



### **BLOG CATEGORIES**

All About NPN (104)

Behavior, Discipline & Sleep (68)

Being Your Best Parent (178)

Birthday & Holiday Planning (48)

Chicago Happenings (132) Childcare (35)

Developmental Differences (53) Expectant & New Parents (68)

Good Giving (32)

Health & Safety (103)

Indoor Activity Ideas & Places (29)

Navigating Chicago Schools (135)

Living in Chicago (67)

Parent Perks & Special Offers (277)

Recipes (36)

CLOSE

# POSTS BY DATE

August 2018 (4)

July 2018 (8)

June 2018 (8) May 2018 (13)

April 2018 (4)

March 2018 (8) February 2018 (8)

January 2018 (11)

December 2017 (3) November 2017 (8)

October 2017 (8)

September 2017 (7)

August 2017 (10)

July 2017 (6) June 2017 (8)

May 2017 (8)

April 2017 (10) March 2017 (11)

February 2017 (3) January 2017 (13)

December 2016 (10) November 2016 (5)

October 2016 (5)

September 2016 (9) August 2016 (12)

July 2016 (7)

June 2016 (15)

May 2016 (20)

April 2016 (17)

March 2016 (20)

February 2016 (18)

January 2016 (15) December 2015 (16)

November 2015 (17)

October 2015 (18) September 2015 (13)

August 2015 (9)

July 2015 (7)

June 2015 (8)

May 2015 (13) April 2015 (12)

March 2015 (13) February 2015 (12)

January 2015 (16)

December 2014 (15)

November 2014 (12) October 2014 (14)

September 2014 (14) August 2014 (13)

July 2014 (9)

June 2014 (14) May 2014 (12)

April 2014 (15)

March 2014 (21) February 2014 (19)

January 2014 (23)

December 2013 (18) November 2013 (20)

October 2013 (20) September 2013 (24)

August 2013 (22) July 2013 (20)

June 2013 (18) May 2013 (26)

April 2013 (22)

March 2013 (24) February 2013 (22)

January 2013 (21) December 2012 (20)

November 2012 (23) October 2012 (25)

September 2012 (24) August 2012 (23)

July 2012 (23) June 2012 (22)

May 2012 (21)

April 2012 (24) March 2012 (24)

February 2012 (26) January 2012 (24)

December 2011 (25)

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January 2011 (2)

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### BACK-TO-SCHOOL PREP TIPS FOR PARENTS OF KIDS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

Written by: Lara Cleary



For most parents, back-to-school time means buying the kids a new backpack and shoes, and maybe taking them for a haircut. For parents of kids with special needs, however, going back-to-school can be much more stressful for both them and their children than just a shopping trip to

the mall. Children who are not successful in school, either for emotional/behavioral or academic reasons, often feel happier and calmer over the summer break when they are not dealing with the demands of school. If this is your family's situation, there are several things you can do to try to minimize the stress of back-toschool for you and your child.

#### Review your child's IEP

yourself with the services and accommodations your child will be receiving in the upcoming school year. Check to make sure that the IEP still reflects your child's needs or whether some aspects need to be modified due to changes over the past few months. Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), an IEP meeting to review the IEP can be requested at any time during the school year. You do not need to wait until annual review time.

Whether the IEP was drafted six months ago or just prior to summer break, it is helpful to refamiliarize

#### Organize your child's school records

If you child has been in special education for more than a few years, chances are you have a lot of paperwork accumulated from the school and outside providers. Summer break is a great time to review your documentation and develop an organizational system. I use an accordian file for my own child, but many of my clients prefer a three-ring binder. Not unlike tax documents, we recommend that you maintain your child's

special education documents during the length of time they are in school. While a parent has a right to request a copy of their child's educational records at any time under the Illinois School Student Records Act (ISSRA), it is still a good idea to maintain your own copy for comparison and easy access.

#### For both my own daughter and many of my clients, I frequently request that an IEP meeting be scheduled

Request a back-to-school IEP for the beginning of the year

approximately 3-5 weeks into the school year to ensure that the services are being implemented smoothly and to review and tweak

child's IEP, especially when experiencing a significant transition, but if that is not the case you can also

simply contact your special education administrator and request it at the start of the school year.

the IEP. For children undergoing a significant transition (e.g., to a new school or new placement), I would not hesitate to request a meeting to review that transition. Ideally, we recommend that this type of back-to-school meeting be included as a necessary accommodation in your

#### Schedule a special back-to-school meet-and-greet/tour for your child prior to the first day of school

Many children with special needs need prior exposure to new experiences to help ease their anxiety. If this sounds like your child, we recommend reaching out the school to request a special meeting and/or tour with your child's LBS and/or classroom teacher. This is especially important if s/he is undergoing a significant transition. However, for many kids, it is necessary even if they are just moving up a grade into a new classroom. Most Illinois school districts implement several days of institute training for school staff prior to the first day of school and it is simple for them to schedule time for your child to visit. As with the back-to school IEP meeting, it is recommended that you include this special meeting/tour in your child's IEP accommodations in their IEP every year.

Cleary is a boutique law practice focusing on the representation of children and families, individuals with disabilities, medical and mental health practitioners, private schools, and other non-profit agencies in the greater Chicagoland area and throughout the State of Illinois.

Lara Cleary and Jennifer Hansen are partners with the law firm of Hansen & Deary, LLC. Hansen

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