

# VIBRATIONS

**NEWSLETTER OF COLORADO SERVICES FOR CHILDREN WHO ARE DEAFBLIND**  
Serving Children with Combined Vision and Hearing Loss (Deafblindness),  
Their Families, and Their Service Providers

**Modified Spring / Summer 2007 Edition**

<http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdesped/SD-Deafblind.asp>

*This is an edited version of the original newsletter. Only the content related to inclusion and access to the general education curriculum has been preserved. Please credit the original source, if you copy any of the content of this version.*



**Paula Kluth**

Toward more inclusive classrooms  
and communities

This website is dedicated to promoting inclusive schooling and exploring positive ways of supporting students with autism and other disabilities.

Links are included to take you to the following topics (and more):

Do You See What I Mean? Creating Visual Literacy Supports for Special Needs Students

20 Ways to Adapt the Read Aloud

Honoring and Including Students with Communication Differences


Making Relationships a Priority

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Spring 2007





“Teaching children to be knowledgeable about differences, supportive of others, and active in changing structures that are oppressive to various groups can all begin within inclusive classrooms. It is within a classroom that openly and directly addresses the interests, needs, and possibilities of all its members that students may best experience democratic structures that empower and support all participants.”

(Sapon-Shevin, 1992, p. 21).





## A PARENT'S PERSPECTIVE FROM ONE PARENT TO ANOTHER

### What Inclusion Means to Us

By Karen Roberts, Family Specialist

As I write this article for *VIBRATIONS*, it's early on a Monday morning and my family is just starting to wake and head out the door for another week of work and school. I think Benjamin may have half an eye open...in a few minutes I'll help him wake up, change him, dress him, move him to my bed where I'll tube feed him, and give him his sandpaper cue which will let him know it's a school day. Since his ears are draining some nasty stuff we'll skip the hearing aids. And the glasses...I'll let him wake up a little more and we'll see if this is a glasses day or not. Into the wheelchair he'll go and down to the van where the noise and routine of going to school has become all very familiar, click goes the seatbelt, grind and slam as the van door closes, on and on goes my voice about going to school as we drive the four short blocks to our neighborhood elementary school, down the van ramp and on to the playground where once he hears all the voices of the kids—a light of recognition and anticipation crosses his face and up his arms go in excitement.

And on some days that is enough for me to know that we are doing the right thing. Benjamin spends the first half of his day in the third grade general education classroom and has math and some “down” time in the special education classroom. Our school is not a center school for children with severe support needs. But I didn't really know that when I was searching for the “perfect” place for him, six years ago. I started looking early, and it was overwhelming. There were almost too many options in our district (Denver). Eventually our family narrowed it down to three priorities—

The most important thing to Benjamin and his family for his elementary school education is that he be included in a general education classroom in a neighborhood within his community—social inclusion is an essential part of every child's education; his family will be involved in the neighborhood school; Benjamin's classmates will motivate him to reach his potential and he will motivate them to achieve theirs. The second most important goal we have for Benjamin is that he be able to communicate his wants and needs in a generally understandable way. The third most important goal we have for Benjamin is that he be allowed the same rights of access as other children to typical school activities such as the playground, art, music, the cafeteria, the auditorium.

These goals were important as we went through the very complicated “placement” process with our district. Different folks said different things. Certainly everyone supported (and legally had to) his going to our home school. BUT, we also needed the structure in place to make the education meaningful for Benjamin. And that has taken an incredible amount of work on my part, as well as on the part of key IEP team members. It has meant great patience when I was told there was not a bathroom to change him in (it always seems to boil down to that!), waiting a long time for books to be adapted and for a paraprofessional to be found and hired. It has taken a few years for the staff to feel completely comfortable with Benjamin and his educational style. And every year is a new teacher and a new working relationship. I feel the key to Benjamin's success is a positive working relationship among his IEP team. We have gone through a few people but all in all he is supported by an incredible team. But it has taken time to reach this level of trust and comfort with one another.

Everyone's story is different and our children's needs change through the years. But the acceptance of Benjamin among his peers, those with disabilities and those without, is a constant. I anticipate that Benjamin will be in a more segregated situation in middle school and beyond, but I am also confident that the community he is a part of, and will continue to always be a part of, is so much stronger and richer due to his inclusion. And I feel that is important for all my children. That they contribute to the world in whatever way they can, make it a better place and make it a good place. That makes for a good life. What more can we ask for?

