

# Time to Get Ready for the New School Year

The new school year is just around the corner and now is a good time to start getting ready. The new school year may mean a new teacher, classroom, school or just returning to the structure of a school day. Taking some time now to prepare yourself and your child will help reduce everyone's anxiety. Below are some tips (you probably have some of your own) to keep in mind:

## **Get Organized**

There will be lots of paperwork, meetings and documentation to keep track of. Figure out what works and makes sense for your family to be able to keep track of all of this information. This could include calendars, notebooks, paper files or electronic ones.

## **Talk About What's Coming Up**

Simply talking about the upcoming year with your child can reduce the anxiety level. Talk about new activities, new classmates and things that will be the same or familiar.

## **Attend the Open House**

Chances are that the school will have an open house before the school year begins. Make a point to attend, with your child. Whether the school is new or not, making this visit to the classroom and the rest of the school will help your child increase their comfort level. As you visit, talk about the school with your child. What do they like or not like? What's new or different? What questions do they have? If it will help your child, take pictures to serve as a reminder when you talk about the school again at home.

## **Review the IEP**

The Individual Education Plan is the key item in your child's education program. Review the plan and make sure you understand it. Make sure the IEP still fits the needs of your child and if it doesn't arrange for an IEP review meeting.

If there are services that your child will receive from school personnel other than the special needs teacher and staff (e.g. speech or occupational therapy) make sure to talk with them as well as the teacher. Ensure that everyone who will be working with your child understands your expectations and that everyone is on the same page.

## **Talk With the Teacher**

Either at the open house or another time, arrange to talk to the teacher about your child. Let the teacher know about working with your child, any recent changes and any questions you have about the IEP. Talk through the IEP goals and how they will be addressed in the classroom. Find out the best way to communicate with the teacher during the school year and establish when and how you'll be checking in to see how things are progressing. Provide the teacher and staff with a written introduction to your

child. Include a photo, what they like and enjoy, how they can best be supported and other details that would be helpful for someone to know. This will be especially helpful if your child has multiple teachers and it would be difficult to meet with each of them.

Get dates for major school events like back to school night and parent-teacher conferences and get those dates on your calendar.

If additional caregivers or outside therapists will be supporting your child during the school day make arrangements for them to meet the teacher and other appropriate school staff. Make sure a plan is in place regarding this care including where it will happen and when.

### **Start or Re-establish Routines**

Talk about and plan out what the daily routines will be, especially those in the morning and evening. Begin practicing them before the school year starts.

### **Advocate for Inclusion**

Be a voice for your child and others by reminding school administration about the importance of inclusion in the classroom and at all school events. Find parents, teachers and students willing to be allies and get involved in the PTSA or Special Education PTSA.