



Families Helping Families

Region 7

Serving: Bienville, Bossier, Caddo, Claiborne, DeSoto, Natchitoches, Red River, Sabine, and Webster



8 Things to do before you go to an IEP Meeting

By Terri Mauro About.com

The night before and morning of an IEP (Individualized Education Program) meeting are tense times for many parents, as you anticipate challenges and disagreements and wonder if you're as prepared as you should be. Use all that nervous energy to gather your thoughts, your to-do list, and your supporting paperwork. Here are eight things to do before you head off to that meeting, to make sure you're ready for your job as a full-fledged team member.

- 1. Read last year's IEP.** Cross out goals you think your child has achieved or placement details he has outgrown. Jot down any questions you have about past provisions or suggestions for future ones. Bring the IEP with you and make sure the issues you've marked out are addressed.
- 2. Review the past year.** If you keep a contact log, get it out and look through the contacts you've had with school personnel over the past year. Make a note of any trouble points, and also of specific positives or negatives the educators or therapists have mentioned.
- 3. Look at the guest list.** The letter you got scheduling the IEP meeting should include a list of school personnel attending. Think about your contacts with those professionals over the past year, and any stories your child may have told you about their work together.
- 4. Check your child's report card.** Gather your child's report cards for the past year. If the grades are good, or rising, you should expect to hear about progress at the meeting. If the grades are bad, or sinking, you'll want to hear how the educators plan to help your child to do better.
- 5. Make goals for your child.** You're going to be hearing about what school personnel think your child should be doing over the next year, what he can achieve, where she is headed.
- 6. Set your own agenda.** After you've done all this reading and reviewing, write down your most important points and goals so you'll remember to bring them up at the meeting.
- 7. Gather reinforcements.** If you've found anything in your reading and research that helps you understand and work with your child, bring it along to the meeting -- preferably with enough copies to pass around.
- 8. Make sure your input is included.** IEPs have a space for a parent to contribute a comment. Often professionals will just compose the parent statement based on things the parent may have said at the meeting, but if you submit your own pre-written version, you can save that person time and make sure your specific voice is heard.

Who?	What?	When?	Where?
A family directed resource center for all individuals with disabilities and their families	Providing information, referral, and support through a network of services and assistance throughout Region 7	8:00 am – 5:00 pm Monday – Friday Drop-ins are always welcome!	2620 Centenary Boulevard Building 2, Suite 250 Shreveport, LA 71104 318.226.4541 877.226.4541 Fhfregion7@bellsouth.net

Documentation is the ANSWER, If its not in writing it did not Happen

This article was reprinted from Families Helping Families of Southwest Louisiana Inc.



When dealing with the state agencies, the school system, or health care providers, one of the most important things to remember is to document **EVERYTHING**. Far too often families are denied services due to lack of documentation. Here are few pointers to help you with this process.

1. **Make Copies.** Any forms filled out or paperwork given need to be copied and dated. Many times families turn in paperwork and then find that there is no record of that paperwork.
2. **Keep a record of telephone conversations.** When speaking to a caseworker, school official, etc., always record the date, time, and the name of the person you spoke to. For even more security, you can email the person you spoke to with a recap of the conversation.
3. **When all else fails email.** If you've attempted to contact someone by phone multiple times, email them with the information. By doing this, you have documentation of the attempt to contact that person. If you don't have access to email, then write a letter. You can also request a "read receipt" for your email which will indicate if the recipient of your email opened it.

By following these simple pointers, you can prevent a "he said/ she said" event. You never know when your documentation can come in useful!

Stipend Money Available!

Do you want to learn more about your child's disability? Have you heard of a new technique that might help him learn? Families Helping Families Region 7 might be able to help you get this knowledge.

There are stipend dollars available for individuals with disabilities and their families who live in the parishes of Region 7. Please apply for these funds if you would like to attend a conference, convention or other activity that will increase your knowledge.

For the next three months, these funds will be managed by Families Helping Families of Northeast Louisiana, Inc. in Monroe. To apply, you may call 1.888.300.1320 or email: info@fhfnela.org.