# When Students Have Severe Disabilities

*Reprinted with permission from the Fall 2006 SESA Newsletter*

*By Margaret Cisco, education specialist, SESA*

Regular and special educators often have limited exposure to individuals with severe disabilities so they assume these students cannot learn. A related problem occurs when educators initially believe the individual can learn, but the instruction provided does not result in learning, so they conclude that the student cannot learn after all. These expectations and conclusions are flawed because they are based on inaccurate assumptions. The fact is that since the middle of the last century, fundamental beliefs about individuals with severe disabilities and the instructional interventions for them have changed. These changes reflect a different set of fundamental beliefs.

During the 1960s, individuals with severe disabilities were placed in institutions for “custodial” care because the belief at the time was that they could not learn. A pioneer special educator named Marc Gold developed a framework for instruction based on a different set of fundamental beliefs. His beliefs were that: (a) students with severe disabilities have a lot more potential than anyone realizes; (b) people with disabilities should have the opportunity to live their lives much like everyone else; and (c) everyone can learn if we can figure out how to teach him or her. Marc Gold’s slogan was: *Try Another Way*. Or in other words, “If at first you don’t succeed, try and try again.”



Friend and former SESA specialist, Doyle Burnett, described the educator’s job with an analogy. He said that a student who has a severe disability is like a treasure chest. The educator’s job is to find the key that will open the chest to reveal the treasure within. This analogy can be taken a step further. Consider the treasure seekers’ staying power: They do not stop with the first key if it fails to open the chest. As educators, we need to keep trying new keys until we find the one that works for our student.

Our students with severe disabilities rely on all of us to “try another way” over and over again until we get it right for them. We must focus on changes to the environment, activity adaptations, and instructional strategies that support students who must engage in instruction differently from their peers to be successful learners. Students may experience cognitive challenges, autism, orthopedic impairments, and/or other limiting conditions. The fundamental belief of this author is that even students who most people think cannot learn will be able to do so with appropriate accommodations and positive expectations. Our goal is to provide many potential keys to the treasure chest for you to try if the first one fails. Use the keys to spark new ideas and try the ones that fit best based on your knowledge of the student and change them as you learn more about your student.

**For more information about Marc Gold’s work go to:**

**<http://www.marcgold.com/aboutmarcgold.html>**



# Start with Three Key Concepts

*Reprinted with permission from the Fall 2006 SESA Newsletter*

*By Margaret Cisco, education specialist, SESA*

These three key concepts apply across all areas of low incidence disabilities. They are *respect*, *organization*, and *expectation*. Set up the learning environment with these three concepts to create a solid foundation for the educational program.



## **FIRST KEY CONCEPT** **Be Respectful of the Student**

Lack of respect is a barrier to learning. The following situations demonstrate a lack of respect for students with severe disabilities and describe the alternative. Use the list to assess the classroom situation and teach others how to show respect for the student with severe disabilities.

1. Many students with severe disabilities have instructional aides with them all day long. Whenever educators or peers look at or talk to the aide but do not include the student, the student is not respected. Everyone in the student's environment needs to interact directly with her. Speak to her and wait for her to respond in her own way and time. Teachers need to be models of good interaction for peers and explain to them how the individual can respond. It would help to ask other students or teachers how they would feel if no one ever addressed them.
2. Some students with severe disabilities cannot speak. When educators or peers talk to each other in front of the student as if the student is not present, then the student is not respected (and it's just plain rude!). To show respect, everyone needs to include the student in the conversation and talk about information that is interesting and relevant to him. Otherwise, save the conversation for another location or time of day.
3. Many students with severe disabilities have a delay between taking in information and reacting to it. When educators or peers do not wait for the student to process and react to information before they proceed, then the student is not respected. To show respect, everyone should wait long enough for the student to understand before expecting him to respond in some way.
4. Some students with severe disabilities may not understand information they see or hear. When educators or peers do not notify the student before a change (e.g., before moving or touching, changing position, giving or taking an item, going to another location, or starting a new activity), then she is not respected. To show respect, everyone must inform the student of what is about to happen, and they need to do it in a way that she can understand. This may not be words. Other ways for giving information are discussed in the visual supports section. Be sure to wait until the student shows that she understands before making the change.
5. Many students with severe disabilities have full time paraprofessionals with them throughout the school day. When educators leave the entire program to para-professionals and do not provide directions, materials, and ongoing program support, then the student is not respected. To show respect, educators need to consistently work with the students who have severe disabilities and

the paraprofessionals who support them.



