

WINTER 2026

Pass it On

Information to use and share with families and professionals caring for children with special healthcare and education needs from birth to 26



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About this Edition

Dear Readers,

Happy New Year! We hope 2026 is off to a positive start for you and your family.

We know many of us—our colleagues at PIC and NH Family Voices, as well as the families we serve—are navigating significant challenges. While we can't make those challenges disappear, we can walk alongside you and offer support. Please reach out to the Parent Information Center (PIC) for help with education-related concerns, or connect with NH Family Voices for health care and family support resources.

This edition of Pass It On offers something for everyone. Moving forward, each issue will include family stories and interviews, selections from the NH Family Voices Lending Library, an article from YEAH (Youth for Education, Advocacy and Healthcare), health care related items, an education-focused feature, and resources for families of children from early childhood through high school.

In this issue, you'll hear from a parent of a child receiving palliative care and find a Parent Roadmap to support families navigating behavioral removals at school. Discover helpful resources for families of children who are deaf and hard of hearing as they begin their preschool journey. We've also included a quick guide explaining the difference between an IEP and a 504 Plan, along with information about our new Caregiver Conversations series.

Please save the date for our **March 2026 Conference, Life After High School for Youth with Disabilities**. Finally, don't miss the **PIC Family Voices Podcast**, available at picnh.org/podcast or your favorite listening app.

No matter what you are going through, you are not alone—we are here to help.

Warmly,

Michelle Lewis
Executive Director, Parent Information Center
(PIC)

Sylvia Pelletier
Director, NH Family Voices (NHFV)

Why Family Voice Matters

By Kendra Dix

Family voice is an opportunity for families, including those with infants, toddlers and young children, to share their needs, wants and experiences to build relationships and inspire positive change within the systems that serve them.

Families know their children and their lives best. When families share their voice, they help schools, programs, and communities understand what families really experience and need. You know what works and what does not every day-at home, at school, and in the community. Your stories and feedback help decision-makers make better policy, service and program decisions. Without the voices of families, decisions are made about families instead of with families. When many different family voices are included, especially families that are often left out, services can become more responsive and accessible.

Sharing your family voice does not have to be perfect or formal. You can share your voice by completing a survey, telling your family's story or perspective, asking a question, or sharing feedback or a suggestion. It could also be by attending a community meeting, advisory board or other group. You can share your family voice in ways that feel right for you because there is no right or wrong way to speak up. What matters is that when families share their voices, families and children get the support they need to learn and grow.



Dream. Plan. Launch.



Life After High School for Youth with Disabilities

Sat., March 21, 2026 8:30 am to 2pm

NH Audubon
84 Silk Farm Rd. Concord, NH

Scan to Register



Or go to:

<https://lp.constantcontactpages.com/ev/reg/qe3eqte>

A conference for families and youth with disabilities focused on planning for life's next steps

Turning Behavioral Removals into Support: A Parent Roadmap for IEP Meetings

By Bonnie Dunham & Heidi Duprey

When children with disabilities are experiencing behavioral challenges and school removals, it can be stressful for everyone. This roadmap outlines steps you can take to better understand what is happening with your child, get to the root of their behavior and find solutions with their IEP team to successfully move forward.

Step 1: Request a Meeting

First, request a meeting with your child's Individualized Education Program (IEP) team to discuss your concerns.

Step 2: Prepare for the Meeting and Gather Data

Data drives decision making in the special education process.

Bringing clear, organized data to the meeting helps the IEP team understand your concerns and make informed decisions. Consider both formal and informal data from the school such as observations and notes from the teacher

and/or service providers, report cards, progress notes, formal evaluations, and discipline reports.

If available, obtain written input from your child's medical or behavioral health provider regarding their concerns and ideas.

Step 3: Document Behavior

Always document your child's behavioral incidents that lead to them receiving consequences including:

- after-school detentions,
- in-school suspensions,
- out-of-school suspensions and
- informal removals such as when your child is sent home early before the end of the school day

For informal removals, you may ask the school to document them as disciplinary removals, or write a dated letter stating your child was removed on specific dates for disciplinary reasons and request it be placed in your child's file.



Step 4: During the IEP Team Meeting

Be prepared by bringing copies of all of your documentation. You can ask the school to make copies for all participants.

