

PICs –n– Pieces

Parent Information Center & Parent Education Network
Parents Helping Parents of Wyoming, Inc.



Fall 2015

What is Family Engagement? How Can I Do it?

School has been back in session for a month or two, and by now, your children should have settled into a routine. You, too, should have had time to develop a relationship, of sorts, with your child's teachers and found ways to communicate with them to support your children's learning in meaningful ways. Or, have you?

Research by Katharine Hoover-Dempsey's has identified three of the most effective lessons that parents can teach their children in order to ensure school success. These are lessons, listed below, are something that parents, regardless of their background, have the power to instill in their children.



**You need to try hard,
Homework is very important, &
School is very important!**

Tips for Getting Involved:

- Ask questions about homework and set up a quiet place for your child to work. This will help them understand that homework is very important.
- Read everything that is sent home from school—report cards, homework assignments, newsletters, etc—show your child you are well-informed and interested.
- Get to know your child's teachers and principal.
- Ask for copies of school policies (i.e. attendance, discipline, homework, parent involvement, etc), or explore the district/ schools website to find where they are located. Ask questions if there is something you do not understand.
- Encourage your child to read at home: read to them, have them read to you, let them see you reading. Visit your local library or school libraries or use book fairs and pick out books together. Choose books for each other to read. Discuss the books at the dinner table or while you are in the car.
- If possible, volunteer to help out in the classroom and with school activities. Attend school activities (i.e. concerts, programs, etc) to support your child.

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Family Engagement Cont...

Questions to Ask Your Child’s Teacher at Parent-Teacher Conferences:

- Is my child performing at grade level?
- What are my child’s strengths and weaknesses in major subjects—reading, writing, math, and science?
- How much time should my child spend on homework?
- Are my child’s assignments completed accurately and on time?
- Who are my child’s close friends? How well

does my child get along with other students?

- What can we do at home to support classroom learning?
- What is the best way to keep in touch with you?
- Does the school have programs to meet my child’s needs? Does my child have special learning needs? Are there special classes my child should be in?

Adapted from US Dept of Education, Empowering Parents School Box: Taking a Closer Look and 100 Tips for Parents, Washington, D.C. 2007.

Focus On Scaffolding

As families, we hear a variety of education terms that are unfamiliar to us about theories, methods and processes. One process we hear mentioned often is “Scaffolding”.

Scaffolding, or *Scaffolding Instruction* is a useful tool for teaching a student a new concept because the teacher models or demonstrates what they want the student to learn as a problem-solving process, then steps back and offers supports as needed, allowing the student to learn in an individual hands on way.

Scaffolding gives students a context, motivation, or foundation from which to understand the new information that will be introduced during the coming lesson.

Scaffolding techniques should be considered fundamental to good, solid teaching for all students, not just those with learning disabilities or second language learners. In order for learning to progress, scaffolds should be gradually removed as instruction continues, so that students will eventually be able to demonstrate their understanding independently.

General Process

First, a teacher begins teaching at the level at which



students understand, and then she builds on that understanding. She then presents the problem and thinks aloud as she goes about solving it. In the process, she shows how it's done by combining actions, images and language. She then does the following:

- She repeats this process two more times, asking questions of the students along the way.
- Each answer, right or wrong, receives a positive response from her, to encourage participation.
- More students are asked to respond to the questions each time it is repeated.
- Correction is provided as needed but reinforced positively.
- When understanding appears to be achieved, students join her in solving a new problem.

Understanding is checked as they solve it. If more instruction is needed, more modeling is provided. If students then demonstrate knowledge, teacher

fades (steps away) and allows students to work independently, offering support as needed.

Scaffolding instruction includes a wide variety of strategies, including:

- activating prior knowledge
- offering a motivational context to pique student interest or curiosity in the subject at hand
- breaking a complex task into easier, more "doable" steps to facilitate student achievement
- showing students an example of the desired outcome before they complete the task
- modeling the thought process for students through "think aloud" talk
- offering hints or partial solutions to problems
- using verbal cues to prompt student answers
- teaching students chants or mnemonic devices to ease memorization of key facts or procedures
- facilitating student engagement and participation
- displaying a historical timeline to offer a context for learning
- using graphic organizers to offer a visual framework for assimilating new information
- teaching key vocabulary terms before reading
- guiding the students in making predictions for what they expect will occur in a story, experiment, or other course of action
- asking questions while reading to encourage deeper investigation of concepts
- suggesting possible strategies for the students to use during independent practice
- modeling an activity for the students before they are asked to complete the same or similar activity
- asking students to contribute their own experiences that relate to the subject at hand

