

# Moving On

A guide to supporting transitions into and within the kindergarten to Grade 12 system of education in NB



InclusionNB

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## INTRODUCTION

This guide is written primarily for the benefit of families who have children with disabilities. It is written with the hope that families and young people with disabilities will have the information and confidence they require to successfully navigate the transitions of entering into and moving within the kindergarten to Grade 12 system of education. Many of the issues discussed in this guide are common to all young people with disabilities.

Since Inclusion NB/Inclusion N-B represents the interests of people with intellectual or developmental disabilities, many of the examples used feature people who have been identified as having this type of disability.

While this guide is intended for families, it can also be useful for teachers, guidance counsellors, and others who have a role in assisting individuals with disabilities and their families to make successful transitions within the school system. The importance of working together to achieve the goals of young people and their families cannot be over-emphasized. Educators, administrators, and support staff need to be clear about their roles and the importance of finding respectful ways to help young people with disabilities and their families navigate the school system.

References to "we" in this guide refers only to Inclusion NB/Inclusion N-B. Any opinions and views expressed in this guide do not necessarily reflect the views of those who have provided financial assistance or assisted in other ways.

To the best of our knowledge, the information contained in this guide is current to the 2023-2024 School Year. Government, school programs, and policies will change from time to time and readers are encouraged to seek up-to-date information.





## WHAT ARE TRANSITIONS?

On the path to live a full and valued life, the time that is the most influential to development is when a student attends school. Attending elementary, middle, and high school provides the foundations of becoming engaged employees, citizens, and friends. While everyone's experience at school is unique, there are many common outcomes and objectives that all students strive towards.

In the province of New Brunswick, there is an established Inclusive Education System. This system is codified by [Policy 322](#) and outlines the inclusion of all students within the education system. While all students have the right to participate in the system, every student has specific needs related to transitions.

This guide will identify the best practices for various transitions into and within the school system. The goal is to provide parents and educators ways of supporting students with a disability to transition from grades, schools, and levels of support.

In this chapter we explore:

- What is a transition and why is it important?
- What are the different types of transition?
- How to use this guide

### What is a transition?

Quite simply, transition is about change. For students who are in the public-school system in New Brunswick, change is constant. Students experience change from the moment they enter kindergarten to the moment they graduate from high school. Some of these changes for students include completing one grade and moving to another, moving from one school to another, the fading of supports that have been in place to support the student's academic success, and changes in programming. These transitions don't happen at the same time but are a part of the growth of a student through their academic career.

This guide presents families ways in which they can support their child to have successful transitions within the school system. It offers guidance, tips, and strategies that have been proven effective to ensure students are able to navigate changes during their youth.

The driving force behind this resource has been that students with a disability and their families have not always had the support to approach transitions. On occasion, not having successful transitions has led to students being excluded from the classroom, not receiving the appropriate supports, and parents not forming a positive working relationship with their child's school personnel. Not having the appropriate support for transition within the school system can make it challenging to have a successful transition after a student has graduated.

### What are the different types of transition?

This guide will explore several different transitions that fall into two main categories: Fixed transitions and Variable transitions. Fixed transitions are changes within the school system that are the same for all students, regardless of their circumstances or needs. Variable transitions are changes within the school system that are directly tied to the needs of the student and the choices that parents, teachers, and administrators make to support the student.



### Some examples of **Fixed Transitions** include:

- From Early Learning to Public School**  
 In New Brunswick, there are over 11,000 children enrolled within Early Learning facilities at any given time.<sup>1</sup> These students will be transitioning from the structure of an early learning environment to that of a school environment. Not only are the general environments different, but there is a large shift in expectations, assessment, and parent involvement.
- From Grade to Grade**  
 There are 13 possible levels for students in the New Brunswick Public School system (Kindergarten to Grade 12). Every student will advance grades throughout their academic career as grade retention is not a standard educational practice.
- Changing Schools**  
 Most schools in New Brunswick are divided into three groups: Elementary School (Kindergarten to Grade 5), Middle School (Grade 6 to Grade 8), and High School (Grade 9 to 12). While there are some exceptions, most students will change schools at least twice in their academic career. Not all schools are the same and there are different structures of support at different levels.

