

COMMUNITY SUPPORT

**Abilities Workshop, Inc.** | AbilitiesWorkshop.com

**National Programs 407-951-6117**

Providing resources and workshops for Parents, Pastors and Teachers to help children with Autism and other special needs be their best. Programs include: Diagnosis Bootcamp, Transition Guidance, Support for Families In Crisis, As well as Current Techniques & support while navigating medical, educational and social options.



**Spectrum Autism Support Group** | Atl-spectrum.com

**2997 Main St. Duluth, 770-239-6630**

Spectrum provides support, education and resources for individuals and families impacted by autism. Support groups, camps (day camps and overnight), Respite, social skills groups, family events and community education and training are services provided.



**Not Your Average Autism Mom** | notyouraverageautismmom.com

**Serving Families Nationally, info@notyouraverageautismmom.com**

We provide training, resources, and support helping parents raising an autistic child navigate their unique parenting journey. We host a weekly podcast, publish a Let's Talk Autism newsletter, and have a private membership that includes coaching and community



**TACA Georgia Chapter** | tacanow.org

**Serving Atlanta Families, 949-640-4401**

The Autism Community in Action (TACA) provides education, support and empowerment to families and individuals affected by autism to enrich their lives. We believe the future is not defined for individuals affected by autism and with your help, hope and improved outcomes are possible.



**Together We Care** | togetherwecare.org

**Serving Families in Georgia, 770-630-3786**

Together We Care provides resource navigation for families supporting a loved one with a disability. We are your one-stop-shop for understanding resources such as pre-K programs, Katie Beckett, Medicaid, school advocacy, respite funding, NOW/COMP waivers, supported employment, and independent housing.



**WheelChariot** | www.wheelchariot.io

**Serving Southeast Region, (678) 730-4778**

We rate business accessibility for those with physical, cognitive, developmental, hearing, and visual disabilities and their caretakers. Review features like parking, bathrooms, and staff interactions. Connect with us and stay tuned for our upcoming app!



INTERVENTION (BEHAVIOR SUPPORT)

**Springbrook Autism Behavioral Health** | springbrookautismbehavioral.com

**One Havenwood Lane, Travelers Rest, 864-660-6220**

Our individualized programs provide successful interventions that correct difficult behavioral issues for children & adolescents with autism. Inpatient Assessment, Acute Crisis Stabilization, Residential Treatment.



OUT OF SCHOOL TIME

**Ainsley's Angels of America** | ainsleysangels.org

**Serving Atlanta Families, 479-461-1672**

Promote inclusion by providing able-bodied runners and walkers to push special needs children and adults in endurance events like 5K races.



OUT OF SCHOOL TIME (CONT)

**Big Bear Sports** | www.bigbearsportsga.com

**3515 North Cooper Lake Rd Smyrna, 770-843-3892**

Big Bear Sports is Smyrna's only indoor training facility for baseball, softball, and other sports. We host the GSGA Adaptive Golf Clinic and have an Adaptive Baseball Clinic in the works.



**Challenge Air for Kids & Families** | www.challengeair.com

**Serving Atlanta Families 214-351-3353**

We were created to change the perception of children with special needs through the gift of flight. We are committed to making a difference in the lives of children with special needs. We provide an unforgettable growing experience that opens the door to possibilities while allowing the children to see if they can fly a plane they can do anything!



**Chastain Horse Park** | www.chastainhorsepark.org

**4371 Powers Ferry Road, Atlanta, 404-252-4244**

Chastain Horse Park has been a 501c3 non-profit since 1999. On a daily basis, we make a difference in the lives of individuals of all ages and abilities through life-changing relationships with horses.



**Dream Makers Youth Foundation** | www.dmyf.info

**620E Powder Springs Street, 678-398-6693**

Dream Makers Youth Foundation's STARS ADAPTIVE SPORTS PROGRAM offers bi-monthly tennis lessons, free of charge, in the Atlanta area. All we need is doctors' clearance, and your kids can PLAY!



RESPIRE

**Developmental Disabilities Ministries, Inc.** | ddmgc.org

**6320 Amherst Ct., 770-623-4899**

We are a Christian-based organization that provides residential and community support services for individuals with developmental disabilities, promoting their independence, inclusion, and spiritual growth.



**Next Step Ministries, Inc.** | nextstepministries.net

**7709 Turner Road, Woodstock, 770.592.1227**

Next Step is a ministry that seeks to enrich the lives of individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) through programs that reinforce their inclusive place in society.



**Special Needs Respite, inc** | www.specialneedsrespite.org

**2300 Holcomb Bridge Rd Suite 103-218 Roswell, 770-289-2182**

Providing funding for special needs childcare.



**Tiff's Place** | www.tiffsplace.org

**Orlando, FL, 630-235-2632**

We are one of the truly ADA-compliant vacation rentals. At Tiff's Place our goal is to provide a venue that adds entertainment and excitement to vacation life while providing necessary equipment to support disabilities safely. Everyone needs and deserves a break from their daily norm - and we created Tiff's Place for families with a member who does not often have an opportunity for such a respite.