## **SECOND KEY CONCEPT** **Get Organized**

A second common barrier to instruction and learning is the lack of instructional planning for students with severe disabilities. While other students have classroom schedules, classroom routines, and daily lesson plans, the students with significant needs often go with the flow. This can mean anything from doing something on the whim of the adult or just listening to what is happening around the class.

1. Establish a daily activity schedule (and stick to it!) Typical classrooms have daily schedules, even though the schedule may vary across weekdays. For example, Monday's schedule may be slightly different than Thursday's schedule. Often, the student with a severe disability is moved from place to place without a plan for the day.
2. Even when there is a plan for the day, the student may feel as though events are random because no one informs him. Be sure to inform the student of his schedule in a manner he understands. This will usually require some form of visual support.
3. Use consistent routines for typical daily activities. Everyone functions well with routines. Good teachers know that routines help students to learn, to better manage their behavior, and to become more independent within the established classroom framework. These same benefits of routine also apply to students with severe disabilities. Doing things in the same way with the same cues will increase the student's ability to understand what is about to happen, and thereby better engage in the anticipated event.



## **THIRD KEY CONCEPT** **Enable Active Participation**

In most schools nowadays, the special education placement model involves inclusion. In other words, students with severe disabilities go to general education classes. Whether the student is included or attends class in the special education room, another barrier to learning occurs if the student has no purpose except being present and cared for in that location. Being present and cared for is not enough. When educators do not expect and modify activities to enable participation, learning cannot occur.

SESA multiple disabilities program specialist Kathy Osinski uses a good rule of thumb to evaluate whether the student is actively participating. The original source of the following is unknown:

Ask yourself if a potato could do what the student is being asked to do. If a potato can do it, then the student is not actively participating. For example, a potato can be present in the kindergarten or in the chemistry class so just being there is not active participation. Other articles in this insert address student participation in more detail.

# Access to the General Education Curriculum TWO STRATEGIES

Reprinted with permission from the Fall 2006 SESA Newsletter.

by Margaret Cisco, education specialist, SESA

Definition of appropriate curriculum for students with severe disabilities progressed over time as educators became more experienced with such students and researchers began to assess the benefits of different methods for different curriculum content.

- ◆ Initially, the students with severe disabilities were given the kinds of activities given to typically developing infants and toddlers. Exposure to these activities did not support skill development, which is hardly surprising. After all, if exposure had supported learning in the first place, the students with severe disabilities would not need special education instruction.
- ◆ The next effort was to break the same developmentally sequenced activities into smaller steps. Instruction often meant practicing the same skill over and over with the same toys regardless of student age or interest. Although there were some exceptions, life skills and academic skills were generally ignored because the students never did master the entire range of early developmental toys and activities.
- ◆ Eventually, researchers and educators discovered that adults with severe disabilities were more motivated by functional activities, those with real meaning rather than baby toys. The students could participate partially and still be active in the tasks and learn, even though they were unable to perform the whole task without help. With accommodations and supports, individuals with severe disabilities could become more independent in real-life activities than anticipated. The curriculum emphasis shifted to functional and community-based instruction. Gradually, the school age curricula focused more on developing functional skills in life domains such as self-care, housekeeping, community skills, work, and recreation/leisure. Students were “integrated” or “mainstreamed” with other students. They were able to join other students for generally non-academic periods where they could fit for social interaction or participation only. This was called a Community Based Curriculum (CBI). Academic instruction was limited to the skills that would apply in the curriculum domains. Many adults educated in this era are essentially illiterate because they were not taught reading, writing, or math.
- ◆ The inclusion movement emphasized placement in chronologically age-appropriate classrooms in neighborhood schools. The goal was to facilitate belonging and peer interaction. Unfortunately, in many situations, this only meant that a one-to-one aide was assigned to the student creating a social barrier. Sadly, it often meant that neither the general education teacher nor the special education teacher developed or managed the student program, often leaving it up to the person with the least amount of training or experience.

