



# ND Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health

Fall 2010

## How to Advocate for Your Child with an IEP

*ehow.com*

If you have a child with a disability, you already know the many challenges your child is faced with. However, with adequate support and access to the appropriate services, your child can be successful throughout his education. Educate yourself, understand your child's rights and get involved in his schooling. Learn to be your child's advocate to give the child a voice.

Learn everything there is to know about your child's disability. You cannot understand your child's needs without understanding her disability. Read current research, join a support group and surround yourself with other parents that have children with your child's disability. The Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health will be there for you. Contact the Federation for support and advocacy

- Know the law, If you want to be your child's advocate, know his rights. Every child with a

disability is entitled to a "free and appropriate public education," under IDEA, or the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Understand IDEA and what it means for your child. Use online resources such as Wrightslaw and Ed.gov to help you understand your child's rights.

- Involve yourself in her education. Be your child's advocate by staying involved in her classroom. Get to know your child's teacher and administrators at the school. Attend all parent/teacher conferences and school functions. Ask questions to make sure that the IEP, or Individualized Education Plan, is being followed.

- Prepare for and attend all IEP or Individualized Education Plan Meetings. This is the most important meeting of the entire school year when it comes to your child's education. Your child's goals will be drafted and his schedule of support services will be determined. Advocate for your child by

showing up at the meeting with a draft of goals that you want for your child. Outline the services you would like your child to receive and stand up for your child when you feel like he is not getting the services that he needs.

- Monitor your child's progress. If your child is not making progress at school, start asking questions. Meet with teachers to determine what adjustments can be made. Set time lines to notice improvement. Ask for another IEP meeting if your child is still not successful. It is your child's right.



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# Parents of Mentally Ill Children Have a Long and Difficult Journey

August 19th, 2010  
by Angela McClanahan

I've long been a fan of the Rudyard Kipling poem, "If."

*If you can keep your head when all about you  
are losing theirs and blaming it on you...*

I can relate to this verse. I'm sure all parents of mentally ill children can. Often the greatest challenge we face is not going stark raving mad ourselves.

*If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you...  
If you can wait and not be tired by waiting...  
Or being hated, don't give way to hating...*

Being the parent of a bipolar child has not made me popular. My child has been passed over for parties and had his own invitations declined. Other parents who only know my child by the stories they hear from their own kids are quick to label him as a bad seed. And if he's a bad seed, surely he must come from bad parents.

*If you can dream-and not make dreams your master;  
If you can think-and not make thoughts your aim,  
If you can meet with Triumph and Disaster  
And treat those two impostors just the same...*

We all have high hopes for our kids. When your child is diagnosed with a mental illness, it's hard to come to terms with the impact of the diagnosis on those hopes. Should you continue to worry about paying for college, or just focus on getting him through high school?

*If you can ...watch the things you gave your life to, broken,  
And stoop and build'em up with worn-out tools...*

Undoubtedly, the hardest part of parenting any child is the hurt we suffer when they suffer. Our children tend to suffer more, and there are few (if any) rewards to soothe their suffering.

*If you can make one heap of all your winnings  
And risk it on one turn of pitch-and-toss,  
And lose, and start again at your beginnings,  
And never breathe a word about your loss...*

I try not to think of all the prescriptions I've filled in the past five years. Particularly the ones I refill-at full market price-only to have the psychiatrist a day later agree they are not working and here, try this instead, and no, it's not available as a generic. And it may not work either. But let's hope for the best.

*If neither foes nor loving friends*

*can hurt you...*

People fear what they don't understand. Many people don't understand mental illness. Some of them are closer than you think-friends and family members you never expected to do or say hurtful things.

Kipling's words paint a disheartening portrait of the world-not unlike the world we face daily as parents. But at the end, he offers this as inspiration-if you can survive all this adversity,

*Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it*

Which perfectly describes those moments when we are proud of our kids...when we feel like we're doing right by them...when we haven't lost our temper or cried in front of them...you know, the good days.

I wish all of us more of those.