## 9 Community Resources

### RESPITE (CONT)

**West Ridge Church** | westridge.com

**3522 Hiram Acworth Hwy, Dallas, 770-222-2125**

The West Ridge Special Needs Ministry welcomes families to experience church with accommodations! We offer sensory friendly spaces, modified classrooms, and inclusive experiences for children with special needs. We also invite special needs families to participate in our respite events, Night of the Stars prom, and Hope for Christmas event.

**Your Respite** | Wwv.yourrespite.com

**105 Lake Top Ct Roswell, 470-227-3897**

Your Respite provides childcare for your special needs family member, in your home, up to age 19(older on a case by case basis).

### TRANSITION (ADULT /TEEN)

**ESP, Inc.** | www.espyouandme.org

**189 VFW Dr Watkinsville, 706-666-4157**

We exist to create transformative experiences for people with disabilities and their families, changing communities for the better. ESP envisions a world where every person, of every ability, in every community has universal access to transformative experiences.

**Gigi's Career Development Programs** | gigisplayhouse.org/atlanta

**11235 Alpharetta Hwy, Suite 120 Roswell, 470-359-4105**

We provide progressive learning programs that are designated to motivate adults with Down Syndrome to achieve their highest potential. Achieved through innovative, educational, goal-development & small group skills instruction, health & wellness, career skills, empowerment, community engagement and exceptional work opportunities.

**In Community** | www.incommunityga.org

**3301 Buckeye Rd, Suite 700 Atlanta, 404-634-4222**

InCommunity provides community-based services and support to people with intellectual and developmental disabilities including residential support, employment services, respite care, family support, in-home care, and day programs. Day programs are available in Cobb and surrounding counties.

**Innovative Solutions for Disadvantage and Disability** | isdd-home.org

**4282 Memorial Drive, STE B, 404-600-3332**

ISDD provides no-cost supportive services to grandparents and others raising relative children with special needs to ensure they stay out of foster care including support groups, education programs, information, referrals, and more.

**Nathan's Driving School, Inc.** | www.nathansdrivingschool.com

**5105 Peachtree Blvd, Suite 105 Atlanta, 770-454-9100**

We are a full service driving school in Atlanta, Georgia providing care, compassion, patience, and expertise to adults and teens. We offer behind the wheel lessons, classroom instruction, defensive driving courses, evaluations and Alive@25. We offer in car and also have virtual live options for classrooms.

**Puzzle Piece** | www.puzzlepiecepastries.org

**1398 Thompson Bridge Rd Gainesville, 678-696-8319**

The shape of our signature cookie and the symbol of our bakery is a puzzle piece. It commonly represents those with autism. For us it represents coming together to create careers and opportunities for people with a variety of disabilities. We work in a field we love while helping those we love enjoy a productive and fulfilling future. This is only possible when all the puzzle pieces come together to create a picture of acceptance!



## Community Resources 10

### TRANSITION (ADULT /TEEN) CONT

**RISE Coffee & Tea** | www.rise-coffee.com

**4651 Sandy Plains Rd, Unit 116 Roswell, 678-395-4709**

Employment and Social activities

**Special Kneads and Treats, Inc.** | www.specialkneadsandtreats.org

**156 Scenic Highway S, Lawrenceville, 678-237-7147**

501c3 nonprofit bakery employing special needs adults and providing birthday cakes to children through partner agencies. Sweet treats available through retail storefront with dine in option.

**Special Needs Cobb** | www.specialneeds Cobb.org

**550 Kennesaw Ave, Suite 900 Marietta, 770-427-8401**

Special Needs Cobb provides families with resources, respite and residential options to give their loved ones the best path to independence, inclusion and self-determination. Special Needs Cobb is "here for you for life"

**Tommy Nobis Center** | TommyNobisCenter.org

**1480 Bells Ferry Road, (770) 427-9000**

Tommy Nobis Center provides employment services to youth and adults with disabilities. Programs include EYES (Early Youth Employment Services) and Connect for students age 14 to 21 and The Academy, an Accelerated Vocational Training Program for young adults.



## Supportive programs for all abilities

We offer comprehensive support programs for individuals with disabilities, their families and support network

- Benefits Navigation
- Behavioral Health and Counseling Services
- Georgia Community Trust
- Job and Career Services
- Family Support Services



**678-365-0071**

For additional information or with any questions, reach out to Bobby Dodd Institute.

info@bobbydodd.org  
www.bobbydodd.org



## Taking First Steps into Adulthood

**SHE IS A SIXTEEN-YEAR-OLD, FULL OF ENERGY AND BIG DREAMS. ONE DAY, SHE WANTS TO GO TO COLLEGE AND LIVE INDEPENDENTLY. SHE LIKES SINGING AND DREAMS OF BECOMING A MOVIE STAR. HER NAME IS ANNABELLA.**

Annabella was one of 60 participants in the Bobby Dodd Institute (BDI) Getting Ready for Opportunities in Work (G.R.O.W.) program this year. G.R.O.W. is a summer program featuring one-week sessions that exposes young adults to post-secondary education opportunities. It prepares the participants to enter the workforce through hands-on opportunities and fun-filled field trips.

