



Back to School ... it doesn't have to be so hard

York Region District School Board Vice Principal shares her tips on utilizing your resources and making the most of your child's team at school.

Another school year has started along with all the joys and heartaches of watching your child grow. For some parents and their children, this school year will be particularly challenging. Perhaps the process began last when your child was put on a growth plan and brought to an in-school team meeting. You began to realize that your child was struggling and wondered what lay ahead. The first thing to do is to establish a strong partnership between yourself and your child's teacher. Regular and ongoing communication is vital to a strong relationship. Writing in your child's agenda is a good way to begin. Attending Meet the Teacher night and the parent teacher conferences are vital to establishing this rapport. If your child is struggling at school, meet with the teacher as soon as possible to share any possible factors which may influence his/her learning. These may be physical factors (medical health, vision, etc.), intellectual factors (thinking processes, etc.), educational factors (strengths and needs), cultural factors (customs, attitudes, expectations), emotional factors (motivation, interests) or social factors (interpersonal relationships). The teacher may suggest bringing your child to an in-school team meeting. This means that your child will meet with the special education team and the principal to discuss the challenges your child is having and to suggest possible plans of action. After the meeting, the teacher or special education teacher (SERT) will contact you to discuss the plans and, of course, they will want your input. The next step may be an academic assessment. This assessment is completed by the SERT and takes approximately 4 – 6 hours. When completed, the SERT will share this information with you and with the teacher. Depending on the results, the SERT may ask for your signed permission to share this information with the school psychologist. The school psychologist may ask permission to complete a psychological assessment on your child. This is an academic assessment that is more in-depth than the one the SERT completed. Upon completion of this assessment, the school psychologist will meet with you to share the results. At that time, you will discuss possible next steps for your child. After this meeting, you may want to take the time to think about the next steps, discuss them with your doctor or the child's teacher. The next steps could involve identifying your child as a special education student which will ensure that he/she gets the support that they need. This support could be resource withdrawal where your child receives help when he/she needs it or it may be recommended that they be placed in a student support centre for 51% of the day. The student support centre is a small classroom (maximum 15 students) with a special education teacher. Students receive more individualized programming in this classroom. If you do decide to identify your child as a special education student, you will need to attend an IPRC (identification, placement review committee) meeting. Your own SERT will be there along with your school's administrator and a visiting administrator. The identification will be explained to you and the papers are signed to ensure that your child will get the support he/she needs. Shortly after the IPRC meeting, an Individual Education Plan (IEP) will be created. This is a legal document which outlines your child's strengths and needs and the support he/she will receive. Your input is crucial to the success of the IEP. You will be asked to give your input and it will be entered into the IEP. The IEP is a work in progress and changes as your child's needs change. It will be sent home to you each term and your input is always welcomed. Remember, the most important thing you can do is to communicate regularly with your child's school. No problem is too small to share with your child's teacher. Regular and on-going communication is vital to your child's success. Ask questions, share strategies, ask for suggestions and share this information, if appropriate, with your child. Work together with the school to ensure a happy and successful education for your child!

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