<sup>1</sup> [https://www2.gnb.ca/content/dam/gnb/Departments/eco-bce/Promo/early\\_childhood/AnnualReport2018-2019.pdf](https://www2.gnb.ca/content/dam/gnb/Departments/eco-bce/Promo/early_childhood/AnnualReport2018-2019.pdf)

Some examples of **Variable Transitions** include:

- From Isolation to Inclusion |**  
As outlined in Policy 322, all schools must enable a common learning environment that allows all students to participate in learning. For some students, they do not spend all of their time in the **common learning environment** as they have specific needs that require additional support. Without proper supports and effective planning, the transition from being outside of the classroom to being in the common learning environment is one that has led to many challenges for students with a disability and their parents.
- From Support to Independence |**  
Students who receive additional supports within the classroom may not need those supports on a permanent basis. Some supports, such as Educational Assistants, are faded over time as the student builds capacity within the classroom.
- From Program to Program |**  
There are several choices available to parents throughout their child's schooling that can lead to transitions. Choosing a specific program for your child to attend (such as **Distance Learning, Experiential Learning**) can lead to changes that must be addressed. When moving from program to program, there are new structures, new routines, and new people, all of which can make the transition a challenge.



### COMMON LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

is an inclusive environment where instruction is designed to be delivered to students of mixed ability and of the same age in their neighbourhood school, while being responsive to their individual needs as a learner, and used for the majority of the students' regular instruction hours.

### DISTANCE LEARNING

is a method of studying in which lectures are broadcast or classes are conducted by correspondence or over the internet, without the student's needing to attend a school.

### EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

means an activity that allows students to engage in concrete learning through the direct experience of observing, learning or performing work and learning tasks in the workplace, during or outside of school hours, online, or in the community. This type of learning allows students to reflect personally, expand their areas of interest and explore various career options to increase their knowledge and develop the skills and attitudes that will enable them to contribute positively to their community.

## TRANSITION FROM EARLY LEARNING TO PUBLIC SCHOOL

Entering school for the first time is something that can be stressful for many families. However, there are some great pieces of information to keep in mind when planning for this transition.

### Communicating with my child's school

When your child goes to school, the communication you have with the teacher will be different from that of the early childhood educator. You likely won't see your child's teacher every day and won't have the consistency of reviewing daily activities. There are several good strategies you can use to ensure you are able to communicate with your child's school to support the learning process and overall experience.

- Be clear and concrete - If your message or request sounds exhaustive or confusing, other people may not know what your child needs
- Listen carefully to what other people are saying and ask questions
- Keep a notebook, log or a diary to record your discussions
- Use e-mails as a follow up to meetings

For more information on how to effectively communicate with your child's school, please read Section 1 (How to be an Effective Advocate for Your Child) of the Achieving Inclusion resource here:

<https://bit.ly/3OSHKrA>.



### What are best practices for transitioning into school, and who should be involved?

Families, Educators, and Early Learning Facilities all play key roles to ensure students have a smooth transition. Not every school or early learning facility will follow these suggestions, however these are the best practices for ensuring a good transition.

Families	Early Learning Facility	School
<p>Create a one-pager ‘About Me’ for the elementary school</p> <p>Attend transition meetings</p> <p>Know your child’s rights and advocate for the appropriate supports</p> <p>Read Social Stories at home - A short description of a situation, event or activity, that can help individuals with a disability to learn what to expect in the situation which, in turn, may reduce <b>anxiety</b>.</p> <p>(For more information on Social Stories, please see: <a href="https://carolgraysocialstories.com/">https://carolgraysocialstories.com/</a>)</p>	<p>Build relationships with local kindergarten and elementary programs</p> <p>Participate in or arrange a transition meeting</p> <p>Support families with knowing their legal rights</p>	<p>Create a transition document</p> <p>Participate in or arrange a transition meeting</p> <p>Invite Parents to be active participants in transition planning</p> <p>Encourage families to share information about childcare programming or services</p> <p>Bring the children to play on the local elementary school playground</p> <p>Provide individualized support for each family’s unique transition.</p> <p>Create/provide Social Stories</p> <p>Talk often about the transition</p>



**ANXIETY**

Anxiety is different than having normal worries. Anxiety is what happens when having worries stops you from doing everyday things.

## When my child is attending school for the first time, how should they be included?

As identified in **Policy 322 (Inclusive Education)** by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, it is the responsibility of your child's school to do the following:

- Enable each student to participate fully in a common environment that is designed for all students. It is appropriate for the student's age and grade, is shared with peers in their neighbourhood school, and respects learning preferences, needs and strengths.
- Have a common environment where student-centered learning principles are applied (e.g., **Universal Design for Learning**, learning outcomes, instruction, assessment, interventions, supports, accommodations, adaptations and resources).
- Consider accommodations and implement them in a timely manner.