The program is funded by the Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency (GVRA). BDI launched the G.R.O.W. program in 2022, and it quickly became a success.

Annabella spent the first 11 years of her life in foster care until her loving family adopted her. "I love my parents. They do everything for me," Annabella says. Her parents, Viola and Jose, found out about the G.R.O.W. program through social media; they saw it as a perfect fit for their daughter and instantly decided to enroll her. For Annabella, this week was a total blast.

Her parents noticed a lot of positive changes when Annabella returned from the program. She is now more diligent in taking care of her appearance and hygiene. Annabella also expresses greater confidence in managing her finances and understanding the value of money. She has even started thinking about her career path and future home as an independent person. Moreover, she has formed new, lasting friendships. Annabella and her parents agree that she will return to the program next year.

Despite having a delayed learning disability, this has never prevented her from following her dreams and leading a fulfilling life. "I really don't think of this as a disability at all. She loves, she smiles just like any regular person. I don't even notice it anymore. I don't even think it's there. You may notice it in her speech, but other than that, I think she's perfect," says Annabella's dad, Jose.

Annabella's family is now exploring other ways for her to take advantage of the programs offered by BDI. One option they have been looking into is the BDI Bridge Academy – a globally recognized 20-week program providing accessible IT training for people with disabilities. The program prepares students for the Cisco Certified Support Technician (CCST) Cybersecurity certification.

In addition to G.R.O.W. and Bridge Academy, both part of the organization's Job and Career programs, there are other available resources. One of these is the new Behavioral Health program, which offers holistic counseling. Benefits Navigation provides services to identify, obtain, and maximize benefits. Family Support Services connects local families with federal resources and offers support to families in crisis. The Georgia Community Trust is another offering. It is a pooled special needs trust that enables saving for beneficiaries' future needs without affecting public benefits like Medicaid and SSI.

[www.bobbydodd.org](http://www.bobbydodd.org)



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SUPPORT

Advanced Care Partners | [advancedcarepartners.com](http://advancedcarepartners.com)

3525 Piedmont Rd NE, Atlanta, 470-401-6060

Private Duty Nursing in Atlanta and PPEC (medical daycare) services in Florida

Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities

[dbhdd.georgia.gov](http://dbhdd.georgia.gov)

200 Piedmont Avenue, S.E. West Tower, 14th Floor, 404-657-2252

We provide treatment and support services to people with behavioral health challenges and addictive diseases. They also assist individuals who live with developmental disabilities. The agency's mission is to provide high-quality health care opportunities for individuals with developmental disabilities or behavioral health challenges. Information about applying for IDD services is located at [georgiacollaborative.com/individuals-families/iddconnect/](http://georgiacollaborative.com/individuals-families/iddconnect/).

Rise and Restore Healthcare | [riseandrestorecare.com](http://riseandrestorecare.com)

Servicing Metro Atlanta and all surrounding counties, 678-783-8131

Rise and Restore provides Medicaid funded private home-care services to medically fragile children under 21 through the Georgia Pediatric Program. Services include skilled nursing and personal care assistants and are at no cost to the family. We service metro Atlanta and all surrounding counties.

Blossom Home Care, LLC | [blossomhomecarellc.com](http://blossomhomecarellc.com)

2470 Windy Hill Rd, Suite 300, Marietta, 678-992-5556

We have more than 15 years of experience in home care services. We are a locally-owned home care agency in Atlanta that provides community-based service to individuals and families in Metro Atlanta and the surrounding areas.



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**NADLER  
BIERNATH LLC**  
SPECIAL NEEDS AND ELDER LAW

## ESTATE PLANNING FOR A CHILD WITH SPECIAL NEEDS: A Parent's Guide

If you are the parent of a child who will need lifelong financial support, there is a good chance that some part of that support will eventually come from state or federal benefits. Many such benefits are means-tested; in other words, they are payable only if the recipient has less than \$2,000 in countable assets. How do you provide for a loved one whose ability to own assets outright is so severely restricted? One of the best solutions is to use a special needs trust. All funds held in a qualified special needs trust are not counted when considering financial eligibility for benefits.

To determine whether a special needs trust is appropriate for a child, we first examine whether a child will be considered "disabled" by Social Security's definition. Social Security finds a child under age 18 to be disabled if they have a medically determinable physical or mental impairment that results in marked and severe functional limitations. If your child is over 18 years old, Social Security defines disability as an inability to earn substantial gainful employment because of a medically determinable impairment which will last for a continuous period of at least 12 months.

If a child is already receiving benefits, we then look to whether those benefits

are means-tested benefits. If a child is receiving means-tested benefits, a special needs trust is likely an important part of your estate plan.