During the meeting:

- Discuss how your child's behavior impacts their learning and the learning of others
- Talk with the team about what additional supports or changes could reduce the disruptive behavior
- Request to add and revise behavioral goals to the IEP, a Functional Behavioral Assessment (FBA), and/or a Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports Plan (BIP), if appropriate

Know Your Child's Rights Around Removals: Understand Discipline Protections

If your child is removed or suspended from school for a total of 10 days (cumulative) in one school year, the school must provide services for any additional days they are out of school. These services must:

- Continue participating and progressing in the general education curriculum
- Continue making progress on their IEP goals

The school must provide at least 10 hours of instruction per week, plus any related services listed in your child's IEP (such as speech, OT, counseling, etc.).

When removals exceed 10 days at one time or add up to more than 10 days total, a Manifestation Determination Meeting must be held.

At that meeting, you and relevant members of the IEP team decide whether the behavior:

- Had a direct and substantial relationship to your child's disability, or
- The school not following the IEP

If the behavior is related to your child's disability:

- In most cases, your child cannot be further punished for that behavior
- The IEP team should instead look at what needs (supports, services, goals or placement) to change and may update the IEP or placement to better support your child

By tracking and collecting this data, it will help the IEP Team meeting know when a Functional Behavioral Assessment (FBA) is needed.

(If needed) Step 5: Request a Functional Behavioral Assessment (FBA)

Behavioral issues can indicate unmet needs. Children with disabilities often use behavior as a way to communicate their frustrations or needs. An FBA is a tool used to determine what your child is trying to "say" with their behaviors. An FBA is generally required after 10 days of removal, but you can request an FBA anytime you have concerns about behavior and its impact on learning.

(If needed) Step 6: Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP)

A Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP – sometimes called a PBIP to emphasize its Positive intent) is a written plan that identifies problem behaviors while teaching appropriate replacement behaviors.

Conclusion:

We hope the steps outlined provide useful tips for navigating this time. If you find you still need additional support or direction, please contact the Parent Information Center.

View all of the sample letters and resources at picnh.org.

Resources

Discipline/Behavioral Tracking Sheet

<https://picnh.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/discipline.behavior-chart-2025.pdf>

Request an IEP Team Meeting

<https://picnh.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/sample-letter-IEP-team-meeting-letter-2025.pdf>

Request a Functional Behavioral Assessment

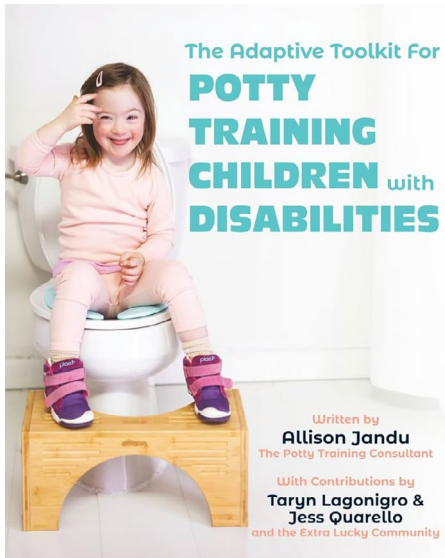
<https://picnh.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/sample-letter-FBA-letter-2025.pdf>

Request a Reevaluation

<https://picnh.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/sample-letter-reevaluations-letter-2025.pdf>

Sample Letters

<https://picnh.org/sample-letters/>



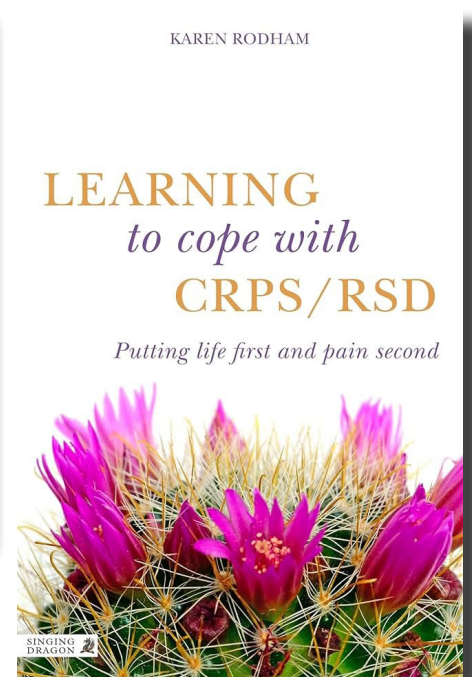
The Adaptive Toolkit For Potty Training Children With Disabilities
By Allison Jandu

The Adaptive Toolkit for Potty Training Children with Disabilities addresses the unique challenges that follow potty training children with disabilities by offering tailored strategies, adaptive techniques, and practical tips to foster independence and dignity during potty training. This toolkit is an excellent resource, especially if you are feeling lost or frustrated guiding your child through this milestone in life.