Adapted from www.study.com

PHP: 25 Years in the Making

In September 1990, Parents Helping Parents of Wyoming (PHP) registered as a statewide non-profit parent organization in Wyoming. Later that month, founder Terri Dawson submitted the first grant proposal, the Parent Information Center (PIC) to the US Department of Education to be a Parent Training and Information Center. At that time, Wyoming was 1 of 8 states that did not have a Parent Center. Notice came in February 1991 that PIC was awarded the grant and would be funded in August 1991.

We were off and running! In 1998, PHP added another project, the Parent Education Network to support schools and families in increasing family engagement.

In our first few years, some members of PHP's volunteer Board of Directors were: Cathy Benitz; Ron Overcast; Kathy Emmons, Deanna Frey, Terri Sporkin, Chris Beck and Linda Dixon. Many other dedicated families, educators and community

members have given their time as board members and stepped up to shared their expertise to further PHP's mission.

In August 2015, PIC opened it's doors with two staff: Terri Dawson as Director , and Nancy Pedro as Administrative Assistant. Together, we gathered a network of families across the state to support families. Since then, PHP and PIC have met and supported thousands of families of children with and without disabilities in all corners of the state, from Point of Rocks, to

Meeteetse, and Lance Creek to Harmony. We have been privileged to share in family's joy of accomplished milestones and good health while supporting them through the disappointment of unmet goals and the despair of serious health needs. We have traveled miles and miles to attend hundreds of IEP's and parent nights, and presented over a 1,500 workshops/trainings on dozens of disability, and related educational topics. We look forward to sharing more miles and milestones with families in the coming years!



LET'S TALK ABOUT MATH

A video series focusing on early math from birth to 3!



Babies doing math? That's right! The roots of early math skills begin developing from birth, through babies' everyday play and interactions with parents and caregivers. These early math skills have a big impact on children's school readiness—in fact, research has found that a strong set of early math skills predicts *both* a child's later math skills and later literacy skills.

ZERO TO THREE, Heising-Simons Foundation, Next Generation, and Too Small to Fail have developed a series of videos (in English and [Spanish](#)) highlighting the foundation of early math skills in the first 5 years of life.

<http://www.zerotothree.org/parenting-resources/early-math-video-series/>

The *Let's Talk About Math* series covers six early math topics:

1. [Shape awareness.](#)
2. [Spatial awareness.](#)
3. [Counting.](#)
4. Early computation,
5. Measurement, and
6. Patterns.

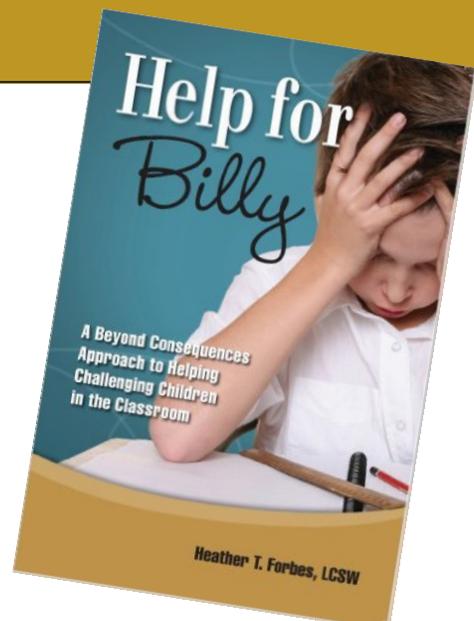
Each video—and accompanying handout—outlines the numeracy skills children are mastering from birth to 5 years old, and suggests fun activities parents and professionals can use to support this learning.

PIC Lending Library

PIC has an extensive lending library of books, videos and CD's available to parents and professionals. Resources on challenging behaviors, specific disabilities, education, parenting, classroom strategies, transition and various other disability issues are available. The only cost to those borrowing materials from the library is the return postage.

This month's "pick" is *Help for Billy: A Beyond Consequences Approach to Helping Challenging Children in the Classroom*, by Heather T Forbes.

Call PIC at 307-684-2277 to find specific titles, or multiple books on different topics available for loan.