Even if the child is not receiving benefits, or is receiving non-means-tested benefits like SSDI, it may be good planning to establish special needs trusts for the child now if there is any chance that the child will get means-tested benefits in the future.


There are two main categories of special needs trusts: first-party trusts and third-party trusts. The primary distinguishing characteristic between the two is the source of the trust funds. A first-party trust holds assets that belong to the beneficiary. A third-party trust holds assets that belong to anyone other than the beneficiary.

A first-party special needs trust can only be created by a parent, a grandparent, a guardian, the trust beneficiary whose assets will fund the trust (assuming that beneficiary is competent to create a trust), or pursuant to a court order (usually in the context of a lawsuit that has resulted in an award of damages). This trust will hold any assets owned by the beneficiary. First-party special needs trusts are often used if a child receives an inheritance from another family member or a personal injury settlement.

**NADLERBIERNATH.COM**

A third-party special needs trust both parents (and other family members) can use it as part of their than trust beneficiary and can be estate plan; 3) you can indicate funded with funds belonging to what happens to funds remaining anyone other than the beneficiary. in the trust when your child (the Third party special needs trusts are beneficiary) passes away. the most commonly used trust by parents who have a child with a disability.

Third-party trusts are useful with typical children; however, if because: 1) not only can the trust the proper trusts are used and hold assets that belong to you, it funded, it is possible to care for a can hold gifts from other friends or child whose support depends on family; 2) Once the trust exists, keeping benefits in place.



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**(770) 455-0535**

HEATHER DURHAM NADLER, ESQ.  
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**ADVOCACY**

**Bobby Dodd Institute** | bobbydodd.org

**2120 Marietta Boulevard NW, Atlanta, 678-365-2260**

We offer a wide range of support for individuals with differing abilities during all stages of life. It is a beacon of hope and possibilities for families in need, with programs that empower people to find their voice, independence and self-sufficiency.



**"Just" People, Inc.** | justpeople.org

**1412 Oakbrook Drive, Norcross, GA, 404-429-3849**

"Just" People, Inc. is a private non-profit organization that's mission is to provide a variety of support services to adults with developmental disabilities, mental illnesses and head injuries. We are dedicated to meeting the needs for quality, dependable support.

**"JUST" PEOPLE, INC.**

**Miles of Advocacy, LLC** | www.milesofadvocacy.com

**4180 Burrnt Hickory Rd. NW, Marietta, 770-750-2688**

Advocate and Educational Consultant for Cobb County School District as well as Katie Beckett Medicaid Application Support for the State of Georgia.



**COACHING / INDEPENDENCE ASSISTANCE**

**disABILITY LINK** | disabilitylink.org

**Metro-Atlanta and surrounding counties, 404-687-8890**

We are a Center for Independent Living (CIL) serving 12 Metro Atlanta counties. disABILITY LINK is led by & for people with disabilities & promotes full participation in community life through education, advocacy, & empowerment. We are a non-profit, non-residential, community-based organizations, governed and staffed by people with disabilities, which offer a wide variety of services to people with disabilities, their families, and the community.

**disABILITY LINK**  
Advocating for human rights, not special rights

**Family Together Educational Services** fmlytgethratl.com

**Virtual services, 678- 274-9976**

Family Together Educational Services specializes in providing accountability, scaffolds and strategies that will better allow students to set systems in place, and utilize their executive functions to be more efficient and independent individuals. Coaching 8th grade- early adults.



**LIFE Behavior Consulting** | lifebehaviorconsulting.com

**Serving Metro Atlanta, 678-235-8817**

We believe everyone has it already within them to work toward their goals! LIFE helps neuro-diverse teens & adults learn the skills to take action steps toward goals & overcome challenges through training, coaching and support. Our virtual classes & individual sessions are designed to empower each client to build tools to support growth in social skills, executive functioning, interdependent living and career development.



**Life Unlimited: Unleash Your Potential, LLC** | lifeunlimitedllc.com

**Serving Metro Atlanta, 301-641-6393**

Life Unlimited: Unleash Your Potential, LLC provides virtual Social Skills Tutoring, Dating and Relationship Guidance, and Employment Consulting services to children, teenagers, and adults with disabilities.



**Limitless Disability Services, INC** | limitlessdisabilityservices.com

**120 Arnold Mill Park, Suite 300, Woodstock, GA, 770-485-9187**

At Limitless, we believe every individual deserves independence and inclusion in a safe and loving environment. The day program gives special needs adults the ability to be independent and grow as an individual through community support & activities.



**COUNSELING**

**Autism Spectrum Resources for Marriage & Family, LLC** | HolmesASR.com

**4514 Chamblee Dunwoody Rd #423, Dunwoody, 404-536-8527**

Dr. Stephanie C Holmes comes from lived and personal experience as a mother of now a young adult on the spectrum and certified autism specialist. Dr. Holmes has courses and consults with families as well as does coaching for marriages and families impacted by the autism spectrum.