The Perfect Shelter
By Clare Helen Welsh

“At first, nobody knew. Then they told me my sister was sick. But together we’ll ride out the storms. And today is the perfect day to build a shelter and be together.” A powerful and uplifting story, exploring the emotions we feel when someone we love has a serious illness. This book is geared toward siblings of children with illness and/or hospitalization and helps them navigate their feelings in a new way.



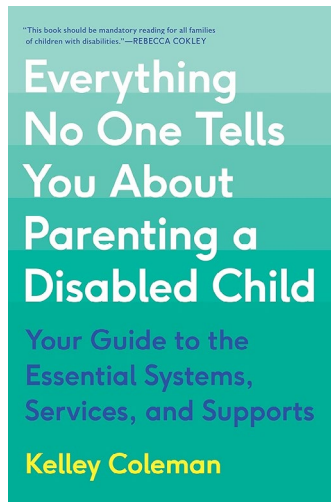
Learning to Cope with CRPS / RSD: Putting Life First and Pain Second
By Karen Rodham

With the help of this compact guide, anyone suffering from CRPS (Complex Regional Pain Syndrome) will better understand their condition and cope with the reality of living with it. Drawing on a wealth of clinical experience, Professor Karen Rodham brings practical advice to managing this complex and debilitating syndrome, next to the first-hand experiences of 10 individuals who are living with this largely misunderstood diagnosis. This book’s hands-on guidance will be of great help to people diagnosed with CRPS and show family and friends how they can best provide support.

Everything No One Tells You About Parenting a Disabled Child: Your Guide to the Essential Systems, Services, and Supports

By Kelley Coleman

The honest, relatable, actionable roadmap to the practicalities of parenting a disabled child, featuring personal stories, expert interviews, and the foundational information parents need to know about topics including diagnosis, school, doctors, insurance, financial planning, disability rights, and what life looks like as a parent caregiver. Presented with empathy and humor, Everything No One Tells You About Parenting a Disabled Child: Your Guide to the Essential Systems, Services, and Supports gives parents the tools to conquer the stuff, so that they can spend less time filling out forms and more time loving their children exactly as they are. With over a decade of experience navigating these systems for her own child, author Kelley Coleman presents key information, templates, and wisdom alongside practical advice from over 40 experts, covering topics such as diagnosis, working with your medical team, insurance, financial planning, disability rights and advocacy, and individualized education plans. Everything No One Tells You About Parenting a Disabled Child gives parents the tools they need to stop wasting unnecessary time, money, and stress.



Borrowing from the NHFV Lending Library is Easy and FREE for NH Residents!



Call 603-271-4525 or go to nhfv.org/how-we-can-help/lending-library/



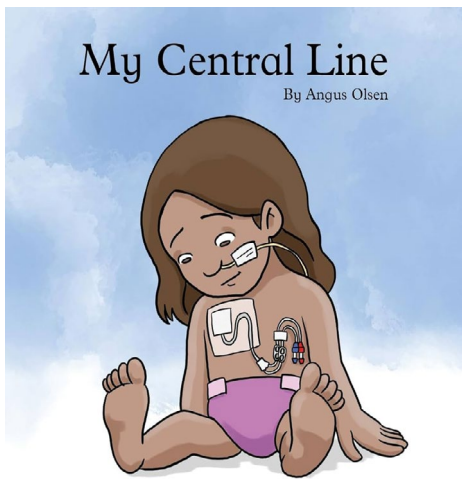
Search thousands of books by subject



Add the book(s) you like to your cart and fill out the delivery form



Books will be delivered to your home or office with a prepaid postage envelope for you to return them when you're finished!



My Central Line
Angus Olsen

My Central Line is a book for children who have received a Hickman Central Line for cancer therapy and other diseases. My Central Line introduces the Hickman line in a quick, simple way with beautiful, colourful, easy-to-understand illustrations and easy-read text.

