



Basics for Parents: Parent Training and Information Centers

◆ Barbara's Story ◆

Barbara works for the Parent Training and Information Center (PTI) in her state. She is also the parent of a 17-year-old daughter who has multiple disabilities. Barbara loves to help other parents. She understands what they are going through. Everyday she gives many families who have children with disabilities help, hope, and a lot of information.

On this day, Barbara's first call is from a new parent who thinks her eight-month-old son may need early intervention services. Barbara gives her the number for the early intervention office in her area. She sends her information about early intervention services and about the PTI, too. She also gives her information on a local parent support group.

The next call is from a social worker at a local elementary school. She wants to know if someone at the PTI can help a parent who only speaks Spanish. Barbara gives her the name of one of the Spanish-speaking staff members and information on how to contact her.

Then, Barbara places a call to a parent she talked to last week. Barbara needed to do some research to get all the information this mom needed. Now that she's gathered the information, she's ready to share it with her. Barbara also has written information she can send her.

Another call comes from a dad who is really worried. His son is repeating 2nd grade and has been getting help after school. Even so, the boy is struggling in class. The school wants to evaluate him for a disability. Dad wants to know what this means. He wants to

help his son, but he's worried about having him tested. Barbara spends a lot of time talking with this dad. She reassures him about the testing, explaining that it will help the school learn if his son has any special needs. If so, then the school will be able to provide his son with the services that can help him succeed. She explains the special education process and his child's rights. She also tells him about the PTI's upcoming workshops and the ones that might be especially helpful to him. With the information that she gives, he is better informed and feels more confident about having his child evaluated.

These are just some of the calls Barbara encounters every day. Parents call the PTI wanting to know about disability information, educational options, school services, respite services, assistive technology, sources for funding, behavior plans, transition planning—just about anything and everything they might need to know to help their child who has a disability.

What is a Parent Training and Information Center?

A Parent Training and Information Center—or PTI—is a terrific information resource for parents of children with disabilities. Every state has at least one PTI. Each one has a different name. For example, one of the PTIs in California is named Matrix Parent Network and Resource Center. The PTI in New Hampshire is called the Parent Information Center. Whatever the actual name, each is commonly known as a PTI. Some states also have Community Parent Resource Centers, or CPRCs. CPRCs do the same work as the PTIs, but they focus on reaching





underserved parents of children with disabilities, who live in specific areas of the state, including low-income parents, parents of children with limited English proficiency, and parents with disabilities. PTIs and CPRCs are funded through our nation's special education law, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). As you can probably guess from their name, their purpose is to *provide parents with information and training* about:

- ♦ disabilities;
- ♦ parent and children's rights under the IDEA and other relevant laws; and
- ♦ resources in the community, state, and nation.

Parent Centers know about the needs of children and families. They understand school policies and practices. Through their experience with the education of children with disabilities, the needs of families and schools, Parent Centers make valuable contributions on a local and statewide basis in support of schools to improve services and outcomes for students with disabilities.

When would I call my Parent Center?

You might call your PTI or CPRC when you have a disability-related, early intervention, special education, or transition question. The Parent Center can help you:

- ♦ understand your child's disability and special needs;
- ♦ learn about the IDEA and what it means for your child;
- ♦ learn about the options, programs, services, and resources available to help your child and family;
- ♦ learn how to talk effectively to the people who work with your child;
- ♦ actively participate in making decisions about the services your child receives;
- ♦ work effectively with your child's school to develop your child's educational program;
- ♦ understand the benefits of mediation for resolving disagreements with your child's school; and



- ♦ participate in school reform efforts on a local and/or statewide basis if you so choose.

Some Centers may also:

- ♦ provide information to teachers and other professionals who work with children with disabilities;
- ♦ help your child understand his or her rights upon reaching the age of majority; and
- ♦ help you participate in developing your state's improvement plan.

How do Parent Centers help parents?

Parent Centers mainly help parents by providing information on the phone. You have a question, the PTI/CPRC tries to answer it. They may refer you to other helpful organizations in your community or offer practical advice.

Centers are run by well-trained and knowledgeable staff. Most have children with disabilities themselves. Some may speak more than one language. They answer the phone prepared to hear your concerns and issues. Most PTIs have one main office with a toll-free telephone number, so that parents can call free of charge from anywhere in the state. Many PTIs also have other offices around the state.

Parent Centers put major effort into conducting workshops, conferences, and seminars for parents. In these training sessions, parents can learn about IDEA, the special education process, recommended practices, and much, much more. Often, Parent Center staff serve on different local and state level advisory councils, boards, or work groups that are designed to improve results for students with disabilities and enhance home-school-community partnerships. Some Centers also extend their training and information services to professionals who work with children with disabilities and their families.