**EVALUATIONS**

**The Cora Lee Institute** | coraleeinstitute.org

**3080 Highlands Parkway SE STE A, Smyrna, 770-634-2349**

Our services include therapy, evaluation/diagnostic testing, educational advocacy, academic support, forensics, co-parenting, bariatrics, social security benefits and COMP Waivers.



**FINANCE**

**Georgia Student Finance Commission** | gsfc.georgia.gov

**2082 East Exchange Place, Tucker, 800-505-4732**

Georgia Student Finance Commission (GSFC) is the administrator of more than 20 state- and lottery-funded scholarships, grants, and service-cancelable loan programs. GSFC provides free financial aid consultation to K-12, postsecondary institutions, and community organizations across the state to help students and their families prepare to pay for college.



**LEGAL CONSULTING**

**Chambless + Fawcett, LLP** | cf-firm.com

**2900 Paces Ferry Road, Suite B-101, Atlanta, 678-819-8339**

We provided assistance with establishing Guardianships and implementing Special Needs Estate Planning. We understand that every situation is unique. That is why we start by listening to you, so we will understand how best to serve you and craft a strategy that provides the results you need.



**Law Office of Miller & Chaet** | northfultonwills.com

**11800 Amber Park Drive, Suite 130, Alpharetta, GA, 678-746-2900**

We specialize in special needs planning & trusts. We help our clients make wise decisions about who is best equipped to distribute their estate to their families or other beneficiaries. We then craft estate plans that carry out those decisions smoothly. We recognize that every family is different so that each client's documents are customized to address that person's wishes.



**Nadler Biernath, LLC** | nadlerbiernath.com

**6801 Governors Lake Parkway, Suite 140, Peachtree Corners, GA 30071**

(770) 455-0535  
Nadler Biernath is a full- service estate planning firm, and we're happy to be able to offer comprehensive special needs planning services, including wills, powers of attorney, and special needs trusts, as well as consultation on ABLE accounts and guardianship/conservatorship.





## Bridging the School and Parent Connection

By Meshell Baylor, MHS

TO ME, THERE IS NOTHING AS LOVING AND ENDEARING AS THE LOVE OF A PARENT FOR THEIR EXCEPTIONAL CHILD. ACCORDING TO THE CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL PREVENTION, ONE IN 44 CHILDREN HAS BEEN IDENTIFIED WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER (ASD). THERE IS A MOMENT WHEN A PARENT REALIZES THIS DIAGNOSIS IS THE BEGINNING OF A NEW JOURNEY. ENTERING THE WORLD OF SPECIAL EDUCATION AND NAVIGATING THE SYSTEM ALONE IS LIKE BEING DOROTHY IN THE LAND OF OZ, TRYING TO FIND YOUR WAY HOME. PARENTS ARE PLAGUED WITH GRIEF, WORRY, FRUSTRATION, AND LOADS OF ANXIETY, ACCORDING TO THE NATIONAL LIBRARY OF MEDICINE.

A parent of a child with any exceptional need or disability should have the tenacity to put aside their feelings in order to build a relationship with a school on behalf of the child. According to the National Center for Education and Statistics, children do better 80% of the time when their parents are actively engaged in school (The National Center for Education Statistics). It is the job of the school and staff to help engage a new parent entering the world of special education in learning how they can work collaboratively with the school to support the child.

When my child was diagnosed with autism, it felt like the world had stopped. I was frozen by this new word—a disability I had never heard of before. What made matters worse was that I was sitting in a room full of people speaking in acronyms and jargon about assessments, class programs, and other things I didn't understand. Any parent without prior knowledge of exceptional needs and special education will feel as if everyone speaks a different language from another planet.

There is a desire in the parent to help and learn more about working with the school, but the staff must also make that parent feel a part of the team. Bridging the relationship between parent and school can be easy if the school is willing to hear the parent's voice and the parent is willing to work with the school to provide for the child's needs. You may ask how this can be possible if the school or parent is not receptive. Here are some positive tips for both the school and parent I, as well as other parents and professionals, have used over the years.

### Tips for school staff working with parents

#### 1. Be welcoming

If you are a psychologist, school administrator, or speech pathologist, please remember the person sitting across the table from you is a frightened parent. They have concerns, they are worried, and this journey of learning the ins and outs of special education may be new for the entire family. When discussing the child's disability, imagine yourself as the parent; step into their shoes and lightly tread when talking to them about their child. This is a moment where you, as the professional, can practice active listening and display empathy. Also, if the meeting starts super early, make a welcome basket with coffee, muffins, or water

available. Morning Individualized Education Program (IEP) meetings can be exhausting, especially if you have a parent with an exceptional needs child who does not sleep well at night and you're asking them to come to an early meeting. Even if the IEP meeting is in the evening, have snacks available, as there is no telling how long it may run. I have seen many professionals provide a welcome basket for parents. The goal is to be accommodating.

