

Guidance for Special Educators for Providing Remote Counseling and Training to Parents of School-Aged Children

Purpose

This communication provides guidance regarding the related service of parent* counseling and training under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and provides suggestions for its use during periods of remote learning. The intent is to support but not overwhelm parents as they navigate the evolving conditions resulting from the pandemic.

Introduction

Parent counseling and training is an available related service under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Providing families with counseling and training assists them in acquiring skills to support the implementation of their child's Individualized Education Program (IEP). Given the global COVID-19 pandemic, our students' homes have become the location of their educational placements. While plans for a return to in-person instruction for school year 2020-21 are underway, schools must be prepared for a hybrid remote and in-person environment, including potential periods of extended remote learning as individual or school-wide health circumstances warrant. It is important to consider how to best offer this service to parents in various learning environments.

As identified in the IDEA, parent counseling and training can be accomplished by:

- Assisting parents in understanding the educational needs of their child;
- Providing parents with information about child development;
- Providing support and basic information about a child's placement in special education;
- Providing parents with contact information about parent support groups, financial assistance resources, and other potential sources of information or support outside the school system.
- Parent counseling and training is not intended to add an undue burden to schools or to

**The term "parent" means— (A) a natural, adoptive, or foster parent of a child (unless a foster parent is prohibited by State law from serving as a parent); (B) a guardian (but not the State if the child is a ward of the State); (C) an individual acting in the place of a natural or adoptive parent (including a grandparent, stepparent, or other relative) with whom the child lives, or an individual who is legally responsible for the child's welfare; or (D) except as used in sections 1415(b)(2) and 1439(a)(5) of Vermont Special Education Rules, an individual assigned under either of those sections to be a surrogate parent. 20 U.S.C. § 1401(23); 34 C.F.R. § 300.30*

Contact Information:

If you have questions about this document or would like additional information, please contact [Tracy Harris](#) or [Katy Langevin](#).

parents. Identifying the need for this related service follows the same process for all special education services: the IEP team should make a decision about the need for this related service based on comprehensive evaluation information, and those services should only be administered if they are required for the child to benefit from special education.

As always, services are needs-based and should be adjusted if check-ins reveal the need for a different form of support. If it is found that more support is needed, this should be reflected in an agreement with parents and a Form 5b to amend the Distance Learning Plan. Parent counseling and training is an important part of distance learning and should be considered as an addition to the DLP where needed.

Education Regarding a Child's Disability

If a parent has recently learned that their child has a disability, the parent may need specific developmental information to more fully understand their child's strengths and needs, how the child learns, and what strategies best support them.

Academic Tools and Considerations

- **Goals**
 - It will be helpful to support the parent in understanding what their child's math, reading and written language goals are and what specific concepts and levels are appropriate for their child right now.
 - This is particularly important in order for the parent to focus on the targeted skill.
 - Example: decoding versus word recognition
- **Vocabulary and Strategies**
 - Coaching a parent on the specific vocabulary, processes or strategies familiar to the child will go far in helping the parent to support their child with their academic work.
 - Math Example: STAR = Search the word problem, Translate the words into an equation, Answer the problem, Review your answer.
 - Reading Example: TELLs = Title, Examine, Look, Look up, Setting.
 - Written Expression Example: POW-TREE = Pick an idea, Organize notes (Topic Sentence, Reason, Explanation, Ending).
- **Tools**
 - Make sure the student and the parent both have access to the tools the child has learned to use
 - Math Examples: number lines, manipulatives, ten-frames, calculators, graphing paper, protractors, rulers, multiplication tables, etc.
 - Reading Examples: story webs/maps/visual organizers, instructional level text, independent level text, etc.

