



Practical tools.
Proven support.
Stronger together.

START STRONG

First-Week School Toolkit

A practical guide for families of
students with disabilities



Build strong
partnerships
with teachers.



Stay organized
and informed.



Help your child
start the year
with confidence.



*Because the first week can
tell you a lot about **the year ahead.***



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Stacey Hoaglund, Advocate



START STRONG

A First-Week School Toolkit for Families of Students with Disabilities

Because the first week can tell you a lot about the year ahead.

A practical toolkit to help you communicate, document, notice concerns early, and start the school year as an informed partner on your child's team.

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About My Child

Complete this page and share it with the people who work most closely with your child. Keep it brief: the goal is to help staff understand what makes your child successful.

My child's name / preferred name

Three strengths, interests, or things my child enjoys

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

How my child communicates best

What helps my child learn and participate

Sensory needs or situations that may be difficult

Signs my child may be overwhelmed, anxious, or frustrated

What helps my child regulate or recover

Important accommodations or supports staff should remember

Safety, medical, wandering/elopement, or transportation information staff need to know

One thing I wish you knew about my child

First-Week IEP / 504 Check

You do not need to assume something is wrong. Simply verify that the supports your child needs have made the transition from paper to practice.

- ☐ My child's teacher(s) know that my child has an IEP or Section 504 plan.
- ☐ The accommodations that matter most are being used in the classroom.
- ☐ Special education services have begun as expected.
- ☐ Speech, OT, PT, counseling, behavior, or other related services are scheduled or underway.
- ☐ Assistive technology, AAC, specialized materials, or accessibility supports are available.
- ☐ Transportation arrangements are correct and safe.
- ☐ Health, seizure, allergy, feeding, toileting, or medication plans are understood by appropriate staff.
- ☐ Safety and wandering/elopement concerns have been communicated to the people who need to know.
- ☐ My child knows who to go to for help.
- ☐ I know who to contact if something is not working.

What needs follow-up?

A useful first-week question

Instead of asking only whether staff received the plan, ask: “How are my child's accommodations and services being implemented during the school day?”

My Child's First Week

Use this to spot patterns. You do not need to document every detail - focus on information that may matter later.

Day	Before school	What my child shared	Services / supports	Concern or success	Follow-up
Monday					
Tuesday					
Wednesday					
Thursday					
Friday					

End-of-Week Review

What went especially well?

What changed from Monday to Friday?

Is there a concern that happened more than once?

Do I need information, a conversation, or a formal team meeting?

Adjustment or Something to Address?

A new school year can bring fatigue, anxiety, schedule changes, and an adjustment period. The question is whether a concern is temporary - or whether your child is not receiving needed access, support, or safety.

May be part of the adjustment	Worth prompt follow-up
• Extra tiredness after school • Needing time to learn new routines • Temporary nervousness about new teachers or classmates • A few difficult transitions while schedules settle	
	• IEP/504 accommodations are not being provided • Special education or related services are repeatedly missed • Your child is placed on a substantially different schedule without explanation • Significant new behavior, distress, shutdown, or school refusal • Bullying, restraint/seclusion, unsafe supervision, or wandering concerns • Transportation or health/safety plans are not being followed • Staff tell you they have not seen or do not need to follow the IEP/504 plan

Before you escalate, document.

Write down the date, what happened, who was involved, what your child reported, what you requested, and the response. A short factual record is usually more useful than a long emotional account.

Communication Log

Date	Person / role	Concern or request	Response	Next step / date

A Friendly First-Week Email

Hello [Teacher's Name],

I wanted to introduce myself as [Child's Name]'s parent and thank you for helping make the start of the school year a positive one. [Child's Name] does especially well when [briefly name 1-2 supports or strategies].

One thing I would particularly like us to keep an eye on during the first few weeks is [important need/concern]. Please let me know if you notice anything that would be helpful for me to reinforce at home. I look forward to working together and keeping communication open.

Thank you,
[Parent/Caregiver Name]

10 Better Questions Than “How Was School?”

Some children cannot easily summarize an entire school day. Try one specific question at a time, and allow plenty of processing time.

1. What was the easiest part of today?
2. What was the hardest part?
3. When did you feel happiest or most comfortable?
4. **Was anything too loud, busy, fast, or confusing?**
5. Who did you spend time with?
6. Did you need help with anything today?
7. **Was there a time you wanted help but didn't know how to ask?**
8. What was one thing your teacher said that you remember?
9. **Did anything happen that you don't want to happen again tomorrow?**
10. **What would make tomorrow a little better?**

Tip for nonspeaking or minimally speaking children: Adapt these questions to the child's communication system. Use visuals, choices, AAC, gestures, or yes/no responses rather than requiring a verbal answer.

Friday: What do I know now that I didn't know Monday?

My child's biggest success:

My biggest concern:

The support that seems most helpful:

The one thing I need to follow up on next week:

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