#### 2. Be receptive

As a professional, be willing to consider or accept new suggestions and ideas from the parent. If the parent has a suggestion about their child's needs, help them be proactive. Allow the parent the opportunity to feel included. Remember, they are an essential part of their child's IEP team. Active engagement helps the parent feel empowered to learn more about their child's needs and encourages their willingness to welcome suggestions and ideas you, the professional, may have for the child.



#### 3. Be informative

As a professional, your understanding of any diagnosis comes with jargon, acronyms, and various dialogue specific to your field of expertise. When sitting in a meeting with a parent, be informative. Engage the parent in the conversation; tell them what the assessment results say, break down the phrases and terms used, and explain what any testing scores mean with context. There will be times you will be working with a parent who may not speak English, has a disability of their own, or plain cannot comprehend the assessments' implications. It is your job to be welcoming, receptive, and informative. Make them feel included.

#### 4. Be resourceful

If this is a new journey for a parent with an exceptional needs child, make sure the team has resources available for the parent. Look up organizations, the local regional center, support groups, and listings to outside agencies that will help them navigate the process a little easier. Google the Department of Developmental Services (DDS) for regional centers that may prove helpful, as well as organizations like Autism Speaks, Autism Society, Special Needs Network, TASK, and Learning Rights. Provide as much information as possible so they can know where they can receive outside support. These organizations welcome all children with all disabilities, so refer the parent to them so they can utilize the additional support.

#### 5. Keep them updated

Send the parent progress reports on the child's status regarding their educational or occupational goals. This helps the parent comprehend the nature of your work as a professional. Tell them when the child has met a benchmark and is doing well. Give the parent praise for allowing you the time to work with the child on their goals. Overall, the goal is to maintain the parent's feeling of inclusion and prevent any sense of exclusion or isolation.

#### 6. Build a rapport

Establish a relationship and open line of communication with the parent. Ask how the holidays went for the family if they worked on a home assignment, and how the family dynamics function within the home. You want them to know you care about the student and their family. Building a relationship solidifies your attentiveness to the family. Make sure you feel connected when it is time for the student to transition to the next grade level.

#### Tips for the parent

##### 1. Be open

This may not be easy for you, but please try to be receptive to the recommendations your professional may have regarding your child. Allow them to give you their professional input on how they can help your child. If you disagree with some things, write down your concerns so you can address them appropriately. Remember that though your voice matters, they also have a stake in your child's care and education.

##### 2. Review, review, review

If the school provides reports and assessments, take the time to read and review them. If you

have questions, jot them down in a way that is accessible and bring them with you to the next meeting. You may also want to write down which parts of the source material inspired the question, so you don't forget. If something you notice is incorrect, highlight it or mark it so you can address it at the right time. Asking for clarity is not a crime!

##### 3. No question is pointless

Sitting across a room full of professionals can feel overwhelmingly intimidating. Listening to them speak about your child's needs using phrases you have never heard of before can also be awkward. Bring a notebook to write things down and take notes. Do not be afraid to ask questions or say phrases like:

"I am sorry. Can you explain what that phrase means?" | "Can you give me an example of that?"

"What exactly does this acronym mean, and how does it impact my child?" | "Can you show me the progress my kid has made?" | "Are there any writing samples I can see?"

Asking a question shows your engagement in understanding your child's academic level.

##### 4. Be informative

Inform the team of your child's health and history, and address your needs and concerns. You are the most critical part of the team. Tell them what you have been working on with your child at home as a parent. Describe your child's strengths and weaknesses, so they know how to work effectively with your child.

##### 5. Welcome your child's support team

If your child has additional help at home, such as a behavior therapist or speech pathologist outside of the school, invite all parties to the meeting. This is a collaborative meeting, so you want all hands on deck and everyone working for the child's benefit. Any suggestions or advice is always encouraged, and both parties can learn what each one is working on with the child. They will appreciate your initiative.

##### 6. Bring treats

If you are going into a meeting, trying to familiarize yourself with new staff, and have the means to bring treats or water, you might want to do so. Sometimes these meetings overrun the scheduled time. I have seen both parents and staff provide snacks as a special treat before an IEP begins. This is an option for the parent, not a request or demand.

#### 7. Build a rapport

For the next couple of years, you will have to go through many transitions with your exceptional child, so build a relationship with the team that will be experiencing these changes with you. Let them know how your child and family are doing, and keep them in the loop of any adjustments or progress. The goal is to keep bridging the gap in occupation between parents and school staff by keeping an open line of communication.

#### 8. Be resourceful

As you walk through your special education journey and learn the system, you will come across courses, training, and support groups that will benefit the professionals on your IEP team. Please provide them with information so they can make use of these potential supports. This will help the professional comprehend more of the parent's

experience, helping rejuvenate their mind and methods to better assist the parent who comes after you.