Please have the following information handy when calling to ask for funding or include these details in any email:

- 1) When
- 2) Where
- 3) Registration Cost
- 4) How much you are able to contribute

This is a great opportunity to attend a state, regional or national event that otherwise might not be possible!



Racing Towards Inclusion
by David Tereshchuk

Dick and Rick Hoyt are a father-and-son team from Massachusetts who together compete just about continuously in marathon races. And if they're not in a marathon they are in a triathlon — that daunting, almost superhuman, combination of 26.2 miles of running, 112 miles of bicycling, and 2.4 miles of swimming. Together they have climbed mountains, and once trekked 3,735 miles across America.

It's a remarkable record of exertion — all the more so when you consider that Rick can't walk or talk. For the past twenty five years or more Dick, who is 65, has pushed and pulled his son across the country and over hundreds of finish lines. When Dick runs, Rick is in a wheelchair that Dick is pushing. When Dick cycles, Rick is in the seat-pod from his wheelchair, attached to the front of the bike. When Dick swims, Rick is in a small but heavy, firmly stabilized boat being pulled by Dick. At Rick's birth in 1962 the umbilical cord coiled around his neck and cut off oxygen to his brain. Dick and his wife, Judy, were told that there would be no hope for their child's development.

"It's been a story of exclusion ever since he was born," Dick told me. "When he was eight months old the doctors told us we should just put him away — he'd be a vegetable all his life, that sort of thing. Well those doctors are not alive any more, but I would like them to be able to see Rick now."

The couple brought their son home determined to raise him as "normally" as possible. Within five years, Rick had two younger brothers, and the Hoyts were convinced Rick was just as intelligent as his siblings. Dick remembers the struggle to get the local school authorities to agree: "Because he couldn't talk they thought he wouldn't be able to understand, but that wasn't true." The dedicated parents taught Rick the alphabet. "We always wanted Rick included in everything," Dick said. "That's why we wanted to get him into public school."

A group of Tufts University engineers came to the rescue, once they had seen some clear, empirical evidence of Rick's comprehension skills. "They told him a joke," said Dick. "Rick just cracked up. They knew then that he could communicate!" The engineers went on to build — using \$5,000 the family managed to raise in 1972 - an interactive computer that would allow Rick to write out his thoughts using the slight head-movements that he could manage. Rick came to call it "my communicator." A cursor would move across a screen filled with rows of letters, and when the cursor highlighted a letter that Rick wanted, he would click a switch with the side of his head.

When the computer was originally brought home, Rick surprised his family with his first "spoken" words. They had expected perhaps "Hi, Mom" or "Hi, Dad." But on the screen Rick wrote "Go Bruins." The Boston Bruins were in the Stanley Cup finals that season, and his family realized he had been following the hockey games along with everyone else. "So we learned then that Rick loved sports," said Dick.

In 1975, Rick was finally admitted into a public school. Two years later, he told his father he wanted to participate in a five-mile benefit run for a local lacrosse player who had been paralyzed in an accident. Dick, far from being a long-distance runner, agreed to push Rick in his wheelchair. They finished next to last, but they felt they had achieved a triumph. That night, Dick remembers, "Rick told us he just didn't feel handicapped when we were competing." Rick's realization turned into a whole new set of horizons that opened up for him and his family, as "Team Hoyt" began to compete in more and more events. Rick reflected on the transformation process for me, using his now-familiar but ever-painstaking technique of picking out letters of the alphabet: "What I mean when I say I feel like I am not handicapped when competing is that I am just like the other athletes, and I think most of the athletes feel the same way. In the beginning nobody would come up to me. However, after a few races some athletes came around and they began to talk to me. During the early days one runner, Pete Wisnewski had a bet with me at every race on who would beat who. The loser had to hang the winner's number in his bedroom until the next race. Now many athletes will come up to me before the race or triathlon to wish me luck."

It is hard to imagine now the resistance which the Hoyts encountered early on, but attitudes did begin to change when they entered the Boston Marathon in 1981, and finished in the top quarter of the field. Dick recalls the earlier, less tolerant days with more

sadness than anger: "Nobody wanted Rick in a road race. Everybody looked at us, nobody talked to us, and nobody wanted to have anything to do with us. But you can't really blame them - people often are not educated, and they'd never seen anyone like us. As time went on, though, they could see he was a person — he has a great sense of humor, for instance. That made a big difference."

