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## Social Networking

Though parents often have concerns about letting their teens use social media Web sites like Facebook and MySpace, a new study by University of Virginia psychologists suggests that well-adapted youth with positive friendships will use these sites to enhance the positive relationships they already have.

However, they warn, teens who have behavioral problems and difficulty making friends, or who are depressed, may be more inclined to use social media in negative and sometimes aggressive ways, or not to use such sites at all.

U.Va. psychology professor Amori Yee Mikami and her colleagues assessed the friendship quality and popularity of 172 13- to 14-year-olds, and then, eight years later, “friended” the study participants on their Facebook and MySpace pages to examine their interactions and friendship quality.

“We’re finding that the interactions young adults are having on their face-to-face relationships.” Mikami said.

“So parents of well-adjusted teens may have little to worry about regarding the way their children behave when using social media. It’s likely to be similar positive behavior. “However, Mikami warns, teens with behavioral problems or who have difficulty maintaining positive friendships may be more likely to use social media sites in negative ways, just as they may behave negatively in their face-to-face relationships. Negative use of the sites would include using excessive profanity, making hostile remarks or aggressive gestures. They also have fewer supportive relationships with their Facebook and MySpace friends. This group is less

inclined to use social media at all. Overall, 86 percent of the youths in the study used the social media Web sites, which parallels the national average.

“Use of Facebook and MySpace is really pervasive among this age group, so it’s understandable that young people would want to be connected with their peers in this way; it’s an extension of the relationships they already share.” Mikami said.

So parents should try to stay involved with their children and make an attempt to understand their online world in the same way they would want to understand any other aspect of their lives.

The key as a parent is to be supportive rather than intrusive and to keep an open dialogue with your children so you can know what they are up to and who their friends are, both online and in person.

Read more at [www.sciencedaily.com](http://www.sciencedaily.com)

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# The Defiant Child—Parenting Strategies

Parents can inadvertently contribute to a child's defiance and negativity by being too intrusive and by constantly imposing their own agenda.

With a toddler, a parent who doesn't read the child's cues and who constantly insists that the child do things the parent's way can contribute to a defiant child's rigidity.

With a school-age child, parents may unknowingly intrude and overload him by the way they boss him around—even when doing something potentially enjoyable together. An eager father may try to coach his daughter in soccer, rather than letting her experiment with different ways to kick the ball. The whole enterprise disintegrates into a struggle between an irritable dad and an increasingly defiant child. Rigid or rules-oriented parents are more apt to set up huge power struggles with the defiant child.

The style the parent uses to try to get their way is important. Parents can persuade, negotiate, and set limits in a calm empathetic, and supportive way. In contrast, an “in your face,” domineering attitude is sure to set up or intensify the child's defiance.

Another parental pattern that I sometimes see among parents of defiant children. They become so drained of energy in the power struggles, and so angry at their child that without meaning to, they inadvertently become less nurturing and empathetic.

The most important way to help your defiant child is to become aware of his underlying insecurities and vulnerabilities and be as soothing as possible. Underneath the child's defiance is his inability to let you know directly how much he needs you and depends on you for comfort and security.

Establishing trust and security is not easy. The defiant child, with his constant need to be the boss and his ongoing power struggles with you, makes life more difficult. Yet, it is crucial to remember that this child is just as prone to being overwhelmed and overloaded as the highly sensitive child.

Study the kinds of experiences that soothe him. Which kinds of sounds help him relax? Does he like light or firm touch? Does he prefer soft music or rhythmic beats? Is he sensitive on certain parts of his body? Does he like you to be laid-back or very focused on him and very enthusiastic? By watching and playing with your child, you can build a profile of his likes and dislikes. Then you can use that profile to adapt your approach to calm and comfort him.

Start slowly and gradually. Even more than with most children, the general goal with the defiant child is to be warm, soothing, and respectful as much as possible. Meet his inflexibility with flexibility.

You need to set firm limits. Being empathetic doesn't mean always giving the child what he wants. The limit setting needs to be done in a firm but gentle manner. Gentle limits coupled with

empathy and flexibility will help your child be less critical. In response to such advice, parents tell me they fear they will “spoil” or over indulge their child and worsen his angry, demanding behavior.

I tell them that parents can't spoil a child by helping him to feel secure.

They spoil him by not setting limits.

In setting limits, take advantage of your child's debating skills to hash out rules, rewards, and punishments together. Try to avoid surprises and avoid throwing a tantrum yourself.

Parents may feel embarrassment and guilt toward defiant or stubborn aspects of themselves. Without being aware of it they see pieces of themselves in their child, and if they hate that part of themselves, they may take those negative feelings out on the child.