### UNIVERSAL DESIGN FOR LEARNING (UDL)

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is a set of principles for classroom instruction and curriculum development that give all students equal opportunities to learn. UDL provides strategies for creating instructional goals, methods, materials, and assessments that work for everyone.

This flexible approach to learning can be customized and adjusted for individual students.



## Frequently Asked Questions

### Does Inclusive Education mean that all students should never leave their regular classrooms?

Inclusive education means that all students are educated in regular classrooms. It does not mean that individual students cannot leave the classroom for specific reasons. For example, a student may require one-on-one assistance in a subject which may or may not be happening during regular class time. As identified in the Education Act, the “common learning environment” provides a fundamental foundation to the concept that learning environments in New Brunswick’s public school system are to be inclusive of students with mixed abilities who are of the same age and attending their regular neighbourhood school. This is important as inclusion means that schools are supposed to adjust teaching methods to ensure that students with different learning needs can learn together, and recognizes that none of us learn exactly the same way.

### Will the school be open to meet with other professionals that have worked with my child, to share strategies that works for them?

Yes! Anyone who has a role with your child’s learning goals should be on the Personalized Learning Plan team. This includes professionals from within the school system and community specialists who are supporting your child and their education.

### Where can I seek support to understand my child’s rights and get resources?

Inclusion NB works to ensure all children have the right to access an inclusive education. Please visit [www.inclusionnb.ca](http://www.inclusionnb.ca) or call 1-866-622-2548 for more information.

### We have worked to develop a plan to identify and review behaviors at our Early Learning Facility. What plan will be made at school?

If determined to be needed by the District you are in, your child will have a **Personalized Learning Plan**. This type of plan would exist when your child needs learning strategies beyond robust instruction, there are additional behavior supports required as outlined in Policy 322, or the common learning environment needs to be varied. Sharing the strategies that have worked in the early learning environment will be essential for planning extra support. If your child does not have a Personalized Learning Plan but suspect it may be necessary, you should discuss your concerns with your school’s resource teacher.

#### PERSONALIZED LEARNING PLAN (PLP)

A Personalized learning plan (PLP) is a plan for a student who requires specific and individual identification of practical strategies, goals, outcomes, targets and educational supports that ensure the student experiences success in learning that is meaningful and appropriate, considering the student’s individual needs.



## TRANSITION FROM SCHOOL TO SCHOOL

Moving from one school to another will happen for virtually every student throughout New Brunswick. Only a few schools in the province offer Kindergarten through Grade 12. In addition to getting older and graduating from one school to the next, families move within cities and to other parts of the province which often results in a change of schools.



### Sharing Information within Personalized Learning Plans

A Personalized Learning Plan (PLP) will vary depending on the circumstances of each child. Plans could speak to the extensive changes or modifications to the regular school program and curriculum as well as a need for on-going support.

When a student has a PLP and is moving from one school to the next, the school team who created the PLP will share that information with the new school. This partnership between schools along with the collaboration of families is critical for a successful transition. The PLP is a legal document and families and school personnel should meet to outline strategies and supports so that students experience continued success in their classrooms.

When moving with a plan from one school to the next, there are several important questions to ask everyone involved.

#### Questions for the current school:

- When will you be providing the most recent PLP to the new school? Will you also be providing previous versions of the PLP?
- How will the school be sharing approaches that were not successful?
- Who from the school will be involved in sharing information?
- How will there be a focus on the strengths of my child when sharing information?

#### Questions for the new school:

- Will you be continuing the plan found within the current PLP or is the plan to start from scratch based on where my child currently is?
- What additional resources are available at this school that weren't available at previous schools?
- What resources are not available that my child has utilized in the past?
- What orientation is available for my child before school starts?
- Is there a representative from the School District who will continue working with my child's team?





## New Transportation Challenges

Changing schools can sometimes mean changes to the usual means of transportation for the student. In preparation of going to a new school, there are a few strategies that parents can implement to make this transition smoother:

- Share concerns about transportation with the new school before classes are dismissed for the summer. If possible and appropriate, have your child experience going on the new bus route.
- Create a visual schedule for your child with the stops and a map of the route.
- Understand what supports are on the bus and who your child should go to if they need support.
- Ask questions about what transportation supports could be available through the school if they are needed.