The current requirement of IDEA 2004 is that all students including those with severe disabilities have access to the *general education curriculum* with learning goals consistent with those of students without disabilities. The implications are: (1) all students, even those with the most severe disabilities need access to the general curriculum, including instruction in reading and math and (2)

students with significant disabilities need instruction that is effective in helping them achieve their state's alternate achievement standards for reading and math (and science beginning in 2007-2008). Realization of these goals presents significant challenges for students who have traditionally been given labels of mental retardation, autism, deaf-blindness, traumatic brain injury, and multiple disabilities. Curriculum access is not the same as physical access to the classroom. Sometimes, the student's specific support needs may require that instruction occur outside the grade level classroom.

In any case, whether the placement is a self-contained classroom or resource room (with integration or mainstreaming for some parts of the day) or whether placement is full time in a grade level classroom with age peers, the student is expected to be an active participant who is engaged with materials and grade level curriculum content, active learning, and communicating with other students and educators.

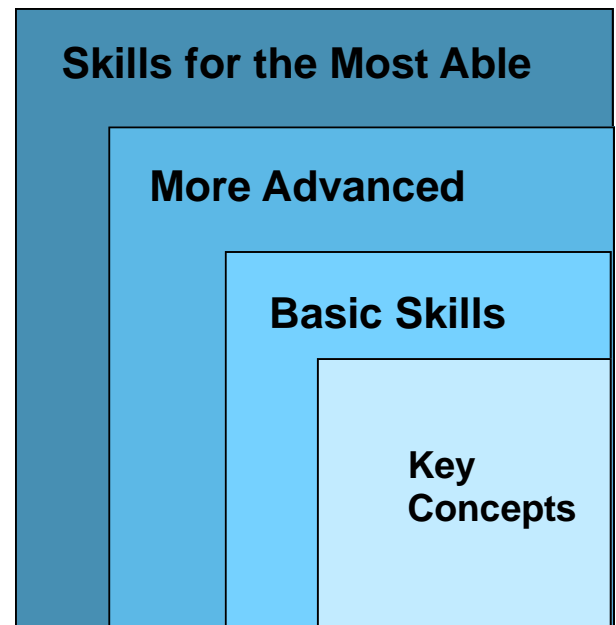
## **STRATEGY #1:**

### **Selecting Content from the General Education Curriculum**

When choosing the content to address, the curriculum can be viewed as having many levels of information to be learned. The student with severe disabilities may only be expected to learn key concepts.

The general education teacher will be able to assist the team in choosing key content for the class.

The diagram below explains how to select what to teach from the grade level curriculum. The student with severe cognitive challenges might be exposed to all of the information in a chapter, but would be expected to learn or be tested on key concepts.

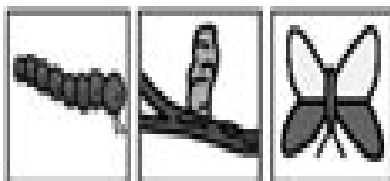


### **Examples of key concepts:**

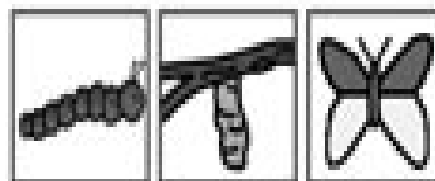
The seventh grade science class is learning about life cycles. The target student is learning to sequence three story pictures. His content is learning about and sequencing pictures of the three stages of the life cycle of the butterfly and the life cycle of the frog.

The sixth grade class is learning about grammar. The target student is a beginning writer. Her target skill is learning to use a capital letter at the beginning and a period at the end of the sentence.

How might a student with severe disabilities participate as an active learner with grade level content? One example is the 7th grade student learning about life cycles. The student's IEP goal relates to learning to sequence three pictures to tell a story: beginning, middle, and end. By blending his IEP goal with the grade level content of the science class, his assessment task is to sequence the stages in the life cycle of butterflies and frogs using three pictures like these:



and



## **STRATEGY #2**

### **When the General Curriculum Seems Like a Pipe Dream**

Sometimes a student with severe disabilities seems to have interests and skills so far from other students in the same grade, that it can be hard to figure out how to provide education related to the general curriculum. This section covers the use of “routines” as a support. Teaching with routines can bridge the gap between lack of participation and participating in typical routines that are different from classmates, and/or from participating in the same routines as peers to access the general curriculum. Teaching with routines is a well-researched support strategy recommended across severe disabilities.



