looked at him and didn’t know his story. Some of his behaviors, especially related to his anxiety, would just seem like him acting out or trying to get out of doing something he didn’t like.” - Parent w/ 10-year-old

♦ “The ‘TEAM’ approach it is a wonderful way to keep everyone in check. You have to meet yearly, and it is the law. It is a legal document and everything in it has to be done. So if you have it written with your concerns…field trips, lunch tables, classrooms, movies etc… It is clearly identified for each teacher to read and use.” –Parent w/ 14-year-old

**DISCLAIMER:** There is no research to confirm or deny any benefits to you or your child that may result from the information included in Project ProsoFamily. The University of Minnesota does not endorse anything on this page. It is simply words of wisdom from individuals and parents based on their personal experiences for you to adapt as you see fit.