5 Common Misconceptions About IEPs

Myth #1: Every Child Who Struggles is Guaranteed an IEP

Fact: To qualify for special education services (and an IEP), a student must meet two criteria. First, he must be formally diagnosed as having a disability as defined under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). This federal law covers 13 categories of disability, one of which is “specific learning disabilities.” Second, the school must determine that a student needs special education services in order to make progress in school and learn the general education curriculum. Not all students with disabilities meet both criteria. Learn more about the process of getting an IEP with an IEP Roadmap.

Myth#2: If Something is in the IEP, the School Will Make It Happen



Fact: The IEP is a legal contract, so the school is required to provide the services and supports it promises for your child. But teachers and administrators are busy—and human—so sometimes details are overlooked or forgotten. Part of your role as your child’s advocate is to make sure he’s getting the services and accommodations outlined in his IEP. Monitor his schoolwork, test scores and attitude toward school. If things seem off track, meet with his teacher to discuss the situation. Explore other ways you can assess whether your child’s IEP is being followed.

Myth #3: An IEP Will Provide Services and Supports For Your Child Beyond High School

Fact: The IEP (and the services it guarantees) will end when the student graduates from high school. Special education doesn’t extend to college or the workplace. The IEP team is required to work with the student to create a transition plan as part of his IEP. This plan will focus on the student’s future goals and help him prepare for young adulthood.

Myth #4: Having an IEP Means Your Child Will be Placed in a Special Education Classroom

Fact: Federal law requires that children with IEPs be placed in the least restrictive environment. This means students should spend as little time as possible outside the general education classroom. The IEP may specify services and accommodations your child needs to succeed in the general education class. If students spend time in a “resource room” or special education class, that will be listed in the IEP.

Myth #5: The IEP is Written by the School, then Explained to the Parents

Fact: According to federal law (IDEA), parents are full and equal members of their child’s IEP team. This means that you have a say in how your child’s IEP is crafted. Even if you’re not an expert on special education, you are an expert when it comes to understanding your child’s needs! Your intimate knowledge of your child’s development, strengths and challenges, home life and activities outside of school are extremely valuable for developing the IEP.

www.understood.org

What in the World Are They Thinking? (Adolescent Brain Growth)

At one time or another, most parents of adolescents and teenagers have asked themselves “What in the world is he (or she) thinking?” in reference to behaviors or decisions of their middle-school or early-high-school aged child. New research suggests that the risk-taking behaviors, impulsiveness, and questionable decision making seen in this age range may be due to their still-developing brains.

Adolescent and teenage behavior is not simply a matter of willful stubbornness or determination to drive their parents and teachers crazy. Early studies blamed increased hormone levels flooding the body for the often unpredictable, hotheaded, and immature conduct of preteens and teens. Hormones probably play a big role in a child’s behavior, but recent studies show that the brain undergoes a growth spurt at adolescence which has a big impact on a child’s behavior and thinking. Scientists have found that an area of the brain called the prefrontal cortex “the part of the brain in charge of executive functions, like planning, organizing, setting priorities, making sound judgments, anticipating consequences, controlling impulses, and calming unruly emotions, is the last part of the brain to mature. In teens, the prefrontal cortex is ‘asleep at the wheel’.” (Source: Pat Crum, DeVos Children’s Hospital, Grand Rapids, MI)

What Can Parents Do to Help Their Teens?

- Adjust your expectations of teens. The brains of teens simply are not as fully developed as the brains of adults, so teens cannot think like adults even though they may physically look like adults.
- Predict that teens will “think” with their emotions more than they will think with their brains and use common sense. They may favor short-term benefits over long-term results.
- Help them think through problems, consider their options, and make reasonable decisions.
- Guide your teen, but avoid making all of his/her decisions. Discuss choices and consequences during calm and stress free times to help prepare your teen for the times when he/she will need to make on-the-spot decisions.
- Supervise your teen and stay involved in his/her activities, but become more of a “consultant” than a “manager”.
- Respect the emerging abilities of your teen, but do not give free rein for him to be totally on his own just yet—his ability to make sound decisions is still developing. Teens still need their parents’ guidance even though they don’t think they do!

“To understand how adolescence, at times, can seem to combine the worst aspects of adulthood and childhood—confronting us with big, strong, intelligent people who may sometimes act like two-year-olds—we must consider some very different aspects of adolescent brain development.”



