

Jewish Life

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Summer To-Do List for Parents of Children with Special Needs

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Thinking about September and preparing for back to school is particularly, and understandably, daunting for many parents of children with special needs. It keeps some awake at night, thinking about the past school year, and what needs improvement in the year to come. Rather than lose sleep over what lies ahead, a little preparation before September could make for a better school year for your child. If you are a parent of a child with special needs, here are some suggestions that should take only a little time, but will save precious time and effort down the road:

1. The first order of business this summer is to relax and enjoy it. You have a great deal of responsibility throughout the entire year, so anything you can do to take care of yourself and recharge those batteries is very important. It can be little things like taking walks, getting together with friends, reading a book or napping in the hammock.

2. Read over your child's 2017-2018 Individualized Educational Plan (IEP). Check for accuracy, and note any discrepancies or anything that is unclear to you. The most important parts to examine are the eligibility, goals (these drive your child's program, and must be reasonably optimistic as well as measurable), placement and services. If any assessments were per-

formed, read through them to make sure that they are clear to you, and note any questions you may still have. If there are any issues, you can request a Committee on Special Education meeting during the summer to address your concerns. Note whether your child is due for reassessment in the coming year.

3. Organize your paperwork and record-keeping. Keep all of your child's records in one place, in chronological order with the most recent on top. If you don't have time to make a gorgeous binder, that's fine. It's much more important to have everything orderly and where you can find it.

It's helpful to have a calendar with all the important school dates in it. This would include school meetings, back-to-school night, special events, SEPTA meetings, class trips, etc.

Get a notebook to use as a communication log so that you can keep a record in one place of phone conversations, meetings, conferences, etc. Always note the date and time of any communication, and with whom. Once you're in the habit of using your notebook, it will become an invaluable tool.

4. Say thank you to those who helped. If there are special people who helped your child have a good year, let them know it.

5. Arrange a meeting with your child's new teacher before the year starts. There are usually a few days before

school starts when teachers are setting up their classrooms, and are available for brief meetings with parents and students. Bring a copy of your child's IEP; do not assume that the teacher has seen it. Highlight for the teacher what you think are the two or three most important things to know about your child.

6. Try to maintain some structure for your child over the summer. Everyone deserves a break, but not for two and a half months. It's better to get back to morning and evening routines before school starts again. Also maintain expectations through the summer about staying organized, such as keeping one's room tidy, doing chores, etc.

7. Summer reading with your child can be a very enjoyable activity for both of you. Going to the library to select books and having a special reading time each day – even for just 15 minutes – can help maintain skills and build confidence. Plus it's a great habit to have.



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