

Start The School Year Out Right: A Guide To Meeting With Your Child's New Teacher

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Summer vacation is almost over and the first day of school for many children is on the horizon. The majority of children (and teachers) experience difficulty transitioning from the carefree days of summer to the rigid structure of school. Children with special needs and learning disabilities are even more likely to exhibit difficulty with the school year. As a parent, it is your duty to advocate for your child in order to ensure that the academic year starts smoothly and that the child's needs are being met.

I recommend that the parents establish a meeting with the child's teacher and any ancillary staff that has an impact on his or her academic success (special education teachers, social worker, speech/language therapist, occupational therapist). In addition, it is always recommended that you have your child's outside therapy team be part of this meeting in order to share information and develop effective strategies. Five specific goals of this initial meeting are listed below:

Meeting Goals

1. It is important that all individuals working with the child be made aware of the child's issues as well as what has worked/not worked in the past. It is vital that last year's teacher have an opportunity to share information with parents about the challenges from the previous year as well as what solutions she has found helpful in the classroom.
2. Any outside therapist needs to be present at the meeting to share how things have been going over the summer. What has the child been working on as part of therapy, what goals were achieved, and what goals were not met. This will help establish expectations for the child.
3. Creation of specific, attainable, and measurable goals is important. If a child is getting out of his seat every five minutes it would not be realistic for his new teacher to expect him to sit for hours on end. We might set up an initial goal so that the child is expected to remain seated for ten minutes. Once that is achieved with regularity we move the goal up to fifteen minutes, and so on.
4. Establish a frequent communication system between parents and teachers. The goal of this is to not bombard teachers with constant emails/phone calls but to be able to have constant communication between all parties so that parents can help organize the daily assignments and ensure that all work is completed.
5. Identify that everyone is on the same team. The goal of this meeting is not to burden the academic staff with more work but to help develop solutions to ensure that the child's needs are met.