Hi! I'm Sam Collyar, a Resource Specialist at NH Family Voices.



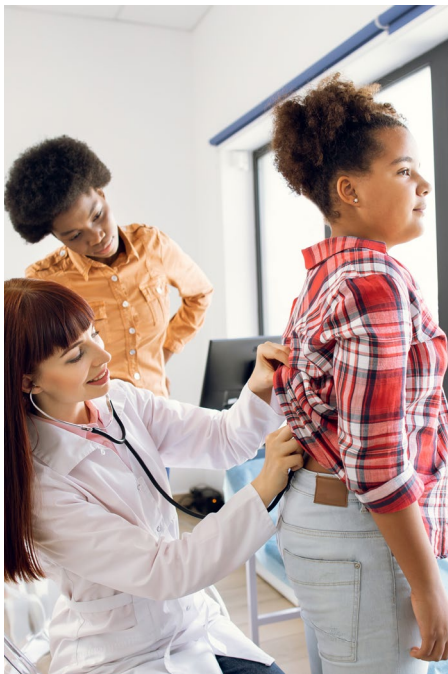
Outside of work, I'm a wife, mom, and pet mom to 3 dogs, a cat, and 21 chickens. I keep busy in my garden and love books. My passion for books really kicked off when my then-eight-year-old was diagnosed with cancer, and we saw just how much hope could hide in the pages of a book. We turned to books for knowledge and stories from others in our shoes a lot, and I'm so excited to be in a position to connect people with books from our FREE Lending Library that could provide that same level of knowledge and comfort.

If you are looking for a specific book or resource on a particular topic, email me at snc@nhfv.org!

Healthcare Transition Skill Highlight: Attending Appointments

By Keri Brand

Attending appointments is a necessary part of living a healthy life. The transition to attending appointments on one's own can be intimidating, and it can occur as early as at age fourteen for some youth. Other youth may continue to attend appointments with a parent or guardian into adulthood. The goal is for each youth to be involved as much as they can in their medical care. Participating in appointments is a huge part of that.



I asked one of our YEAH (Youth for Education, Advocacy and Healthcare) Council members to reflect on their experience with appointments now that they are an adult.

“My independence grew as I did (the same is true for my sister). It felt completely natural. If there was something that I could answer for myself I did, only looking to my parents to check something if it needed to be clarified. They always made sure that the questions were directed towards us, as we are the ones the information pertains to.”

“In my family, responsibility is equal to trust. As I grew older, my parents began to entrust more responsibilities to me, and with those responsibilities, came the hope that I will follow through with them. I endeavor to fulfill them to the best of my capabilities.”

“One thing that I always have difficulty with is keeping everything straight in my head, and the number of appointments I have doesn't help. There is a tool I sometimes use for school to record the audio from class, perhaps I will implement that in appointments too.”

Family members and guardians can prepare youth to gradually take on more responsibility and independence during their appointments. Let's break down some of the skills involved in attending a doctor's appointment. During an appointment, you need to be able to:

- Explain why you want or need things
- Express concerns or preferences about your options
- Ask for help when you don't understand information
- Recall the information that is being given to you
- Make a decision based on available information

In addition, during appointments you have limited time to make sure you leave with what you need, including the answers to your questions and any prescription refills.

As a parent or guardian, you can help your youth practice these skills by letting them take the lead in appointments while you are still attending with them. In my experience, providers are usually very enthusiastic about working with youth to get them more involved. Preparing for the appointment together ahead of time with a parent or guardian can also help the youth to have more confidence during an appointment. This could entail making a list of questions together or identifying what the issue is that the youth wants to get help with. During the appointment, the parent or guardian can model taking notes in some way, or have the youth help with this.



Read More at:

<https://parentandteen.com/5-ways-help-teens-with-chronic-conditions-get-involved-in-doctors-visits/>

Understanding the Difference Between an IEP and a 504 Plan

Both an IEP and a 504 Plan help students with disabilities at school, but each has their own purpose, set of eligibility criteria, services and supports. The chart below from the Disabilities Rights Center of NH lays out the similarities and differences.

