

Your child's education

"Your job as the parent of a child with autism," begins Heidi Mizell, a parent mentor and the Autism Delaware™ resource coordinator, "is to advocate on behalf of your child. Where autism has limited your child in life, you want to create ability and possibility. And you can do this through education."

You can help create the best education possible for your child through the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. IDEA ensures that each child with a disability in the U.S. receives the educational services he or she needs to reach a reasonable level of independence and self-sufficiency in life. In Delaware, state and public agencies provide these federally mandated services through early intervention, special education, and related services. Infants and toddlers (birth–2 years of age) with disabilities and their families receive early intervention services under IDEA, Part C. And children and youth (3–21 years of age) receive special education and related services under IDEA, Part B.

In January 2008, IDEA added language regarding students with autism spectrum disorders (ASDs). Because students with ASDs have unique educational needs, each individualized education program (IEP) must be developed around the specific student's individualized needs. To this end, the IEP team should create a program with these core areas in mind:

- the student's need for improved verbal and communication skills
- the student's skill with social interaction
- the student's sensitivity to environmental stimuli
- the student's response to change
- the student's ability to modify repetitive behavior and movements and the need for positive behavioral interventions
- the need for a functional behavioral assessment (FBA) that matches the intensity level of the student's repetitive behavior and movements

"Ideally, all interventions should be presented as an educational need," write Melvin L. Morse, M.D., F.A.A.P., and Sue Moniz, R.N., in *IEP Planning and Educational Recommendations for Children with Asperger's and High Functioning Autism*. "It is the responsibility of the parents to educate and convince the school district that [their] child has unique educational needs."

Contact Autism Delaware for more information or help with your child's IEP. In northern Delaware, call Heidi Mizell at (302) 224-6020, ext. 205. Or send an email to heidi.mizell@delautism.org. In southern Delaware, contact Dafne Carnright at (302) 644-3410. Or email her at dafne.carnright@delautism.org.

Your parental rights

Do you remember that little booklet your child's individualized education program team (or IEP team) has been offering you at every IEP meeting?

It's called **Procedural Safeguards**. According to Dafne Carnright, a parent mentor and the Autism Delaware southern Delaware service coordinator, you should keep a copy and read it (despite the going joke that reading it will help you fall asleep). Make sure you have the most recent edition, dated May 2012; you can tell by the date on the front. Then, become familiar with it because it describes your parental rights as established by the Delaware State Code and Delaware's Administrative Code.

For example, did you ever wonder how to proceed if you don't agree with a portion of the IEP presented by your child's school? The booklet can help you understand your options by explaining your rights. Here are a few basics:

- The child has a right to a free, appropriate public education (FAPE) designed to meet his or her specific needs.
- Parents are a part of the child's IEP team; therefore, parents are part of the decision-making process and have the right to give input and ask questions. Parents can also invite others of their choosing (such as an aunt, therapist, or advocate) to their child's IEP meetings.
- Parents have the right to take the IEP home and review it for 10 days before signing it. Parents also have the right to sign "agree" or "don't agree" on the IEP document.
- Parents have the right to request an IEP meeting at any time.
- Parents have the right to observe their children's educational programs, which means parents can observe their children's classrooms and their time spent in the community. Usually, parents need to request this time in advance.



Helping People and Families Affected by Autism

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Your child's education (continued)

- Parents have the right to request that a psycho-educational evaluation be completed by the school, and the school has to pay for the tests. If parents don't agree with the evaluation, they have the right to request an independent evaluation, and the school has to pay for this evaluation also—unless the school district wants to take legal action to prove that its evaluation was appropriate.
- Parents have the right to ask that the evaluation scores be presented in ways they can understand, such as standard scores, percentile ranks, and grade and age equivalents. The evaluator can help with this item.

For more on parental rights, read *Individualized education program: What you may not know—but should*, by Marie-Anne Aghazadian, executive director of Parent Information Center (PIC) of Delaware, Inc. This article can be downloaded from the Autism Delaware website—www.delautism.org—under Autism Resources, Learning Links, and Autism Articles.

You know your child depends on you. And you are your child's best advocate. So, if you don't have a copy of **Procedural Safeguards**, check out the actual code it's based on. You can find it on the State of Delaware website at <http://regulations.delaware.gov/AdminCode/title14/900/926.shtml#TopOfPage>.



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