

RealTalk for Parents: Podcast #1

Focus on Fall School Check-In



Welcome to RealTalk for Parents the new Podcast from The Parents Place Maryland. RealTalk will bring you information, education and support because being a parent of a child with Special needs can be challenging.

My name is Yvette DeCosta and I'm a proud mom of three two son's with ADHD and my typically developing diva daughter. I've been on a personal journey of navigating the special education maze for the past 10 years. Seven of those years I've been helping families here in Maryland working here at the Parents' Place of Maryland.

Today I'm going to introduce you to the Parent's Place and what we do and talk about our Focus on Fall School check in. The Parent's Place of Maryland is Maryland's Parent training and Information center and has been supporting Families of children with Disabilities in Maryland for over 25 years. We are also Maryland's Family to Family health information center.

Fall is really upon us the weather is getting colder and the end of the first marking is over. Your child has had a chance to settle in and your child's teacher has had the chance to learn about your child and how they learn and interact in the classroom. Now we are going to talk about some tips and suggestions to help make this fall and winter a success.

If you're like most parents, myself included, we can have the best intentions of staying on top of all those projects, volunteering, after school activities etc, but sometimes we need to pause and take inventory of where we are and where we are trying to go. It's a good time to touch base with your child's classroom teacher to see how things are going and if any adjustments need to be made.

Here at RealTalk we give you the real skinny the truth. Sometimes we can have a great amount of anxiety about talking to our child's teacher. But as an important

member of your child's support team it's essential to have open communication with all teachers, administrators, service providers that interact with your child.

If you are not sure how to start these conversations you can send a quick e-mail or note. Here are some examples of questions you may consider:

- Ms. Smith I wanted to touch base with you to introduce myself and see how Michael has been adjusting to the 5th Grade? How is his handwriting?
- Hi Mr. Jones, I wanted to see if there are some upcoming projects that are due soon. Mary was very excited about her Planet for sale project and we appreciated the heads up in planning our time to get all the parts completed by the deadline.
- Good afternoon Mrs. Williams, This is Jamie Fisher's father. I was looking over Jamie's IEP and feel she is on track for some of her reading goals but would like to talk to you about what specific reading interventions have been effective. Also, I would like to discuss the speech and language goals and get an updated progress report from the Speech Language Pathologist.
- Dear Mr. Williams, I received your note and I am concerned about my son Ben. I am concerned about his lack of focus as well. Let's meet to discuss his 504 and if we may need to consider evaluations of IEP eligibility.

Building and maintaining positive relationships with school staff is quite necessary for the success of your child. Start out like you can hold out. Set the tone.

Introduce yourself as the Parent. Let the school know you are a very engaged parent and you are excited to be a part of the team to insure your child's success. A quick note or card can go a long way to start a good relationship.

You may not know all the School staff but it is important Get to know the Players!

It's up to you as the parent to introduce yourself to the primary teacher, Special education teacher and principal. These are only some the key players. You will need to eventually meet support staff and service providers as well. It's important to remind staff about your child's IEP and there may be a need to have a meeting before your annual review.

Now we come to my personal favorite area of growth opportunity!

Organizing all the paper work. The file, the binder, or the pile!! We may know the general area of where the school papers are, but it's time to put your hand on those important documents. Starting a binder is a great idea to keep organized. In the world of special education, there are lots of meetings, paperwork, and documentation to keep track of.

Try to keep a family calendar of school events, special education meetings, conferences, etc. It is really important to find the most recent IEP or 504 plan. If all else fails get the most recent copy from your child's file at the school. Setting up a binder or folder to keep your child's special education documentation, meeting notices and IEPs in sequential order can also help you stay organized.

Now here is a key component: communication, communication, communication. Ask the teacher and staff the best way to communicate with them. E-mail is good because keeping a paper trail is critical. Communication is a two way street but we as parents have to document this. You will hear this over and over but: document, document, document.

Creating a communication log of all phone calls, e-mails, meetings and notes sent home, and conferences is very important. This communication log can be simple a notebook that is easily accessible. Make sure to note the dates, times, and nature of the communications you have.

Review your child's current IEP

The IEP is the cornerstone of your child's educational program, so it's important that you have a clear understanding of it. And here is where The Parents' Place of Maryland provides a great deal of resources and fact sheets on our website. Also there will be future podcasts where we go into great detail about the IEP process and the document. Note when the IEP expires, meaning the IEP annual review date and if your child is up for reevaluation this year. Most importantly, be sure that this IEP still "fits" your child's needs! If you're unsure, contact the school

about holding an IEP review meeting. Make sure you put your request in writing. Some parents find it helpful to have a 60 or 90 day day review at the beginning of the school year to see if the IEP is being implemented or if changes need to be made.

You can call an IEP meeting at anytime, but the school is required by law to meet annually. If this meeting is coming up soon I want to make you aware of the “5 day rule”. The 5 day rule is a law only here in Maryland. The law requires that the IEP team provide parents with a draft of the IEP or any evaluations or documents that will be discussed at the IEP meeting 5 business days before the meeting. Getting these documents before the meeting is essential so you can review them so you can be a prepared and informed member of the team.

Let’s retouch on communication one final time. Keep everyone informed. It's important that you and the school communicate early and often! If there is anything (concerns, changes, questions about the IEP) that you feel is important to share with the staff working with your child during the year, don't hesitate to contact them! The more proactive and honest you are, the better the school staff will be able to meet your child's needs.

Thanks you for listening to Parents’ Place first podcast this is Yvette DeCosta.

RealTalk for parents, where we keep it real and keep it moving. Remember We’re on that journey right along with you and it’s a marathon not a sprint! Take care