It used to be thought that the structure of the brain was complete in adolescence, but new technology (magnetic resonance imaging, MRI) has made it possible to show that the teen brain is still a “work in progress”, far from mature, until well into a person’s 20’s. The development of the teen brain involves an enormous overproduction of connections between brain cells. Surplus connections mean that teens cannot keep track of multiple thoughts. By about age 18, the connections which are “hardwired” by experience are kept and the rest are trimmed away. This trimming increases the power and efficiency of brain function. Teens are creating their own brains, in a way. Whatever they choose to learn or experience will be hardwired and kept. (Sources: The Dana Forum on Brain Science, Vol. 5, 2003; Pat Crum, DeVos Children’s Hospital, Grand Rapids, MI)

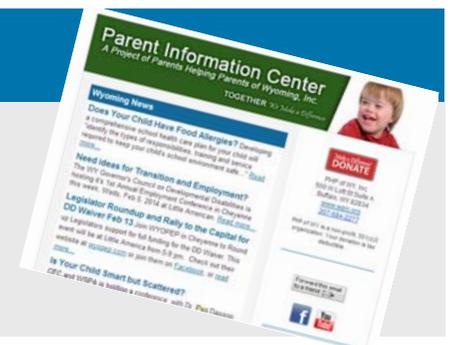
- Encourage adolescents and teens to try many different activities, sports, and hobbies to find out what they are really interested in and have natural ability to do.
- Spend quality time with children of this age, but realize that they also need time to themselves and time with their friends. You are the parent, the guide and mentor, not the buddy or pal.
- Be a good listener and be available. Distracted or absent parents are not very helpful to adolescents and teens who want and need to discuss concerns or problems with adults.
- Allow your adolescent or teen to take advantage of the help and support of other responsible adults (teachers, coaches, aunts, uncles, grandparents, etc.), too. Young people may have several suitable role models in addition to their own parents.

- Invest a lot of time and energy into nurturing a comfortable relationship with your teens or adolescents. They will learn patterns of appropriate adult behavior, self-restraint, good judgment, and consideration for others as they spend time with kind and caring parents.
- Be patient. Understand that “this, too, shall pass” and your adolescent/teen will become a thinking, caring, sensitive, capable adult just like you did.
- Realize that this is a time when your child is vulnerable. Talk to him/her about the destructive short-term and long-term consequences of drug, alcohol, and tobacco use, and sexual activity or experimentation. Give them the facts, but try not to lecture.
- Try to direct your teen’s attention to the many options available to him/her. Provide as many opportunities as you can to give your teen a variety of life experiences. All the choices that are possible can be considered, and then he/she can start focusing on his/her life’s path.

It’s unfair to expect adolescents and teens to have adult levels of thinking, reasoning, and behaving before their brains are finished being built. Adolescents undergo remarkable brain growth leading them to the eventual maturity that we would expect them to have in their late teens and early twenties. The more technical and more advanced the studies of brain development become, the more they lead us back to some very basic beliefs of child-rearing: spend loving, quality time with your children. The brain is largely wired for social interaction and for bonding with loving parents and caregivers.

Sign up for PIC E-news!

Keep up-to-date on “What’s Happening in Wyoming” and continue to read interesting and relevant articles by subscribing to our online E-News at www.wpic.org (free to all) or by subscribing to our hard copy PICs-N-Pieces newsletter—available at no cost to parents/family members of children with disabilities/ \$20 professionals. All donations appreciated!



Promoting Self-Determination in Youth with Disabilities: Tips for Families and Professionals

Promote Choice Making

- Identify strengths, interests, and learning styles;
- Provide choices about clothing, social activities, family events, and methods of learning new information;
- Hold high expectations for youth;
- Teach youth about their disability;
- Involve children and youth in self-determination/self advocacy; opportunities in school, home, and community;
- Prepare children and youth for school meetings;
- Speak directly to children and youth;
- Involve children and youth in educational, medical, and family decisions;
- Allow for mistakes and natural consequences;
- Listen often to children and youth.

Encourage Exploration of Possibilities

- Promote exploration of the world every day;
- Use personal, tactile, visual, and auditory methods for exploration;
- Identify young adult mentors with similar disabilities;
- Talk about future jobs, hobbies, and family lifestyles;
- Develop personal collages/scrap books based on interests and goals;
- Involve children and youth in service learning (4H, AmeriCorps, local volunteering).