## Involving the student as part of the transition process

Encouraging the participation of your child may be a difficult task, but it is one that will allow your child to feel valued and develop skills and confidence to advocate for themselves. When changing schools, having your child participate in meetings that involve their learning would be a great way to build relationships with those around the table. It also provides an opportunity for your child to feel like they are a part of their own learning, and that their voice matters. While the role of professionals is important to support your child, the transition process will be far more effective if a student and their parent are active in setting and supporting goals.

Here are a few ways you can encourage participation of your child through the transition process:

- Remind your child to talk about or express their desires and wishes at their comfort level. As parents, you can help build confidence in your child by having a positive attitude about their future.
- Provide your child with the opportunity to make decisions in the transition process. This promotes further skill in making decisions and preparing for new experiences.
- Request that your child to be present and encouraged to be an active participant during a planning meeting. Even 5 minutes, would prove valuable for them to build their skills and feel a sense of ownership over their education experience. It also provides an opportunity for all attending to engage with your child and acknowledge their participation in identifying goals for their education.

## Transition from Grade to Grade

While there is not as much change when a student is returning to the same school, this transition is still challenging for many students. Whether it be the loss of a favoured teacher or a support staff member who understood the student very well, every school year presents its own challenges.

Here are several things to remember every year:

- **Stay informed:** It is important for parents to stay informed about their child's disability and any accommodations or support that may be needed during the transition process. This may include discussing the transition with teachers, school staff, and other professionals who work with the child.
- **Help the child prepare:** Parents can help their child prepare for the transition by talking with them about the changes that will be taking place and helping them to develop coping skills and strategies to manage any challenges that may arise.
- **Plan ahead:** Parents should start planning for the transition as early as possible to ensure that their child's needs are met. This may include working with school staff to develop a Personalized Learning Plan that outlines the support and accommodations that will be needed in the new grade.
- **Stay involved:** Parents should stay involved in their child's education and continue to advocate for their needs as they transition from grade to grade. This may include attending meetings and staying in touch with school staff to ensure that their child is receiving the support and accommodations they need.

## Change of Support

There are times when a student who previously had an Educational Assistant no longer has access to the support. This could be for any number of reasons, but it greatly changes the school experience for this student. If a student no longer has educational assistant support, there are several important things for parents and school staff to consider:

1. **Review the student's Personalized Learning Plan (PLP):** It is important to review the student's PLP to determine what accommodations and support are still needed in the absence of EA support. The PLP should outline how the student's needs will be met in the absence of EA support, and may include strategies such as additional one-on-one support from the teacher or other school staff, the use of assistive technology, or other accommodations.
2. **Communicate with the teacher:** Parents and school staff should communicate with the teacher to ensure that they are aware of the student's needs and are prepared to provide the necessary support and accommodations.
3. **Identify any potential challenges:** It is important to anticipate and address any potential challenges that the student may face in the absence of EA support. This may include identifying strategies to support the student's academic and social-emotional needs, as well as providing additional support as needed.



4. **Foster independence:** Removing EA support can be an opportunity to encourage the student to become more independent and take on more responsibility for their own learning. Parents and school staff can work with the student to develop self-advocacy skills and encourage them to participate in the decision-making process about their education.
5. **Stay involved:** Parents should stay involved in their child's education and continue to advocate for their needs as they transition to a new level of support. This may include attending meetings and staying in touch with school staff to ensure that the student is receiving the support and accommodations they need.

## Being an Effective Advocate for Your Child

In essence, advocacy is the process of supporting and standing up for another person. Good advocacy on behalf of a child with a disability may be necessary for a number of reasons:

- Your child may have greater needs for support in order to enjoy life or to be involved in school or other learning opportunities, employment in the community, or other community activities.
- Your child may not be afforded the same opportunities in life because of other people's attitudes, or because of physical or other barriers that may exist.
- Your child may have difficulty speaking for him or herself because of communication difficulties or other reasons.

How much and what kind of advocacy may be required will depend on each individual's or family's own circumstances and needs.

Regardless, advocacy can be more effective when families learn the skills and steps that can help you get results. This section provides valuable information that will assist families with the advocacy process.



