



# First Steps

## Record Keeping

# #11

Our children do not come with instructions. Parents Reaching Out provides resources that help families make informed decisions about the care and education of their children. We thank the families who have asked questions and found successful ways to advocate for their child for providing the inspiration for these fact sheets.

Record keeping is one of the most important and empowering ways you can help your child. As you begin to keep records together, you will better understand your child's disability and your child's history. You will also better understand how that history might influence future services and programming and how the system works. The time and effort you give to keeping accurate records will help you secure the services and supports that your child needs to be successful.



### The Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA or the Buckley Amendment)

- Guarantees you the right to inspect and review your child's file; you may also receive copies of the information contained in the files;
- States that only people who need to see the file can access the file;
- Allows you to challenge information in the file if you feel it is inaccurate or misleading;
- If you disagree with something in the file, you can ask the school to remove it; if the request is denied you have three options:
  - You may attach a letter to the page telling why you disagree, OR
  - You may request mediation, OR
  - You may request a due process hearing
- School districts must have your written permission to release records to any other entity with the exception of another school district. The law requires districts to transfer records to each other.
- You may not have a right to see a teacher's personal notes as long as nobody else has ever seen them, either.

*If you have more questions about FERPA, contact:*

#### Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) Office

U.S. Department of Education

600 Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, DC 20202-4605

1-202-260-3887 / TDD 1-202-260-8956 / <http://www.ed.gov/offices/OM/ferpa.htm>

**As the guardian of your child's records**, it is important to know where your child's records are kept by schools and other agencies. Your child's records may be located in:

- Student Cumulative Files in school office
- Health or nurse's office
- Discipline file with teacher and/or school principal
- District Special Education Office files
- Files maintained by support staff providing services to your child. These may include: school counselor, social worker, psychologist, behavior health professional and therapists (occupational, speech/language, physical) or others.
- Files maintained in the offices of your private doctors and other service providers.



## I want to keep good records for my family. Where do I begin?

There are many ways to keep records. To begin getting your child's records in order, we recommend keeping records in chronological order. You can use file folders if you have a file cabinet or you can a notebook system that is more portable and less expensive. (A 3" ring binder with a package of dividers and sheet protectors or a three-hole punch costs about \$10.00).

Label the divider tabs (or folders). Here are some suggestions: IEPs, Evaluations, Doctor's Reports, Correspondence, Phone Calls, School Notices, and Samples (of child's work).

- **IEPs.** This will be a chronological record of your child's Individualized Education Programs and should include the team's recommendations. This section should also include any information you receive as an indication of how progress towards goals, objectives and benchmarks will be measured and any reports that address this progress; and a record of reports between home and school.
- **Evaluations.** Keep copies of all evaluations and recommendations. Evaluations describe your child's needs and should include recommendations for meeting those needs. Evaluations are the first place the team will look when trying to determine educational programming.
- **Doctor's Reports.** These reports add yet another piece to the puzzle. You and the IEP team will certainly want to look at doctor's reports that might have a bearing on your child's success at school. Doctor's reports may provide key information on diagnosis, suggested interventions, processing or supports. Schools do not have to provide medically related therapy as part of the IEP.
- **Correspondence.** Keep copies of all correspondence sent and received.
- **Phone Calls.** Keep a log of phone calls. It is very important to note the date and time of the call, who you spoke with, the subject of the call, and the call's outcome.
- **School Notices.** The district is required to notify you at different times while your child is in school. The district will send you Notices of Meeting, notices of evaluation, Prior Written Notices of Program, and other communications. Keep all notices, progress reports, notes from teachers or other staff and other correspondence (including copies of e-mail).
- **Child's Work.** Keep both good and bad samples of your child's work. Portfolio assessments (a collection of the student's work and recommendations) are being used more and are often more accurate than a formal assessment.
- **Shot Records.** Keep copies of all shot records. Don't rely on your health provider to have these records. Health provider's change over time and the only way to make sure you have an accurate record of your child's immunizations is to keep copies in your files!

*Good record keeping should provide a complete picture of your child!.*

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