IEP vs 504

IEPs are developed under the IDEA, a federal law specific to the education of students with disabilities.	Section 504 plans are authorized under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, a federal civil rights law that protects all people with a qualifying disability from discrimination based on their disability.
IEPs are used when a student requires specialized instruction	504 plans are used when a student needs accommodations or modifications to programs and facilities
Student must fit one of the 14 disability eligibility categories	Section 504 has a broader definition of disability
The IDEA grants specific procedural safeguards that must be upheld	Section 504 contains some limited due process rights
Parents are part of the IEP team	No parental input is required to develop or implement a 504 plan
IEPs follow a specific format including evaluation timelines, goals, and objectives	504 plans are usually written documents but do not have to follow a specific format
IEPs require documenting measurable growth	Assures that a student will have equal access to public education and services
Generally, applies to public schools. May apply to non-public schools under certain circumstances.	Generally, applies to all schools that accept federal funding (public, private, religious)
The Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS) at the Department of Education administers the IDEA and IEPs.	The Office of Civil Rights at the Department of Education administers Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and 504 plans.

No cost to parents
 Designed to meet the individual student's needs
 Require a qualifying disability – qualifications differ
 Based off of an evaluation of the student – specific requirements differ

What is going on with the YEAH Council! (Youth for Education, Advocacy, and Healthcare)

Youth voice can influence policies and how health and education professionals engage with young people while also empowering other young adults!

Visit nhfv.org/get-involved/youth-involvement to learn more about the YEAH Council mission and check out our podcast while you are there.

The YEAH Council is supported by The Parent Information Center and NH Family Voices. If you would like to chat with us, e-mail yeahcouncil@nhfv.org.

In the last edition of Pass It On, the youth talked about why you may want to join the YEAH Council. This month, the group wanted to update you on all the wonderful happenings within YEAH.

Instagram posts

Have you heard the Yeah Council is on Instagram? Follow us at @yeahcouncil. On our Instagram account, we strive to share helpful tips and resources developed by youth that can be shared freely. The YEAH Council tries to do two Instagram posts per month. Recently, everyone came together to develop tips for self-advocacy in various situations. In another Instagram post titled "Getting Through the Winter," one member wrote tips for how to get through the winter months with certain conditions.

Podcast

In December and January, the youth worked on a podcast called Future Planning, where each youth identified goals that mattered to them and researched the next steps they needed to take to get there. One youth chose to focus on housing as an adult, another member chose how to navigate health insurance while working and with pre-existing conditions, and the last one chose navigating qualifying for Social Security benefits. Listen to this episode at NHFV's website at www.nhfv.org/podcasts or PIC's website at www.picnh.org/podcast.

Calendar

The youth want to share that they are working on a Health Conditions and Disabilities Awareness Days Calendar. With this calendar project, the youth hope to show people who follow YEAH Council and our community partners how many awareness days are actually on the calendar, even those that don't receive as much national exposure. The calendar will also include tips from a youth perspective. These are meant to be generalizable tips that anyone might use.



Youth Transition Conference

The YEAH Council is excited to announce that they will be participating in the Parent Information Center and New Hampshire Family Voices youth and family transition conference. Save the Date for "Dream. Plan. Launch. Life After High School for Youth with Disabilities." This conference is on Saturday, March 21st 2026 8:30 AM-2 PM. It is at the NH Audubon Center in Concord. The address is 84 Silk Farm Rd. in Concord NH. We look forward to seeing you then!



Exploring NH's LNA Program for Parents of Children with Special Healthcare Needs

By Sam Collyar

Across the United States, many families of children with special healthcare needs are trying to navigate life amid a staffing shortage, and Granite State families are no exception. We often hear of families struggling to fill nursing hours for their loved ones, and while there is no "one size fits all" answer, there are a few avenues worth exploring to help bridge the staffing gap our families face.

Following the COVID-19 pandemic, certain programs remained intact to afford families the flexibility to become paid caregivers for their children with disabilities, and we also saw the emergence of other options. To date, families can explore three avenues: becoming their child's Licensed Nursing Assistant (LNA), a self-directed Personal Assistant Service (PAS), or a Direct Support Professional (DSP/Parent Stipend). Throughout the next few Pass It On editions, we will take a closer look at these three programs. In this edition, we are exploring the LNA program in New Hampshire.