### Advocating for What?

Advocacy can be used for many purposes. Advocating for and with a loved one with a disability may:

- Help your child stand up for his or her individual rights (for example, the right to make decisions, the right to dream and set goals, the right to have meaningful relationships, the right to be safe, etc.).
- Help your child have and maintain opportunities for meaningful involvement in the community (including school and learning, employment and recreation).
- Help your child gain access to the supports and disability related services that he or she may require to have a good life.

A good starting point for effective advocacy is to know and be clear about what you and your child want and need. It may be harder to get good results when you are unclear about what you want to see happen in your child's life. There are a few important things that you, your child, and others can do:

- You can help your child develop and tell others about his or her vision or dreams for the future. At times, especially when your child is younger, you may need to talk about your vision for your child. It is this vision that should inform and drive your efforts to achieve good things for your child.
- You can help your child develop and set some short- and long-term goals. Goals may involve the areas of education and learning, employment, recreation and so on. Goals should be positive but also realistic and achievable.

- You can help to identify what actions or steps need to be taken to achieve your child’s goals. Knowing what needs to happen is a critical part of effective advocacy. Remember that there may be other people that need to be involved in helping to figure out what actions need to take place.

Fortunately, there are planning processes that can help you and your child identify dreams, goals and actions. Many people with disabilities have benefited from planning processes such as PATH and MAPS. For more information on these planning processes, contact Inclusion NB.



### A Note about Service Systems

Over the course of your child’s life you will encounter a number of different service systems. There are many different types of service systems including early child care, education, medical and mental health, disability services, employment, and income support. Some services are provided by government while others may be provided by community agencies (which are usually funded by government). Each of these systems is unique but most have some common features, including:

- Its own set of rules and regulations that set out what services can be provided and by whom.
- Professionals and support staff who are hired to provide services that you and your child may need. (For more about working with professionals see the information at the end of this chapter).
- A “hierarchy”. This means that there are levels of authority that can range from “front line” workers to supervisors, managers, directors and often other layers of people who are in control of the organization. Working with these kinds of systems can be frustrating but it is important to know the “chain of command” if you are going to be an effective advocate.
- A budget or set amount of money that someone decides will be available to provide services and supports. How this money is used is important. Service systems are often challenged by the demand for services that exceeds the money that is available.
- Sometimes (or perhaps often) services systems are disconnected from one another and work independently (some call this working in “silos”). This can cause considerable frustration for families as they often have to try and work with a number of different systems at the same time. Governments are looking for ways to better “integrate” their service systems in order to make them more effective to those they serve.

## Tips for Being an Effective Advocate

Becoming an effective advocate may require learning about good advocacy practices as well as having a lot of patience and perseverance. Some people are naturally better at advocacy than others. Those who tend to be better advocates are people who are not easily intimidated by difficult people or situations and who have little difficulty in speaking up for themselves or others. Some people, however, learn to be good advocates over time (often because they feel they have to be to achieve good things for their child).

There are a number of good practices that will help you to become an effective advocate. These practices can be broken down into four main areas: preparation, communication, documentation or note taking, and follow up. It is important to remember that what you may need to do as an advocate may depend greatly on the issue or situation. Some situations will be more difficult and trying. They may require action over a period of weeks, months, or sometimes years. Other situations may be resolved more easily and therefore require less effort.



Below are a few tips that you can consider as you advocate on behalf of your child.

### Preparation

Good preparation is a very important aspect of effective advocacy. Here are a few tips to help you become more prepared:

- **Remember that information is power.**  
The more that you can inform yourself about a particular issue or situation the better you will be able to speak on behalf of your child. Depending on the situation, you may need to become better informed about your child's rights, how different service systems operate, how other families have achieved similar things for their child, and so on.
- **Have specific goals or things you would like to achieve for your child.**  
Sometimes goals can be broadly stated (for example, to help my child find a job) but goals may also be much more specific. Good preparation usually involves trying to be as specific as possible about what you want to achieve and, if possible, what specific actions you would like to see happen.
- **Identify the key issues or problems that you and your child are encountering.**  
Often, people with disabilities face barriers that may result from other people's attitudes, a lack of effective supports and services, etc. When you are able to clearly identify the problems or barriers that may exist, you can focus your advocacy on what needs to be addressed.
- **Identify some possible solutions that you see as workable.**  
Sometimes, solutions may not be easily identified or can only be identified by talking things through with others.