#### In closing

I will close by saying that if the school and parent can effectively work together to build a relationship for the child's benefit, the outcome will be a success. For the staff, remember to show empathy and a willingness to listen to the parent and the child. For the parent, allow yourself to keep an open mind on the recommendations and suggestions. Practice active listening for the benefit of your child as well as your fellow team members. The goal is to hear all parties' perspectives and ideas, so everyone feels a sense of inclusion and cohesion. Below are some resources and references; remember, everyone, your voice matters, and it takes a village to raise a child.

#### References | Resources

National Education Center for Statistics  
Parental Involvement in U.S. Public Schools in 2017-18 (ed.gov) <https://nces.ed.gov/pubdocs2021/2021041/index.asp>

CA Department of Developmental Services is an agency through which the State of California provides services and supports to individuals with developmental disabilities.  
<https://www.dds.ca.gov>

Autism Speaks Inc. is an autism advocacy organization and the largest autism research organization in the United States. It sponsors autism research and conducts awareness and outreach activities aimed at families.  
<http://www.autismspeaks.org/>

Autism Society of Los Angeles is a non-profit 501(c)3 corporation serving millions of people in the LA area affected by autism.  
<https://www.autismla.org/>

Special Needs Network, Inc. (SNN) is a nonprofit grassroots organization responding to the crisis of Autism and other developmental disabilities.  
<https://snnla.org>

Team of Advocates for Special Kids (TASK) serves families of children ages 0 to 26 under IDEA and other systems mandated to provide services to individuals with disabilities.  
<https://www.php.com/directory/team-of-advocates-for-special-kids-task/>

TASK Learning Rights Law Center is a legal services nonprofit that fights for a child's right to education.  
<https://www.learningrights.org>



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**Age 5-Adult**, Remote Academic, Executive Function and Social Emotional Coaching



**TC Services** | www.terriconwenhoven.com

**Nationwide Resource, 262-284-5043**

**Age 5-Adult**, Terri's books are the go-to resource on puberty and development written for individuals with autism and other intellectual and developmental disabilities. Written at a third-grade (reading level). It is filled with tasteful visual supports, concrete language, and interactive activities to improve comprehension.



**Rhythm & Writing: The Handwriting Program** | www.rhythmhandwriting.com

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**Birth-Adult**, Frazier Center is a nonprofit in Atlanta, Georgia, that provides an inclusive, nature-based, early childhood education program for children with and without disabilities, as well as a person-centered program for adults with disabilities who are seeking employment, social, educational, and recreational opportunities within the metro Atlanta community.



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1205 Bluffs Pkwy  
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**Bartow County**  
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65 Gilreath Road  
Cartersville, GA



**Atlanta Public Schools**  
404-802-3500  
130 Trinity Ave. SW  
Atlanta, GA 30303





## SHIFTING SENSORY REGULATION FOCUS FOR BETTER BODY UNDERSTANDING

By Laura Ryan, OTD, OTRL

WE ARE SENSORY BEINGS. WE GLEAN INFORMATION BOTH IMPORTANT AND DISMISSIVE, POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE, ALARMING AND COMFORTING FROM OUR SENSES, AND WE USE THAT INFORMATION TO MAKE DECISIONS THAT KEEP US SAFE AND HAPPY. CONTRARY TO POPULAR BELIEF, WE HAVE EIGHT SENSORY SYSTEMS WE REGULARLY DRAW INFORMATION FROM.

The first five senses commonly known and understood include the visual system, which is responsible for seeing; the auditory system, responsible for hearing; the olfactory system, responsible for smelling; the gustatory system, responsible for tasting; and the tactile system, which is responsible for feeling (STAR Institute, n.d.).

The three remaining systems are equally important. They include the vestibular system, responsible for balance and understanding where our body is in relation to the environment; the proprioceptive system, responsible for understanding where our skeleton is in space and how much effort we need to expend to move it; and interoception, the understanding of the soft tissue parts of our body (STAR Institute, n.d.), such as feeling our stomach is empty because it is growing and understanding that means we need to eat.

Children with sensory over-responsiveness may have a lower threshold for incoming sensory information. They are much quicker to note and react to this information because their threshold is met very quickly. These children are particular about how they like things and can become upset with change. They tend to notice and become distressed over small and seemingly inconsequential details, such as a new toothbrush. Involving them in decisions, like having them choose what color their new toothbrush is, can be helpful in alerting them to a change and giving them more agency over the shift.

Additionally, environmental supports such as placing carpet in your home to reduce noise and giving them access to quiet spaces can help temper sensory information. Those who are under-responsive may have a higher threshold for sensory information and are slower to react because their system takes much sensory input to become activated. This is the child who may need their name called several times before looking up or the child who falls and scrapes their knee but doesn't appear to feel the pain. In order for this high threshold to be met and acted upon, the sensory information needs to be consistent, repetitive, and robust. Environmental cues may help, including using a brightly colored placemat and dishes so they remain attentive to their meal or placing bright stickers at important points around the house, such as where they should hang up their coat.