Develop a routine in the following manner: The first example schedule and routine is for a student with deafblindness or multiple disabilities. It is adapted from <http://www.tsbvi.edu/Outreach/seehear/archive/routine.html>

### **CHOOSING THE ACTIVITIES**

Before setting up routines, it is important to decide which daily activities to formalize into routines. The following tips will help in this process:

1. Write the sequence of activities that occurs in a typical school day.
2. Begin by picking obvious activities where routines are likely to already exist, such as eating and toileting. Next, look at the activities that adults must do for the student. Would these activities be made easier if the student could participate partially? For example, it would be helpful if the student could anticipate when the adult needs to slide a diaper under him and participate by raising his bottom rather than requiring the adult to lift him. Finally, look at those activities that could be done as vocational activities.

### **Developing A Routine**

After identifying activities for routines, it will be helpful to write out the routines. List all the steps in the activity in the order in which they occur. The amount of detail in each step will depend on the expectations for the student. Work on specific IEP objectives if they fit into the routine. These objectives would be written into the routine script. One objective might be included in several different routines.

#### **SCHOOL SCHEDULE**

8:30	a.m.	undress
9:00	a.m.	bathroom
9:15	a.m.	morning gathering
9:30	a.m.	table activity
9:45	a.m.	free time
10:00	a.m.	music
10:30	a.m.	medication and snack
11:00	a.m.	physical therapy
11:30	a.m.	music
12:00	p.m.	computer
12:30	p.m.	recess
1:00	p.m.	lunch time
1:30	p.m.	bathroom
1:45	p.m.	wash up, brush teeth
2:00	p.m.	library
2:30	p.m.	dress to go home
3:00	p.m.	go to bus

**Example: Mealtime/Snack Routine with IEP targets in parentheses**

1. Walk to the table (Trail walk from hall to cafeteria.)
2. Find place and sit down
3. Look for spoon when tapped on table and pick it up (Use vision to explore space and locate objects. Grasp object.)
4. Allow adult to help scoop and carry spoon to mouth (hand-over-hand.)
5. Set down spoon and reach for cup when drink is offered, or set down cup and reach for dessert. (Indicate choice by reaching for preferred item.)
6. Help move plate away when meal is finished
7. Allow adult to wipe off hands and face
8. Drink medication from medicine cup
9. Remove bib (Remove clothing independently.)
10. Get down from chair

Track the student's progress by taking periodic videos of the activity or keeping data.

As seen in the example above, routines provide multiple opportunities to practice a skill in a familiar context. If the routine were developed around classroom participation, such as the free time slot in the schedule, the student would be able to interact with peers without disabilities. Routines provide opportunities to work on functional skills in natural contexts (e.g., dressing for the outdoors, not just to practice shirt-off, shirt-on). Routines also provide predictable events for students who can learn to anticipate and initiate their active role and demonstrate how they are "smart."

The example that follows is for a student with autism or autism characteristics: A typical way of structuring tasks visually might include using baskets or folders for assignments. The student would be taught to get the first basket, complete the task inside, then return that basket and get the next one. Once the student understands the structure and is able to utilize it for independent work, he can use the same routine in the grade level classroom.







Routines can be developed and taught for communication, classroom participation, and academic performance. Each of us uses routines throughout the day. They allow us to be efficient in what we do and enable attending to the content that requires our focus.

## Conclusion

In this new millennium, nearly fifty years since Marc Gold advocated "try another way," there continues to be educators who remain uncomfortable in working with and sometimes disrespectful of the type of learners with significant support needs. Without adequate training/knowledge, some educators may even think that their students belong elsewhere, such as a special school or institutional setting. Within Alaska and across the country, it is difficult for teachers and aides to get the information and support they need to use appropriate instructional practice with the challenges presented by working with their students with severe disabilities.

***Editors' Note: We thank Margaret for sharing this article with us. Please be in touch with the Colorado Services for Children with Combined Vision and Hearing Loss Project on how we can work together on educational programs for our learners with deafblindness. Contact Gina Quintana at (303) 866-6605 or Quintana\_g@cde.state.co.us for further assistance.***

**Use this chart to “pat yourself on the back” for strategies already in place and to consider what you will add next:**

	Already doing this one. Give myself a cheer!	I think I'll start this next
✓ Student is shown respect by peers and adults.		<input type="checkbox"/>
✓ Student has a planned daily schedule.		<input type="checkbox"/>
✓ Student participation supported and expected.		<input type="checkbox"/>
✓ Visual supports make sense to the student.		<input type="checkbox"/>
✓ Student has a meaningful way to demonstrate knowledge of key concepts from grade level standards.		<input type="checkbox"/>
✓ Consistent routines enable student participation		<input type="checkbox"/>

*(Chart concept contributed by Brenda Jaeger, education specialist, SESA)*

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# From Here to Activity . . .