**A KEY PART OF EFFECTIVE  
ADVOCACY IS BUILDING GOOD  
RELATIONSHIPS WITH PEOPLE WHO  
ARE IN THE POSITION TO MAKE  
DECISIONS OR TO OFFER HELP.**

- **If possible, identify what you are willing to accept if you cannot get exactly what you want.**  
This will require thinking about what you may be willing to compromise with. This is not always easy but it is sometimes necessary. Having a “fall back” position will allow you to still negotiate for something that may be acceptable, even if it is not the perfect solution.
- **Identify people who may be able to help you.**  
Often, advocacy is more effective if you have allies. This may be simply someone who agrees to attend a meeting with you to support your cause or to simply take notes. It may also be someone who has some particular expertise in the issue you are dealing with or in advocating for people with disabilities (for example, a volunteer or a staff person from a disability organization). Remember, being a good advocate does not mean that you have to do everything on your own.
- **Identify the people that you need to talk with to achieve results for your child.**  
These may be people who have some authority to make some decisions or who can help make things happen. Depending on the circumstances, key people might include someone who works for government, a politician, someone from a service agency, an employer or a human resource manager in a company, and so on.

## Communication

Effective advocacy also requires good communication. Communication can take many forms including phone calls, face to face meetings, group meetings, letters and emails.

Here are a few tips to remember about communication:

- **Be clear and concrete.**  
This means making sure that your messages or requests are stated as clearly and briefly as possible. If your message or request sounds confused, other people may not know what it is that you want for your child. What is the most important information that you need to convey? At times, other information may be useful to support your request. Too much information, however, may get you side-tracked on other issues that may not be as important.
- **Be assertive.**  
When you communicate with others, they should understand that you have expectations that you expect to achieve. Assertive communication also means talking in a firm (but not harsh) tone of voice. In face to face meetings, try to keep your body erect but also relaxed and use eye contact. Remember that assertive communication is not aggressive.





- **Listen carefully to what other people are saying.** Listening is simply a respectful way to communicate. This means paying close attention to what people are trying to tell you and not interrupting when other people are talking. In addition, listening may also provide you with information or clues about how to solve a problem or to get what you want for your child.
- **Ask questions.** If something is not clear to you, ask for a better or clearer explanation. Asking questions is also a good way to get valuable information that may assist you in your advocacy. Asking questions may also be a useful way to have a conversation with someone who may be able to help you. A key part of effective advocacy is building good relationships with people who are in the position to make decisions or to offer help. If possible, prepare the questions you want to ask before a conversation or meeting.
- **Where appropriate, use stories or visual ways to communication information.** Often, people remember personal or other kinds of stories more than anything else. Stories can be helpful in providing a sense of the real-life issues that may be at stake. They can also be helpful by providing examples of how situations or issues may be resolved.

## Documentation and Note Keeping

Keeping good notes and records can be a great aid to the advocacy process. We like to call it the “power of the paper trail”. Here are some tips that may be helpful:

- **Keep a notebook, log or a diary to record your discussions.** Whether you have talked with someone on the telephone or in person, it is important to keep track of the name, contact information and title or position of the person with whom you spoke. Also, record the date and any responses you have received. This information will be particularly helpful to you if you need to do a follow up or talk with someone else who is higher in the “chain of command” within an organization, government or company.
- **Keep a file of written responses and other documents.** Sometimes you will receive written responses to requests or will want to ask for a written response. This may be in the form of letters or emails. It is important to keep track of these in case you need them in the future. Sometimes, people will say or promise things verbally but not later act upon. Having a written record of what was agreed to may be very helpful. Also, when a request is being refused, it is helpful to have the refusal (preferably with the reasons for the refusal) spelled out in writing. This may be particularly important if you are asking someone else to review the decision or have the opportunity to make an appeal.
- **Use e-mails as a follow up to meetings.** After meetings it may be useful to send an e-mail message to the people you met with to summarize what was agreed upon. If so, send your message as soon as possible after the meeting and print your message and any responses and keep them in your document file.



## Follow Up

Often, advocacy does not provide immediate results. Some situations may require persistence and effort to achieve success or have things resolved. Often the adage “the squeaky wheel gets the grease” is very true when families are trying to accomplish things for their child with a disability. Keep the following points in mind:

- **Try not to be too frustrated or intimidated if you are not getting the response or results that you are seeking.**

Continue to follow up until you feel that your issues have been resolved to your and your child’s satisfaction.

- **Sometimes, following up your issues may require that you talk with a more senior person with the organization.**

This person may have more authority to make decisions or may have an interest in helping you resolve your issue.