- Written Expression Examples: graphic organizers, lined paper, pencil grips, slant boards, assistive technology, word processing programs, etc.
- **Games and Practical Applications**
 - Parents can make academic times at home more enjoyable by playing games and applying their math, reading and writing skills to household tasks.
 - Math Examples: cooking, measuring, budgeting, Shutbox, Farkle, Yahtzee, Rumikub, Phase 10, Connect Four, Chutes and Ladders, etc.
 - Reading Examples: reading recipes/street signs/grocery lists/maps/schedules/labels, word searches, rhyming games, writing rap lyrics, mad libs, Boggle, Scrabble, Apples to Apples, etc.
 - Writing Examples: writing notes/letters/email messages/text messages, creating a blog, making a grocery list, painting rocks with words of hope, making signs, Scrabble, Mad Libs, crossword puzzles, Balderdash, etc.

Behavioral Supports

A new environment will likely mean new behaviors. It is advised that parents are offered tools to track the changes in behavior and that there is a plan to adjust behavior interventions in light of these changes. The change in activities, environment and schedule will likely lead to changes in intervention effectiveness. For example: a student at school may have found snacks or outside play to be reinforcing but due to the increased availability of those reinforcers, they are no longer effective.

- Copy of behavior plan and checklist, if applicable
 - Assist in revising for home
- Reinforcers
 - Provide the parent with ideas around what reinforcers have proven effective for their child; work with parent to create their own menu of reinforcers
- Consultation regarding antecedent, behavior, consequences, function of behavior
- Explanation of school's PBIS expectations, if applicable
 - Assist in revising for home
- Consultation around frequent, specific praise
- Consultation around managing responses (tone, affect and duration)
- Consultation on prompts, reminders and corrections

Other Related Services

Case managers should reach out to related service providers as needed to obtain resources and to get guidance to share with parents regarding remote education. Determinations will have to be made based on needs of the family and availability of the service provider for more direct training and consultation. Below are examples of possible related service provider resources.

- **Occupational Therapy**
 - Provide a consultation regarding sensory diet

- Assist in revising for home
 - Provide parent with sensory tools helpful for their particular child
 - Provide a video demonstration of how to use sensory tools
 - Provide consultation and video modeling around fine motor tasks
 - Provide parent and child with adaptations and tools for writing / keyboarding
 - Provide consultation and video modeling around fine motor exercises
 - Occupational Therapy Tools (for parent at home and for therapist to model)
 - Sensory brushes, weighted blankets, interoception (a sense that provides information about how one's body feels on the inside), body-check charts, resistance bands, pencil grips, body socks, etc.
 - Home Adaptive Tools (pillow case filled with rice instead of a weighted lap pillow, thin gloves with fingers Velcroed together instead of pencil grip)
- **Physical Therapy**
 - Provide consultation and video demonstration of gross motor exercises
 - Provide parent and child with stick figure representations of exercises or other visual aids
 - Understand what parents have the physical strength to do and what they do not. Provide strategies for parents to protect their own bodies from harm
 - Provide data/tracking logs.
 - Physical Therapy Tools or Tool Substitutions (for parent at home and for therapist to model)
 - Scooter boards, weighted balls, resistance bands, yoga balls, stander, ramps, etc.
 - Home Adaptive Tools (bucket filled with toys instead of weights, use a rolled-up yoga mat as a balance beam)
- **Speech and Language Pathology**
 - Oral Expression
 - Listening Comprehension
 - Speech Therapy Tools (for parent at home and for therapist to model)
 - Bite blocks, tongue depressor, chew tubes, PECs board, Tobii Dynavox, Proloquo, other AAC devices, etc.

Resources

- [Vermont Family Network](#) (VFN)
- [Vermont Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health](#)
- [Vermont's Interdisciplinary Team](#) (I-Team)
- [Vermont Agency of Education COVID-19 Special Education Guidance](#)
- Vermont Department of Mental Health: [Staying Mentally Healthy During Self-Isolation or Quarantine](#)

- National Association of School Psychologists: [Helping Children Cope with Changes Resulting from COVID-19](#)