*Students that do not write, communicate verbally or comprehend the curriculum at grade level can actively participate, just look and see!*

*In Biology, student receives the same worksheet as others in lab. Student scribbles on the paper as others label the parts of a plant.*



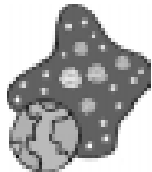
**Active Solution:** Give students Avery labels with simplified terms i.e. stem, roots, leaves etc. Instruct students to use the stickers to independently label the parts of the plant.



*In Health, students create the Food Guide Pyramid. A paraeducator pastes magazine photos onto paper while the student attends therapy.*

**Active Solution:** Mount a switch accessible camera onto the student's wheelchair. Instruct student to photograph foods from each food group during a fieldtrip to the supermarket.

*In Astronomy, students study diagrams of constellations. A paraeducator studies the pictures for the student with low vision.*



**Active Solution:** Photocopy constellation diagrams. Outline each with puffy paint. Let students explore tactile maps with their hands as the teacher lectures.



*In Math, a paraeducator completes long division problems on a worksheet for the student.*

**Active Solution:** Student uses an IntelliKeys keyboard with MathPad software to set up problems and answers independently.

*In History, a paraeducator uses a pencil to fill in the blanks on a test. The student with physical and sensory disabilities sits with a lowered head.*



**Active Solution:** Convert test to multiple-choice format. Create an ABC grid for communication device. Instruct paraeducator to read the questions and choices to student. Student answers A, B or C by pressing a switch.



*In Chemistry, students verbally identify solvents and solutes during a review session. The nonverbal student watches and listens.*

**Active Solution:** Add pictures of food items such as soda pop, water, sugar, etc. to an AAC device. Prompt student to press a key and choose a classmate to identify the food item as a solute, solvent or solution during a review.

*In Computer Class, a paraeducator moves the mouse and student's hand in a preschool program while others create pages for the school web site.*



**Active Solution:** Create a template of the web page. Prompt student to select text and background colors, use a trackball to draw a picture and type their name with a keyboard.



*In Physical Education, the class practices archery outside. A paraeducator shoot hoops in the gym along side a student*

**Active Solution:** Student joins others outside to practice turn-taking, social interaction and learn the names of archery equipment.

# When a Program is Not Appropriate for Your Child

## What is The Next Step?

By Sandy Lyons

We once found our child in this situation and had to begin the process of advocacy. When a program is not appropriate for your child what is the next step? We first found advocates that understood dual sensory loss, other learning differences and the law. Second we gathered as much information as we could about our child and third we researched other school programs in our area.

We had to meet with many school professionals and it took a lot of time and commitment from us as parents and our advocacy team, but we eventually came to an agreement with our school district and our child was finally placed in what we thought was the most appropriate program. Although advocating wasn't easy it was worth the effort. Our child has since excelled in school and is incredibly happy; his support team of teachers, para-educators and therapists are **wonderful**. We are so thankful for them everyday.

I think it is important to remember when you are meeting with the school district, teachers or anyone involved in an IEP or Mediation to always remain polite and respectful. Professionals may not always see things as we do. We are passionate about our children and want things a certain way, but these meetings are going to be much more successful if everyone involved is courteous.

### IMPORTANT TIPS

1. Understand the law, regarding a **Free and Appropriate Public Education**.
2. Find Advocates that understand your child's disabilities, education and the law.
3. Know your child's strengths and areas of need.
4. Always act professional and respectful.
5. If possible have both parents or a supportive person attend all meetings.
6. Keep a paper trail and document all correspondence in writing with letters.
7. Take a break from the stress and take care of yourself so you can be at your best.

*One looks back with appreciation to the brilliant teachers,  
but with gratitude to those who touched our human feelings.  
The curriculum is so much necessary raw material, but  
warmth is the vital element for the growing plant and for  
the soul of the child.*