Children with sensory cravings who are also over-responsive are typically very active and engage in many strategies to meet a high threshold but can become easily overwhelmed. This is the child who runs, climbs, and jumps with low regard for their safety, then becomes disorganized and can display behavior such as crying. Supporting a child who seeks sensory input involves carefully tailored access to the input that feels good to them (for example, jumping on a trampoline) with mindful breaks to avoid overstimulation. It is also important to note that children who have difficulty processing sensory information may also have difficulty with motor skills like managing a zipper, pulling a shirt over their head, or using a pencil to write their name. In addition, social



skills such as playing cooperatively with peers may also prove difficult.

There are several ways to support a child who may process sensory information differently. First, and most important, is to respect that their perception of sensory information is valid and reliable. Seeing a sensory event from their perspective will allow you to better experience their feelings and make adjustments. For example, feeling the tag of a shirt to check if it is scratchy will allow you to proactively remove it before your child wears the shirt, thereby supporting their sensory system.

Second, directly break down sensory information into small, understandable chunks to teach sensory awareness. Interoception, being attuned to the soft tissue of your body and what the feelings of those soft tissues mean, is an emerging area of importance in sensory processing. When breaking down sensory information, it is especially important to relate that information to body feelings. For instance, if your child is yawning, you can call attention to their yawning and then to other more subtle signs of fatigue, such as their eyes wanting to close or their legs feeling like they are moving through wet cement.

You can grade their fatigue by how big or little their yawn is. To make this information more engaging, you can demonstrate a BIG yawn with a broad expanse of your arms or a tiny yawn with the pinch of two fingers and then relate that to their mood. Relating back to this



conversation, the next time your child is tired will allow them to gauge their fatigue better and judge whether they need to take a rest. Building on these skills will eventually lead to a more proactive and independent analysis of how they are feeling and create an effective strategy to support their body.

Last, remain consistent in the language you use when describing sensory moods or feelings. There are programs that organize sensory feelings into concrete categories and link strategies to those categories, so when a child is having difficulty identifying a feeling that is inherently more ambiguous, they can instead relate their feeling and employ a strategy related to its color category to bring themselves back to a regulated state. For example, a child may understand a stronger emotion like sadness but have difficulty understanding that disappointment and "bummed out" are variations of sadness. Collecting these feelings together and linking a strategy to that collection will allow the child to broadly identify how they are feeling, what to do to make themselves feel better, and ultimately build resilience and independence in the area of sensory processing.

#### Resources

The Zones of Regulation framework and curriculum can be accessed at <https://www.zonesofregulation.com/learn-more-about-the-zones.html>

#### References

STAR Institute. (n.d.). Your 8 Senses. STAR Institute. Retrieved July 13, 2022, from <https://sensoryhealth.org/basic/your-8-senses>

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Johnson, S. L. (2013). The therapist's guide to pediatric affect and behavior regulation. Elsevier Inc. <https://doi.org/10.1016/C2010-0-67272-5>



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ISSUE 7

## What do I need to do for my child **TURNING 18?**

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# Alphabet

By Carmen Brown, RBT

*This is an abbreviated list of some of the most common acronyms you may come across as you navigate the Special Needs world.*

*For a complete list please visit [www.AbilitiesWorkshop.com](http://www.AbilitiesWorkshop.com)*

- Diagnoses:**
- ADD** – Attention Deficit Disorder
  - ADHD** – Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder
  - ASD** – Autism Spectrum Disorder
  - CP** – Cerebral Palsy
  - DD** – Developmental Disabilities or Developmentally Delayed
  - ID/DD** – Intellectual Disability / Developmental Disability
  - LD** – Learning Disability
  - MI** – Mental Illness
  - TBI** – Traumatic Brain Injury
- Federal Agencies:**
- ACF** – Admin. for Children & Families
  - ADD** – Admin. on Developmental Disabilities
  - AHCA** – The Agency for Health Care Administration
  - APD** – Agency for Persons with Disabilities
  - CMS** – Centers for Medicaid & Medicare Services
  - DCF** – Dept of Children and Families
  - DOE** – Department of Education
  - HHS** – Dept of Health & Human Services
  - PCP** – Person-Centered Support Plan
- SSA** – Social Security Administration State Agencies
- SSDI** – Social Security Disability
- SSI** – Supplemental Security Income
- Other Bureaucratic Shorthand**
- AAPP** – American Association of People with Disabilities
  - ADA** – American with Disabilities Act
  - EI** – Early Intervention
  - ESE** – Exceptional Student Education
  - FAPE** – Free Appropriate Public Education
  - HIPAA** – Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act
  - ICAN** – Increasing Capabilities Access Network
  - IDEA** – Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act
  - IEP** – Individual Education Program
  - NCD** – National Council on Disability
  - NOD** – National Org. on Disability
  - OT** – Occupational Therapy
  - PT** – Physical Therapy
  - RBT** – Registered Behavior Therapist
  - SEA** – State Education Agency
  - SLP** – Speech-Language Pathology
  - UCP** – United Cerebral Palsy