In New Hampshire, we currently have two organizations that help families become Licensed Nursing Assistants for their child. Families can turn to Team Select Home Care (NH Family LNA Program) and Regency Home Health LLC (LNA Family Solution) for assessments of eligibility, level of care, and the hours allotted to an individual. Please note that the final hours allotted are determined by the insurance provider based on the assessment.

The first step to becoming a paid caregiver is to contact one of the programs above and request an assessment. A qualified clinician will assess your child's needs and program eligibility. Individuals may qualify for LNA care if they require hands-on support with activities such as, but not limited to, mobility, bathing, and dressing. Once your family member's case is approved, the next step will be enrolling in an approved LNA certification program. After completion of the program, you can expect to begin the onboarding process with Team Select or Regency Home Health to start providing care for your loved one.

It is important to remember that income made in these types of programs is taxable income and could potentially affect your family's income-based eligibility for other programs you may be accessing. The child must be covered under a NH Medicaid plan. If your child has private insurance, be sure to check with their provider to see what sort of home healthcare benefits you may have access to. If you would like to talk about caregiver options for your family, please give us a call! We would like the opportunity to talk with you about your family and explore the support you may be looking for.

Resources

Regency Home Health
<https://www.regencyhomehealth.com/lna-family-solution>

Team Select Home Care
<https://tshc.com/family-programs/new-hampshire-family-lna-program/>



I Don't Need Fixing, I Need Support!

By Angela Fletcher

Many times, we as parents find ourselves looking for answers and support with no idea how or where to find it. As a parent and caregiver of a homebound child on palliative care with multiple disabilities and complex medical conditions, I am all too familiar with the feeling of being overwhelmed, exhausted, misunderstood, and isolated. I know, I'm not alone in this. As each day passes, these feelings pile up and eventually leave us feeling abandoned, alone and lacking support. Family and friends struggle to understand us, which makes us feel more isolated. Often, we don't know what we need or want from those that surround us. So, finding it becomes more of a challenge. As caregivers we forget about self-care, I too am guilty of it. Like many, I ignore it so I can stay focused on caring for my child. Let's not forget that the amount of time and energy we have to invest in it is limited. Often people say try this or that, but the truth is this isn't a one size fits all situation. The ones saying this don't know what it's like to put one of our shoes on much less walk in them. Unfortunately, they don't understand the amount of energy we expend just to find a sliver of belonging, understanding and support.

We are on a constant emotional roller coaster. Many feel that if we ask for help, we are a burden. At times we may even feel shame, guilt, and judgment if we vent. These feelings aren't something we can turn off or change. This is how our brains are wired because society has made us feel that we need to handle everything ourselves and remain quiet. We need to remind ourselves that we are human and finding connections is important. Everything has a balance and without it we experience consequences that affect our physical or mental health. Parent and caregiver burnout is real; it's a result of living in constant chaos. It's important to find a way to quiet the chaos. I wish I could tell you there is a fast track to doing this, but the truth is we all must forge our own path. We are all unique and each of our journeys is a bit different.

Over the past 17 years, I too have faced all these same challenges. I have fallen upon times where I felt like I was on an island alone screaming, and no one was hearing me. I've found myself there more than

I would like to admit, and sometimes that island feels even smaller. Having a child on palliative care who is homebound creates a lot of additional barriers. I'm not going to sugar coat this or make it sound easy because it's not and honestly, it has taken many years to establish some type of toolbox which often seems sparse. There is always room for more tools no matter how many I have. My hope is that when one doesn't work, maybe another one will.

Over the past few years, I have dipped my toe into just about everything you can imagine just to find some sense of belonging and purpose. I have even gone as far as consuming myself with anything that will keep my mind busy, but this turned into a new stress from overextending myself. Don't get me wrong; each opportunity has been helpful and often comes with a lesson learned. One of the best lessons I've learned is that support comes when you start feeling that you belong, when you aren't just being seen, but you are also truly being heard. It doesn't have to be the words people hear you say. Maybe it's what you've left unsaid, a change in your body language, a facial expression, or the distance you have placed between you and others. It's the people who observe these shifts that will likely become your friends or allies. They will be the ones that help lift you up and cheer you on when you need it most.

When we feel unsupported, many of us don't realize that this is when we need to make ourselves seen and heard, which is so much harder to do than it sounds. It means you must allow yourself to be vulnerable and speak your truth no matter what. You must be louder so people can hear and truly see you. Maybe it will only be one person out of a whole group that does, but that person will end up being the most valuable.