Re-printed from:

<http://www.healthyplace.com/blogs/parentingchildwithmentall-ness/2010/08/parents-of-mentally-ill-children-have-a-long-and-difficult-journey/>

# Anti-Stigma: Do You Know the Facts?

Stigma is not just a matter of using the wrong word or action. Stigma is about disrespect. It is the use of negative labels to identify a person living with mental illness. Stigma is a barrier. Fear of stigma, and the resulting discrimination, discourages individuals and their families from getting the help they need. An estimated 22 to 23 percent of the U.S. population experience a mental disorder in any given year, but almost half of these individuals do not seek treatment (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2002; U.S. Surgeon General, 2001).

This educational information encourages the use of positive images to refer to people with mental illness and underscores the reality that mental illness can be successfully treated.

**Do you know that** an estimated 44 million Americans experience a mental disorder in any given year?

**Do you know that** stigma is not a matter of using the wrong word or action?

**Do you know that** stigma is about disrespect and using negative labels to identify a person living with mental illness?

**Do you know that** stigma is a barrier that discourages individuals and their families from seeking help?

**Do you know that** many people would rather tell employers they committed a petty crime and served time in jail, than admit to being in a psychiatric hospital?

**Do you know that** stigma can result in inadequate insurance coverage for mental health services?

**Do you know that** stigma leads to fear, mistrust, and violence against people living with mental illness and their families?

**Do you know that** stigma can cause families and friends to turn their backs on people with mental illness?

**Do you know that** stigma can prevent people from getting access to needed mental health services?

## DO'S

**Do use** respectful language

**Do emphasize** abilities, not limitations.

**Do tell** someone if they express a stigmatizing attitude.

## DON'TS

**Don't portray** successful persons with disabilities as super human.

**Don't use** generic labels such as retarded, or the mentally ill.

**Don't use** terms like crazy, lunatic, manic depressive, or slow functioning.

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## National Bullying Prevention Month, October 2010

### Talking With Your Child

Parents can prepare themselves to talk with their children by considering how they are going to handle their child's questions and emotions. They can also decide what information they would like to give their child about bullying.

Parents should be ready to:

- *Listen.* It is the child's story; let him or her tell it. They may be in emotional pain about the way they are being treated.
- *Believe.* The knowledge that a child is being bullied can be shocking. To be an effective advocate parents need to react in a way that encourages the child to trust.
- *Be supportive.* Tell the child it is not his fault and that he does not deserve to be bullied. Parents need to empower their child by telling him how terrific he is. Parents need to avoid judgmental comments about their child or the child who bullies. Their child may already be feeling isolated and hearing negative statements from parents may only further isolate him.
- *Be patient.* Children may not be ready to open up right away. Talking about the bul-

lying may be difficult as they may fear retaliation from the bully or think that even if they tell an adult that nothing will change. The child might be feeling insecure, withdrawn, frightened, or ashamed.

- *Provide information.* Parents should educate their child about bullying by providing information at a level that the child can understand.
- *Explore options for intervention strategies.* Parents can discuss with their child options they may have in dealing with bullying behavior.

## Talk with Your Child about Bullying

### Questions to Ask Your Child about Bullying

Parents can help their child recognize bullying behavior by asking them questions about their situation. The following questions may be helpful:

- Did the child hurt you on purpose?

- Was it done more than once?
- Did it make you feel bad or angry? *or* How do you feel about the behavior?
- Did the child know you were being hurt?
- Is the other child more powerful (i.e. bigger, scarier) than you in some way?

*(Adapted from "Your Child: Bully or Victim," Peter Sheras, Ph.D., 2002)*

Variations of these questions for the child who is reluctant to talk about the situation may include:

- How was the bus ride today?
- Who did you sit by at lunch?
- I notice that you seem to be feeling sick a lot and wanting to stay home: please tell me about that.
- Are kids making fun of you?
- Are there a lot of cliques at school?

What do you think about them?

- Has anyone touched you in a way that did not feel right?

[www.pacer.org](http://www.pacer.org)

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