- **At some point, you may feel that you have done all you can on your own.**

Following up your advocacy may require that you involve other people, particularly from a disability organization to assist you.

- **When dealing with government systems or agencies, you may need to contact elected officials.**

This kind of follow up should normally be done only when you have gone through all of the regular channels in the government system.

- **Lastly, there may be times that you are not successful no matter how hard you try.**

Remember that advocacy is about negotiation. What are the things that you are willing to compromise with or settle for if you cannot get what you want or need? Sometimes, the next best solution is better than no solution at all.

## Working with Professionals

From the time of the birth of your child, you may be involved with a number of professionals. These may be medical professionals, social workers, early intervention specialists, educators, and others. Your relationships with these professionals will be important. The best kind of professional–parent relationships are those where there is trust, respect and open communication. Parents are recognized for the central role they play in the life of a child with a disability and on that child’s growth, development and well-being. Professionals are recognized because they have some special knowledge to contribute.

It is sometimes easy to feel that professionals know best and that parents should not challenge what professionals are saying or suggesting. At the same time, however, it is important that parents’ ideas and concerns are respected. There may be times when you and professionals will not agree on important issues concerning your child. In a good parent-professional relationship, these differences are often resolved by talking openly.

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Sometimes, however, parent-professional relationships break down, and you may need to find other people who can help you and your child.

The National Information Center for Children and Youth with Disabilities in the United States has provided a number of useful suggestions for parents on working with professionals:

- If you are looking for a professional with whom you can work well, ask other parents of children with disabilities.
- If you do not understand the words that a professional uses, be prepared to ask questions. For example, say “What do you mean by that?” or “I don’t fully understand, can you please explain that again?”
- If necessary, write down what professionals are saying. This can be particularly helpful in medical situations when a medication or therapy is to be given.
- Learn as much as you can about your child’s disability. This will help you to better understand what professionals are saying and to be better informed in discussions with professionals.
- Prepare for visits to professionals by writing down a list of questions or concerns you would like to discuss during the visit.
- Keep a notebook in which you write down information concerning your child’s particular needs or your concerns. This can include notes about your child’s medical history, results from tests that may have been given, observations you have made about your child, and so on. A loose-leaf binder is easy to maintain and add information to.
- If you do not agree with professional recommendations, say so. Be as specific as you can about why you do not agree.



*Adapted from: Parenting a Child with Special Needs: A Guide to Reading and Resources. Available from [www.kidsource.com](http://www.kidsource.com)*

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## Checklist for Preparing for Meetings

### BEFORE THE MEETING

- I have identified what I am asking for.
- I have identified the “key players” that need to be involved.
- I have a supporter to go with me to the meeting.
- I have written down any points I wish to discuss or questions I would like to have answered.
- I have the following information: the day, date, time frame, and place of the meeting, who will be in attendance, and whether I must bring any materials.
- The scheduled meeting time allows enough time to cover the issue(s) that need(s) to be addressed.
- I have gathered and prepared any materials that I think are necessary for the meeting.

### DURING THE MEETING

- I arrive a few minutes before the meeting time.
- I record (or have your supporter record): the date and place of meeting who is in attendance with contact information, if possible key points of information, decisions made the date and details of any future meetings.
- I ask participants to clarify any terms or points I don't understand.

### AFTER THE MEETING

- I have asked for minutes to be sent out regarding the meeting with a summary of decisions that were made and issues that were addressed.

### OR

- I have sent out an email to all participants summarizing what I understood to be the decisions made and issues that were addressed, with a request for their confirmation my summary.

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## Sample Log for Recording Discussions

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Names of people involved:

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Contact information for people involved:

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Questions asked / What was discussed?

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Result of Discussion:

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Follow-up steps required:

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## References/Resources

New Brunswick Early Learning and Child Care Action Plan Annual Report 2018-2019. Retrieved from: [https://www2.gnb.ca/content/dam/gnb/Departments/eco-bce/Promo/early\\_childhood/AnnualReport2018-2019.pdf](https://www2.gnb.ca/content/dam/gnb/Departments/eco-bce/Promo/early_childhood/AnnualReport2018-2019.pdf)

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Inclusion NB. Taking the Journey. Retrieved from: <https://nbacl.nb.ca/product/taking-the-journey-an-information-and-advocacy-guide-for-families-raising-a-child-with-a-disability/>





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