I think it is important to realize that support looks different for everyone because our needs are different. One person may get it from therapy while another finds it through nontraditional methods. Life is just different when you have a child that has diverse needs. If that's not enough of a barrier, let's add the feeling of being invisible and unsupported. Honestly, I've attended support groups where this has happened, but it's important to remember that not

all groups are the same. Just because one didn't work doesn't mean another won't. From my experience, it takes at least 4-6 sessions to make an informed decision and how long I personally need to give it a fair run. Support groups are multifaceted. The success of the experience depends on the relationship and comfort level you have with the facilitator. It's also about the connection you may or may not feel with others within the group. I've learned by attending different ones that if you leave feeling lighter, fresher and energized then these are most likely your people. By attending some of these I've been fortunate enough to connect with a couple of moms. They are walking different paths with different circumstances but have been an amazing support. Despite the many barriers we may have, we've created unique opportunities to connect and found ways to support each other through the challenges we face.



I've even joined things that are purposeful with the hope of finding support and a sense of community or even belonging. Anyone who truly knows me knows I am always thinking outside the box. Over the past few years, I've really pushed myself out of my comfort zone to become part of things. I joined the Monadnock Family Council, The Mental Health Taskforce and Civic Engagement Taskforce through AbleNH, The NH Leadership series and even my town library board. My thinking when joining these groups has always been, no matter what happens, at least I showed up advocating for not only my family but also for those who are unable to for whatever reason. I've attended workshops and taken advantage of every learning opportunity I've felt drawn to.

I joined a 6-week Caregiver Conversations workshop over the summer, through New Hampshire Family Voices, that covered a new topic each week. Even though the sessions were planned out, we were given a chance to get to know each other. It was an amazing opportunity to share our experiences and learn from one another. We were all able to feel seen and heard by a variety of caregivers from different backgrounds. Each one with a unique perspective on

every topic. During these sessions I found a sense of community. With the feeling that some of these amazing individuals could be my people. This was an opportunity that allowed a door to be opened. Unfortunately, once the series ended, much of the connection did too. However, at times our paths cross and occasionally we do a quick check in.

As I mentioned before, my daughter is on palliative care, so support looks a bit different. There is no single place or person that provides it because the need is different from minute to minute. A large part of my support system is truly my daughter's team of medical providers, therapists, and nurses. We are so fortunate to have this amazing team in place. It didn't happen overnight. It took a lot of trial and error, with patience, persistence and determination to find so many that are dedicated to their craft. They listen with compassion and acknowledge that most of what weighs heavily on me relates to my daughter. Over time, sharing my thoughts and feelings with them has allowed me to get clarity and answers to many questions. It has also allowed them the opportunity to get to know me even during the most difficult moments. These people, for me, have been one of the best places to get consistent support. Often, we underestimate just how important it is to have a good team that's not just checking boxes but also working with you. Not only should they be knowledgeable, but they need to be compassionate and understanding. If you find that, then you will feel some of the weight lifted from you.

Lastly one of the best things I've done for myself is signing up for Narrative Medicine. I went into it with no idea what it was or how it worked but thought why not try it. Nothing else I've tried has worked for me. This has been such a wonderful place for me to feel understood and supported. Much of what I feel is so hard for me to talk about, but this has given me an outlet. It allows me to share my thoughts and feelings freely through expressive writing. One of the best parts of this whole experience is that it can be done openly without fear because pen to paper has no judgement or pity. It's one place where I don't feel like anyone is trying to fix me. It feels amazing to know that I can control something when everything else feels so out of control. At the end of the session, I get to decide who reads or hears my deepest most inner thoughts. For me, this has been the best place to feel seen, heard, and supported.

A Parent's Perspective: Transitioning to Preschool When Your Child is Hard of Hearing

By Joanne Grobecker

Emma Gonya is a busy mom of twin boys with a full life and a full heart. She has two sons entering public preschool at the same time. Their family just found out last November that one of her sons is hard of hearing. The transition to preschool with one kid is a lot of time and paperwork but with two kids, Emma has double the amount. Emma knew that she wanted her son to have full access to language to open all the doors to communication so he could choose what he prefers as he grows. Emma's goal was to cast a wide language net with their son by getting him hearing aids, learning ASL as a family, and having him enrolled in public preschool.