Promote Reasonable Risk Taking

- Make choice maps listing risks, benefits, and consequences of choice;
- Build safety nets through family members, friends, schools, and others;
- Develop skills in problem solving;
- Develop skills in evaluating consequences.

Encourage Problem Solving

- Teach problem solving skills;
- Allow ownership of challenges and problems;
- Accept problems as part of healthy development;
- Hold family meetings to identify problems at home and in the community;
- Hold class meetings to identify problems in school;
- Allow children and youth to develop a list of self-identified consequences.

Promote Self Advocacy

- Encourage communication and self-representation;
- Praise all efforts of assertiveness and problem solving;
- Develop opportunities at home and in school for self-advocacy;
- Provide opportunities for leadership roles at home and in school;
- Encourage self-advocates to speak in class;
- Teach about appropriate accommodation needs;
- Practice ways to disclose disability and accommodation needs;
- Create opportunities to speak about the disability in school, home, church, business and community.



Facilitate Development of Self-Esteem

- Create a sense of belonging within schools and communities;



PIC Parent Conference on disAbilities
Feb 26, 27 & 28, 2016 at Parkway Plaza, Casper.
Featuring Paula Kluth

- Provide experiences for children and youth to use their talents;
- Provide opportunities to youth for contributing to their families, schools, and communities;
- Provide opportunities for individuality and independence;
- Identify caring adult mentors at home, school, church, or in the community;
- Model a sense of self-esteem and self-confidence.

Develop Goal Setting and Planning

- Teach children and youth family values, priorities, and goals;
- Make posters that reflect values and are age-appropriate;
- Define what a goal is and demonstrate the steps to reach a goal;
- Make a road map to mark the short-term identifiers as they work toward a goal;
- Support children and youth in developing values and goals;

- Discuss family history and culture--make a family tree;
- Be flexible in supporting youth to reach their goals; some days they may need much motivation and help; other days they may want to try alone.

Help Youth Understand Their Disabilities

- Develop a process that is directed by youth for self-identity: Who are you? What do you want? What are your challenges and barriers? What supports do you need?
- Direct children and youth to write an autobiography;
- Talk about the youth's disability;
- Talk about the youth's abilities;
- Involve children and youth in their IEP;
- Use good learning style inventories and transition assessments;
- Identify and utilize support systems for all people.



Join the Parent Information Center as we celebrate PIC's 25-years of supporting families in **OPENING DOORS** for their children with disabilities.



This year, PIC is expanding our Parent Conference on disAbilities to three days: Feb 26-28, 2016 in Casper. The conference will feature Paula Kluth, nationally recognized speaker and author on Autism and Inclusive Classrooms, all day, Friday Feb 26, 2016.

Saturday and Sunday, February 27 & 28, 2016, will feature a variety of sessions on topics such as:

- creative ways to use apps to support learning,
- skill building for getting and keeping a job,
- Self-advocacy –a special session for youth with disabilities in finding their own way with confidence, &
- strategies for challenging behaviors in the classroom.

Saturday's banquet will celebrate 25-years of great families supporting and networking across Wyoming!

ABOUT US:

Parent Information Center (PIC):

Outreach Parent Liaisons (OPL) provide information and support to families of children with disabilities, on their rights under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). PIC can attend IEPs with families to help empower them to partner with schools effectively. We also provide workshops on IDEA, IEPs, and specific disabilities such as attention disorders and autism spectrum disorder.

For more info check out our website at www.wpic.org or call PIC at (307) 684-2277:

Terri Dawson, Director, tdawson@wpic.org (307) 217-1321
Serves the entire state

Juanita Bybee, jbybee@wpic.org (307) 684-2277
Serves Buffalo & Sheridan

Janet Kinstetter, jkinstetter@wpic.org (307) 756-9605
Serves Moorcroft, Gillette, Sundance & Newcastle for phone support only. Janet no longer attends IEPs or provides workshops

Tammy Wilson, twilson@wpic.org (307) 217-2244
Serves Green River & Rock Springs

To help you get organized,
check out the newly updated,
***Packaging Wisdom: A Family Centered
Care Coordination Notebook***



TOGETHER *We Make a Difference!*

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donation helps us strengthen our
network of support for families.**

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Save the Date: PIC Parent Conference on disAbilities
25 years of Opening Doors

EXPECTATIONS

PIC Parent Conference on disAbilities
Feb 26, 27, & 28, 2016 Casper *Open Doors!*

PTSB credit and STARS available



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