

## Finding the Right School Placement

### Do Your Homework

**Know the law.** Call your State Department of Education and request copies of all the laws, programs and schools (public and private) available. Get a copy of the Parents Rights from each school and read it before you visit. Also know, your school district is required to provide transportation if an out-of-district program is the most appropriate for your child.

**Present your child's needs.** The school program must be based solely on your child's needs. Always talk in terms of what is "appropriate" and "inappropriate" for your child. You will need to discuss your child's history, their needs, and potential placement in that order. It is illegal for the school to tell you what they have first and then try to fit your child into it. The child's needs come first, and placement is according to those needs. Clearly communicate what therapies your child requires to be successful in school. If you want your child to have a full-time aide, get a doctor's note clearly explaining that this is needed for your child to be successful in school. Also, be prepared to discuss academic goals for your child in terms of cognition, self-help, fine and gross motor skills, speech and social growth.

**Know the process.** There is no standard RTT teaching approach. Teaching must be tailored to the child's specific needs. If you disagree with the school's suggested approach, request to go to mediation and due process. Stay calm and "stick to your guns". Plan to drop in for a short, informal meeting with the principal, school psychologist, therapists and nurse before the formal meeting. They won't be able to discuss their placement outside of the formal meeting, but you can get valuable information about the program, insight about the school's philosophy and a feel for the school's atmosphere.

**Begin in time.** The school selection process should begin well ahead of your child's third birthday in case you need mediation. Delivery of services must begin with a designated time after services have been agreed upon.

### Visit the School

You will want to visit each of your child's classroom options: your local school, early childhood classrooms and special needs classrooms. Visit when the children are present and when you can talk to the teacher alone.

### Some questions to ask:

- Do they have experience with RTT? Children with communication problems?
- How many months a year does the school run?
- Are summer programs available?
- How many days do the children attend class?

- What are school hours?
- What professionals are in the classroom?
- Will they have a personal aide?
- How many children will be in the class?
- What is the ratio of adult to child in the classroom?
- How far is the restroom? Are there provisions for privacy?
- How many hours of therapy would be available for your child?
- How many room transitions must be made each day?
- Is there a provision for inclusion with typical students?
- What kind of therapies will be provided?
- Does the school have good adaptive equipment?
- What is a typical school day schedule?
- What is the curriculum? Do they do academics? Art and music?
- Will they take field trips?
- Are parents encouraged to participate?

Take good notes. Put all requests to school administration in writing with a copy to the school's superintendent if you think it is necessary.