Emma has found that the transition to preschool is hardest because she is still learning while she is in the process. She said that being in the special education system is like "playing a game everyone has the rules for, and you don't know what's happening." Emma found that the way to learn the rules was to build her own knowledge through research and build a team of her own to help her navigate this transition. Emma wishes she had done more research ahead of time. It wasn't until she was at her first IEP meeting with a room full of the school team that she realized she needed more information. She said the best thing she learned is that she has 14 days before she has to sign any forms. This enables her to bring forms home to process information and do her own research. She found that building a team for her family was important to help support her son. She recommends having someone you can bring with you to IEP meetings like your Early Intervention Case Worker or even a trusted friend.

Becoming part of the school team to support her son has been a unique experience for Emma. She said she works on establishing a rapport with the team while knowing that she has to advocate right from the start for her son. "You want them to know you are nice and it's hard to walk in asking for things off the bat." She has found the most successful tool to advocating is to understand what options are available to her son at school and the reason behind the school's recommendations. Asking why decisions are being made and how they will benefit her son is key. Understand that the team may not have all the answers and may be learning about your child's disability alongside you. Don't be afraid to share information you have since you are the expert on your child. In NH your child may be the only hard of hearing child in the school or that has been in the preschool program in a while. You are an equal part of the team and if you work together, you can ensure success for your child!



Resources for Families

Use this Pre-school evaluation chart when touring multiple schools or programs:

www.handsandvoices.org/pdf/preschool_eval.pdf

Use this Parent/School Input Form to share how your child communicates with the preschool:

www.handsandvoices.org/astra/docs/advocacy-tool.html

Educational Rights for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Children

As a parent of a child who is deaf or hard of hearing it is important to know that your child has rights at school.

186-C:32 Deaf Children's Bill of Rights

Some key rights are:

"III. Children who are deaf or hard of hearing have the right to an education in which their parents or guardians have full informed participation in determining the extent, content, and purpose of all their educational planning and programs.

V. Children who are deaf or hard of hearing have the right to an education in which their communication mode, style, and language is respected, used, and developed to an appropriate level of proficiency.

XII. Children who are deaf or hard of hearing have the right to a placement best suited to their individual needs, including, but not limited to age, hearing loss, academic level, modes of communications, style of learning, motivational levels and family support."

For a full list of your child's rights please visit: <https://law.justia.com/codes/new-hampshire/title-xv/chapter-186-c/section-186-c-32/>

Your Child's School Team: Who Can Support a Deaf or Hard of Hearing Student

By Joanne Grobecker

In addition to the required team members, here are some professionals you may want to invite to the IEP meeting:

- **Teacher of the Deaf-** Has specialized nuanced training on how to give your child more access to language. They help your child and teacher.
- **Educational Audiologist-** They go through the classroom and test hearing acoustics of classroom. They can suggest adjustments to the environment such as tennis balls on chairs. They make sure your child has access to the technology they need. They look into what is impeding access to educational sounds and what can be implemented in the classroom so your child can access sounds. They are trained on what equipment the school should have for your child.
- **Interpreter-** If your child uses ASL, an interpreter should be on the school team to help your child learn how they can benefit from an interpreter at school. If you want your child to use ASL to access their education, that is your right.
- **Case Manager-** At school every child has a person in charge of managing the services and service providers like speech therapists and other support. This person makes sure the IEP is followed. This may be a person who works with your child providing other services.
- **Paraprofessionals or Aids-** These are extra helpers at school to make sure your child's needs are met. Even if your child has medical needs, the school will still make sure they can attend school safely with their health conditions in mind.



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- **Share practical strategies & resources** from personal well-being tips to navigating services, each session offers tools you can use right away.
- **Show up on your schedule!** Register once, attend when you can.



Monthly Topics

January - Resetting in the New Year

February – Adolescent Years

March – Preparing for School Meetings

April – Finding Providers that Fit

May – Adult Transitions & Supporting Your Youth in their Growth

June – Finding Recreation and Social Opportunities



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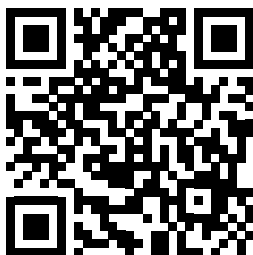
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