After 4 years of marathons, Team Hoyt attempted their first triathlon — and for this Dick had to learn to swim. "I sank like a stone at first" Dick recalled with a laugh "and I hadn't been on a bike since I was six years old."

With a newly-built bike (adapted to carry Rick in front) and a boat tied to Dick's waist as he swam, the Hoyts came in second-to-last in the competition held on Father's Day 1985. "We chuckle to think about that as my Father's Day present from Rick," said Dick. They have been competing ever since, at home and increasingly abroad. Generally they manage to improve their finishing times.

"Rick is the one who inspires and motivates me, the way he just loves sports and competing," Dick said.

And the business of inspiring evidently works as a two-way street. Rick typed out this testimony:

"Dad is one of my role models. Once he sets out to do something, Dad sticks to it whatever it is, until it is done. For example once we decided to really get into triathlons, dad worked out, up to five hours a day, five times a week, even when he was working."

The Hoyts' mutual inspiration for each other seems to embrace others too — many spectators and fellow-competitors have adopted Team Hoyt as a powerful example of determination. "It's been funny," said Dick "Some people have turned out, some in good shape, some really out of shape, and they say 'we want to thank you, because we're here because of you'."

Rick too has taken full note of their effect on fellow-competitors while racing: "Whenever we are passed (usually on the bike) the athlete will say "Go for it!" or "Rick, help your Dad!" When we pass people (usually on the run) they'll say "Go Team Hoyt!" or "If not for you, we would not be out here doing this."

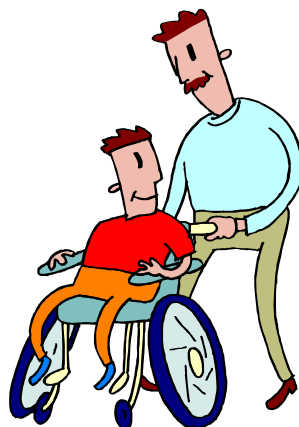
Most of all, perhaps, the Hoyts can see an impact from their efforts in the area of the handicapped, and on public attitudes toward the physically and mentally challenged. "That's the big thing," said Dick. "People just need to be educated. Rick is helping many other families coping with disabilities in their struggle to be included." That is not to say that all obstacles are now overcome for the Hoyts. Dick is "still bothered," he says, by people who are discomforted because Rick cannot fully control his tongue while eating. "In restaurants - and it's only older people mostly - they'll see Rick's food being pushed out of his mouth and they'll leave, or change their table. But I have to say that kind of intolerance is gradually being defeated."

Rick's own accomplishments, quite apart from the duo's continuing athletic success, have included his moving on from high school to Boston University, where he graduated in 1993 with a degree in special education. That was followed a few weeks later by another entry in the Boston Marathon. As he fondly pictured it: "On the day of the marathon from Hopkinton to Boston people all over the course were wishing me luck, and they had signs up which read 'congratulations on your graduation!'"

Rick now works at Boston College's computer laboratory helping to develop a system codenamed "Eagle Eyes," through which mechanical aids (like for instance a powered wheelchair) could be controlled by a paralyzed person's eye-movements, when linked-up to a computer. Together the Hoyts don't only compete athletically; they also go on motivational speaking tours, spreading the Hoyt brand of inspiration to all kinds of audiences, sporting and non-sporting, across the country.

Rick himself is confident that his visibility — and his father's dedication — perform a forceful, valuable purpose in a world that is too often divisive and exclusionary. He typed a simple parting thought:

"The message of Team Hoyt is that everybody should be included in everyday life."



Support Groups



Up With Downs -meets every third Thursday at Willis Knighton Piermont

on the 2nd floor in the conference room at 6:30. Their number is 318-797-8575.

Cystic Fibrosis - meets third Thursday of every month at 6:00 @ Hillman House, Shreveport. For more information call Linda Behm at 318-676-7488.

CHADD - meets the first Tuesday of each month @ Doctor's Hospital in the cafeteria. For more information please call Judy Mabry at 318-865-1289 or John Beck 318-636-5845.

