

Week 18

What Now: Mindfully Accessing Services in the COVID World **Peggy Pisano and Lisa Nathan**

Peggy Pisano:

Schools play a significantly important role in a child's life, in areas of health, educational achievement, social adjustment and overall wellbeing. As schools begin to open parents are faced with some very difficult choices/decisions. Most of all parents may have to decide if the risks of in person learning outweigh the risks of virtual schooling. Aside from the education, access to meals programs, social-emotional supports and peer interactions are other areas of need that are filled by schools. So how do parents continue to have access to these necessary requirements in today's world?

Ask Questions

1. Parents must keep informed as best possible with their school and their state educational requirements. Review your school and state rules regarding absenteeism and attendance etc.
2. Advocate for the services that are specific to your child.
3. Virtual learning should not be a reason to avoid starting services such as RTI (response to intervention), remediation, and/or special education.
4. Ask your school how they plan to differentiate the instruction of students with disabilities.
5. Evaluations and re-evaluations should and need to take place.
6. Special education meetings can take place virtually.
7. Ask how your child might receive counseling and supportive services through special education or through guidance services, either in-person or remotely.
8. Ask how your child will access vocational services.
9. Ask about transitional services or those students exiting high school this year.
10. Most of all, be informed.

There are many questions ahead; every school, every student and every parent will require something different. Working together will likely have the best outcome for all.

Lisa Nathan:

1. How do I stay informed? Do I have the support I need? It's okay to ask for help. I acknowledge that I don't have to know everything.
2. How do I become a better advocate? I know that I know my child better than anyone. Stay anchored to what is true for right now. Trust my instincts. I acknowledge that I get emotional in advocating for my child. Practice acknowledging emotions and learn how they feel in my body and how to breathe and let them go.
3. I've had some experience with virtual learning for my child already. What works and what doesn't? I acknowledge that I am doing the best that I can.
4. Who can I contact at the school? Who is my ally? Recognize who listens to you and can hear you? Can I communicate what I really want to say? By focusing your mind and practicing just a few minutes of mindfulness, I can become more clear headed and communicate better.
5. Trust my instinct if I think my child needs to be evaluated or re-evaluated. Information/ knowledge is power. I get certainty by knowing.
6. I may not like virtual meetings but they can still get the job done. Am I bringing negative emotions to the table because I do not like this format? Am I angry before we even begin? How can I make sure that I am heard and listened to? Find your center before the meeting begins. Set your timer for 5 minutes before the meeting starts and take 5 deep calming breaths making your exhales longer than your inhales to calm your nervous system.
7. Does my child need extra support? Can you keep a log so you have concrete examples to share. Take audio/video clips. If I can be clear then I can be more clear of my child's needs.
8. Again, clarity can help you ask the questions that will provide you with the best results.
9. What are my expectations in relation to my child's expectations? Are we both on the same page? Do I have the support team at school, a mentor who can help me and my child create a realistic and beneficial life plan?
10. Keep taking stock!! Where are my thoughts? Am I wrapped up in negative thoughts, living in the past or projecting the future?