

INCIID Insights: December 29, 2015



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This INCIID article is about your child’s most important Team member: You.

What links all of those subjects together in everyday life for too many special education parents is trying to keep some sort of order in their family and personal lives while also dealing with all of the special education stuff. The

special education stuff seems to wrap its tentacles around everything in their personal lives.<sup>1</sup>

This past year (2015) the number of frustrated and overwhelmed parents who get in touch with me is at an all-time high.

A typical parent who contacted our little operation out here in the woods has attended several workshops and mini-courses for special education parents. And, typically, the workshops and mini-courses were primarily concentrated on the regulations, how an IEP or 504 plans should be written, procedural safeguards, writing complaints and so on and so forth.

We might ask what is causing the problem? I cannot answer that question.

A better question is - what can you do about it?

W.C. Fields said, (paraphrased) “Sometimes you have to take the bull by the tail and face the situation”<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> One classic resource for helping overwhelmed parents is a publication written by Pete and Pam Wright titled *From Emotions to Advocacy*. You can find it at <http://www.wrightslaw.com/bks/feta2/feta2.htm>

<sup>2</sup> **William Claude Dukenfield** (January 29, 1880<sup>l</sup> – December 25, 1946), better known as **W. C. Fields**, was an American comedian, actor, [juggler](#) and writer.<sup>[2]</sup> Fields' comic [persona](#) was a [misanthropic](#) and hard-drinking [egotist](#), who remained a sympathetic character despite his snarling contempt for dogs and children. Source: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/W.\\_C.\\_Fields](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/W._C._Fields)

To illustrate taking the bull by the tail I'd like to tell you about my dog Ruby.

The reason she is in this article is because Ruby is a metaphor for how far too many special education parents are worn out; at their emotional brink; angry; distrustful; afraid; or cautious about attending Team meetings.

The story of Ruby.

Ruby came to live with me out here in the woods by way of the Middlebury Animal Shelter. It took about 15 seconds for me to decide Ruby (the name I gave her) must go home with me. The people at the animal shelter tried to talk me out of taking



her. Several families had previously picked her out of the crowd – and every one of them brought her back to the shelter. Why?

Because Ruby was an emotional wreck. She had been abused. In fact, when she came to live at my place it took her about eighteen months to decide that I was not going to hit her. She was hyper hand shy. It took her about another few months for her to decide I was not going to take her back to the shelter.

She has been out here in the woods reigning over the house and office for almost eight years.

And don't parents who have similar feelings get that way by being abused in various ways at Team meetings? I think Ruby's emotional condition and hand shyness is remarkably similar to how parents feel and react to Team abuse.

Team abuse is a strong allegation. For this article we aren't going to talk about the many manifestations of Team abuse because it is more important to recognize abuse when you don't see it and how to Go Forth.

A few Team abuse tactics:

- Packing the Team meeting with way more school people and "experts" than are necessary.

- Spending way too much time talking about stuff that isn't relevant to specific Plan elements.

- Ignoring parental participation letters

- Scheduling meetings without consulting the parent to see if the meeting date is convenient for the parent.

Scheduling meetings for an hour when everyone knows the meeting can't even cover 1/10<sup>th</sup> of what has to be discussed in an hour.

The highest function of any Team meeting is to do the right thing for the student. What is right is faithfully applying the procedures in the regulations. Doing the right thing for the student is way better than a meeting conducted by the Team's "I said so" doctrine.

How can you make that happen?

***“Do not go where the path may lead;  
go instead where there is no path and leave a trail.”***  
~ ***Ralph Waldo Emerson*** ~

Remember these things:

1. Everyone wants to be respected. Demand respect from the Team and treat the Team with dignity and respect – even if they don't deserve it.
2. All of us would rather be asked than be told. Frame what you want the Team to do in the form of a question. For example, you want the IEP to decrease the time your student needs in the resource room. Ask, can we reduce the number of hours Nimrod spends in the resource room?
3. People want to know why. Using the question in No. 2, ask Why can't the number of hours in the resource room be reduced?
4. All of us would rather have options than threats. School district Team members are hypersensitive to threats by a parent. They perceive requests for a due process hearing in just about anything that a parent demands. That means that if a sticky issue is being discussed, you might ask the Team, What options do we have to solve this issue? This deescalates the tension being built up in the meeting.
5. Most of us always want to have a second chance. Yes, I know you have bent over backwards trying to get something important changed. But ask yourself whether the things you bent over backwards about were framed in the form of questions instead of in the form of demands.
6. Rule of reciprocity

This is a simple principle. All of us have a sense of obligation to return favors after someone does us a favor (even if the favor is not normally perceived as a favor by the other person). For example, if a school Team member made a helpful comment or persuasive comment during a Team meeting you might send that person a nice email message or mail a card to thank that person for her helpful participation in the meeting. Courtesy? Yes, but more. If you acknowledge that person's positive contribution to the meeting, then that person is more likely to reciprocate with more positive comments during future Team meetings.

But what of the person in the Team meeting that threw a crowbar in the gears during the meeting? You can still complement that person. For example, you might write to that person and say something like this: Although we didn't agree on X during the Team meeting I appreciate your time and consideration of X. A message similar to that will do more good than writing to that Team member saying how angry you are and how you think she should be relegated to IEP Hades.

Are thinking that I have gone soft? If you are, the answer is no. Every parent and every advocate should use techniques to get what a child needs in the IEP or 504 plan. Treating Team members with dignity and respect (even if they don't deserve it) will go a long way in getting more cooperation than blowing up and writing nastygrams. After all, that is our job. Get the best IEP or 504 plan the student deserves under the rules and procedures.

Go forth - Do your thing - Leave a trail. - - - Ruby



*-Brice-*

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