Autism (Northwest Louisiana Chapter) - Contact Alice Reynolds at 318-747-1662 or website www.autism-society.org.

Shreveport Mental Health Support Groups - Contact Dorothy Bennett at 318-676-5124.

Northwest Louisiana Brain Injury Support Groups - meets first Tuesday of each month at Summit Hospital, 4900 Medical Drive, Bossier City. Meeting begins at 7:00 PM. Survivors of brain injury, there families and friends, medical professionals and other interested parties may attend. For more information please call Kathy Geyer at 318-798-8155.

Northwest Louisiana Ostomy Support Group - meets the second Sunday of each month. Schumpert Medical Center, Ryan Room, 2pm. For more information contact Duane Ebarb @ 318-688-4830.

H.O.P.E - for Special Kids-Natchitoches Parish Support Group. For More information call Lequita Johnson at 318-352-0403.

C.A.R.E.S.- (Commitment to Auism Research, Education and Support Group) Contact Melissa Harris at (318)543-0403.

Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Support Group - If you are raising your grandchild and would like to network with others in the same situation, please contact Caddo Council On Aging, Myrtle B. Pickering Senior Center, 4017 Greenwood Rd. or Rhonda Howard or Ernell Brown at 318-632-2080.

Cerebral Palsy Support Group - meets First Tuesday of the month at 6:30PM @ The Center for Therapy, 1800 Buckner Street, Suite A-201. For more information, please call Karri Sith at (318)377-9364.

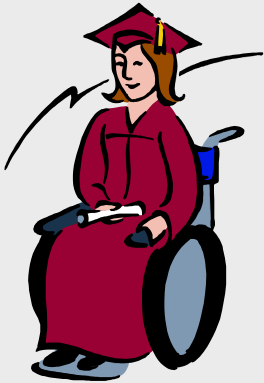


New Horizons Independent Living Center

NHILC services are offered to people with any type of disability. NHILC believe that independence can come even to those with the most severe disabilities. Independence starts as an attitude - a desire to take responsibility for one's own life. Independence continues through the development of knowledge and skills that enable one to control his own activity. Furthermore, New Horizons believes it is the responsibility for those who have achieved a measure of independence to advocate for the removal of all barriers to people with all forms of disabilities. New Horizons believes in the inclusion of all persons with all forms of disability, regardless of origin, age at onset, or degree of disability.

New Horizons believes that each individual is different and unique and should not be treated as if one size fits all. Because of this uniqueness, people with disabilities are in the best position to guide, direct, and control their own lives. We work with consumers with all types of disabilities to assist them in accomplishing their personal goals for independent living. Each independent living plan is as unique as the individual consumer.

New Horizons offers four core independent living services, assistive technology services, transportation services, mental health counseling services, an attendant training program, and attendant services to people with disabilities in the 29 parishes of North Louisiana. We also provide support for people with disabilities who are considering transitioning from a nursing home or other institution. Services and programs are directed from our main office in Shreveport and from satellite offices in Alexandria and Monroe, in the homes of consumers, and in the community. The primary focus of all of the services and programs is toward "enabling people with disabilities to live independently."



For additional Information about New Horizons Independent Living Center and the services they offer, you may contact them at 318-671-8131 or toll-free at 1-877-219-7327.

Louisiana Developmental Disabilities Council's Mission

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To ensure all individuals with disabilities benefit from supports and opportunities in their communities so they achieve quality of life in conformance with their wishes.

Through the Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act Congress funds and authorizes the Developmental Disabilities Council to conduct advocacy, capacity building and systems change activities. The Council's efforts are designed to promote the increased self-determination, independence, productivity, integration and inclusion of people with developmental disabilities in their communities.

The Louisiana Developmental Disabilities Council (DDC) is made up of people from every region of the state who are appointed by the governor to develop and implement a five year plan to address the needs of persons with developmental disabilities. Membership includes persons with developmental disabilities, parents and representatives from public and private agencies. Several members rotate off the Council each year in October and nominations for new members are always welcomed.

You may contact the DDC by calling 1.800.450.8101 or visit their website: www.laddc.org

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