Centers also use snail mail, e-mail, faxes, and Web sites to share their information. Many Centers publish newsletters and other written

materials. They may also provide these materials in other languages based upon the needs of families in the community.

As you know, dealing with many issues at one time can be overwhelming. An experienced Parent Center staff member can help you sort through the issues and put them in perspective. Together, you can brainstorm strategies and possible solutions. What questions need to be asked? Of whom? What information or training would be helpful? What does the law say? The PTI/CPRC can help you address your unique concerns, and expand and build upon your knowledge and strengths.

Most Centers have limited resources and don't go to school meetings to advocate for you and your child. Some Centers do go to meetings, mainly to offer support to parents. Most often, the PTI/CPRC gives *you* the skills and confidence to negotiate for your child on your own. This helps you get your child the services needed to reach his or her full potential.

Will I have to pay for services?

Most services are free to parents. However, there may be some services where the PTI/CPRC does charge a fee. Parents should ask about any costs for services when they contact the Center.

My son has a disability. Can the Parent Center help me find resources to help him?

Absolutely. Depending upon your needs, the PTI/CPRC can usually:

- ◆ tell you about any upcoming workshops related to your son's disability;
- ◆ help you develop your negotiation skills, so you're sure his needs are addressed in his Individualized Education Program (IEP);
- ◆ put you in touch with available parent support groups;

- ◆ recommend articles, books, videos, and organizations;
- ◆ share information on resources and supports available from the school system, community, state, and national centers, such as NICHCY;
- ◆ give you a list of tutors, special schools, or programs for children with disabilities; and
- ◆ refer you to educational consultants or specialists, so you can learn more about what your child needs.



We just moved to this state. Our son needs special education services. We have his old IEP with us. Can the Parent Center help us?

Sure. First, the PTI will probably ask you some questions to get a picture of your situation. For example: Where do you live now? (This will tell the Center what school district you're in.) What are the dates on your son's IEP? (This will tell the Center if the IEP is current or not.) What kind of services was your son receiving in your old state? (This will tell the Center what types of services your son needs.)

The PTI/CPRC will probably share a lot of information with you. They may talk a bit about the law. Both federal and state regulations have requirements for schools when a child moves into the state with an IEP from another state. The Center will want to make sure you understand what those requirements are.

With all this information, the PTI/CPRC should be able to direct you to the right school office. They can also advise you on how to use your son's existing IEP. This will be useful when you meet with staff at his new school. And you can always call the Center back if you need more information in the future.

My daughter has been receiving special education services for two years, but I'm not sure she's getting all that she needs. How can the Parent Center help me?

There are several ways the PTI/CPRC can help you. First, the Center may invite you to one of its workshops on the special education law, IDEA. There, you'll learn more about the rights of children with disabilities under the law. And you'll gain more understanding on how the special education process is designed to work. This information will help you work with the school system. The Parent Center may also recommend workshops that target areas such as:

- ◆ How to Develop Your Child's IEP
- ◆ Collaborating with Your Child's School
- ◆ How to Advocate for Your Child
- ◆ What Do You Do When Home-School Communication Breaks Down?

Many Parent Centers have lending libraries. If yours does, they may loan you a book or a video. They may also suggest specific organizations or specialists working in the area of your daughter's disability.

The PTI/CPRC may offer to review your child's school records with you. Together, you can see if anything is unclear or appears to be missing. If it seems that more information on your child is needed, the Center will give you some ideas on how to talk with the school about gathering this information.

If, indeed, your daughter does need more services, the Parent Center can be particularly helpful. They know a great deal about how to work with school systems. They can help you explore options and develop a strategy for working with your daughter's school. This includes how to talk to your daughter's school about her need for more services. The Center can also tell you what other options are available to you, if you and the school cannot agree.

And always, the PTI/CPRC will be there to provide you with follow-up support, information, and advice. Advocating for your child is a long-term commitment. The Parent Center is there to help you and your child.

Finding Your Parent Center

To find your Parent Center, look at the NICHCY *State Resource Sheet* for your state (available on our Web site or by contacting us directly). You'll find the PTIs and CPRCs listed there (under "Organizations Especially for Parents") as well as other information resources such as disability-specific organizations and state agencies serving children with disabilities.

Also, the Technical Assistance ALLIANCE for Parent Centers is the national coordinating project for all PTIs and CPRCs throughout the U.S. and territories. You can find your state's parent center on the ALLIANCE Web site.

NICHCY: www.nichcy.org
1.800.695.0285

The ALLIANCE:
www.taalliance.org/Centers/PTIs.htm
1.888.248.0822

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