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What's the IDEA* about Parent Counseling and Training?

If your child receives special education and related services, you as a parent may also need services to help support your child's education. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) recognizes the need for parents to receive such services. IDEA refers to these services as "parent counseling and training." They are found in the "related services" section of the regulations. Parent counseling and training means:

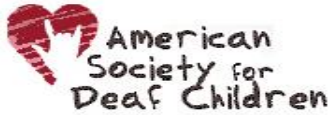
- Assisting parents in understanding the special needs of their child;
- Providing parents with information about child development; and
- Helping parents to acquire the necessary skills that will allow them to support the implementation of their child's Individualized Education Program (IEP) or Individualized Family Services Plan (IFSP).

Parent counseling and training can cover a range of areas. Because parents of deaf and hard of hearing children often need assistance learning their child's mode of communication, this document will focus on that. However, the principles that apply here apply to any form of parent counseling and training.

The U.S. Department of Education has long recognized that training in the child's communication mode can be provided under the parent counseling and training provision of IDEA. In 1986, the Department stated ". . . an IEP for a deaf child could include training parents to use the mode of communication that their child uses as part of an educational program." In 1991, a policy letter from the Department specifically mentioned sign language instruction as a matter of "entitlement to a related service." And U.S. Department of Education guidance on the 1997 reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act stated "The IEP team may . . . wish to consider whether there is a need for members of the child's family to receive training in sign language in order for the child to receive a Free Appropriate Public Education."

Decisions about all related services, including parent counseling and training, must be made by the IEP Team and written on the IEP document. Parents are part of the IEP Team and can ask that training for the family in the child's mode of communication is included in the child's IEP. School districts sometimes provide this training themselves, other times they pay for family

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members to take classes off site. In any case, if the IEP states that the family should receive this training, the school district must find a way to provide it.

Instruction in the child's mode of communication may not be required in all cases. As with other sections of the law, decisions must be made on a case by case basis depending on the needs of the child. The goal always is to have the child receive a Free Appropriate Public Education in the Least Restrictive Environment, based on the child's IEP. Keep in mind:

"[I]f a parent of a child with a hearing impairment or school district believes that sign language instruction for the parent is needed in order for the child to benefit from the special education and related services included in the child's IEP, then the parent's need for such instruction must be considered by the participants on the IEP team. If the participants on the IEP team determine that this service is needed, sign language instruction must be provided to the parent as a related service in the form of "parent counseling and training" and must be included in the child's IEP. In all instances, decisions as to whether a child with a disability requires a particular related service must be made on an individual basis through applicable IEP and placement procedures."
(Letter to Dagny)

If you need training in your child's mode of communication in order to help your child progress educationally, don't be afraid to ask for it.

References

Letter to Dole from U.S. Department of Education Assistant Secretary Madeleine Will, July 25, 1986

Letter to Dagny from Director of Office of Special Education Programs Director Judy A. Schrag, June 3, 1991

Appendix A to Part 300 - Notice of Interpretation, Federal Register, Vol. 64., No. 48, March 12, 1999