Being aware of these patterns allows us to take a more supportive and empathetic posture with our children, rather than an overly critical one.

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# Becoming an Effective IEP Partner: *Ten Practical Tips for Parents*

**Inform Yourself**  
**Educate Yourself**  
**Prepare for the IEP Meeting**

by *Connie B. Fanselow*  
ASK Resource Center

*The Parent Training and Information Center of Iowa*

**Participate Actively**  
**Ask Questions**  
**Request What You Want Clearly**  
**Take Notes**  
**Negotiate**  
**Engage Your Child in the Discussion**  
**Recognize Success**

1. Inform yourself. Take advantage of opportunities to get information and training on special education, the IEP process, parents' rights, and effective advocacy. Read newsletters and publications like this one. Get in touch with the Parent Training and Information Center of Iowa, or your local Parent & Educator Connection. Find out about advocacy organizations in your area that help inform and support families of children with disabilities. Attend one of the many conferences that are sponsored annually by statewide organizations to help parents and professionals keep up with current information about special education and disability issues. Conferences also offer an opportunity to meet other parents and expand your support network. Often, scholarships are available to parents to help make conference attendance more affordable.
2. Educate yourself. You are already the expert on your child, but from time to time you may need additional information about your child's disability (or suspected disability) and what treatments, therapies, or educational approaches have worked for other children who have similar challenges. The Iowa Disability Resource Library has a large collection of books and other materials on specific disability conditions and all kinds of related issues. The DRL's resources can be accessed by phone, mail, or internet from anywhere in Iowa.
3. Prepare for the IEP meeting. Even though most educators do their best to give your child's IEP the individual attention it deserves, your IEP meeting may be one of many they participate in and everyone's time is limited. You can take some steps to help the whole team focus effectively on your child's unique needs:
  - Organize. Keep the information you receive about your child: evaluation reports, correspondence, progress reports, IEPs, meeting notices, and notes of phone conversations. Find a method of organizing the documents that makes sense to you—a file drawer, notebooks, binders - whatever method is convenient for you to store, use, and share important information about your child.
  - Define the issues that are important to you. Chances are that if you try to present too many issues at one meeting, none of them will really get the attention they deserve from the team. Decide on the two or three most important issues for your child at this time and focus on those issues and the reasons why they are vital to your child's education. Be specific and be prepared to explain why you think these issues are so important.
  - Gather your evidence and share it. If you have evaluation reports, test scores, or other evidence that will further explain your concerns, ask the team to review it. This evidence can be from your child's educational file, or it can be new information that you are sharing with the team from an outside source—a private therapist, counselor, physician, community service provider, or other person who knows your child well. Sharing outside information with other team members prior to the meeting will help them be better prepared for a productive discussion.
4. Participate actively. Even though it may sometimes feel like it is "us" (parents) and "them" (educators), you are all part of a team in developing your child's IEP:
  - Offer suggestions or solutions when you can. Because you spend so much time with your child, you may have developed your own methods to address learning or behavioral issues. Sharing those with the IEP team may help them to better understand your child and determine what educational approaches are likely to be most successful. For example, if you notice that your child has great difficulty remembering things he or she reads, but can easily remember long stories someone has told, that is useful information in planning classroom teaching strategies. Because it can sometimes be hard to recall these strategies on demand, whenever you recognize a routine action that could be used by teachers to accommodate your child at school, write it down and include it in the system you use to organize important information about your child.
  - Listen and learn. Be open to ideas from the other members of the team. Be courteous of different view points and respectful of the expertise the educators bring to the table. In turn, they are much more likely to be respectful of your expertise as a parent of a child with special needs.
  - Keep focused. It can be very easy to get caught up in what happened last year, in the first grade, or even last week. But those issues are only important if they have a direct impact on the planning you are doing now for your child's next IEP. Don't be distracted by "old wounds" or unrelated issues. You have your work cut out for you drafting effective and measurable IEP goals for your child without devoting time and energy to issues that don't affect the next steps in your child's educational progress.
  - Don't personalize. Personality differences exist and sometimes when they exist within an IEP team, the team's work is especially challenging. All team members, including parents, need to remain "professional" in their working relationships. If the meeting does become emotionally difficult, ask to take a



5 or 10 minute break so everyone can come back to the table ready to focus on the task at hand. Even if there is someone on the team that “pushes your buttons,” do your best to develop a workable relationship for the sake of the process and most importantly, for the sake of your child.

5. Ask questions. If you don't understand something that is said, or if you haven't been given all the information you need, ask about it. Educators, like other groups of professionals tend to speak in their own jargon and may use shorthand references that sound like alphabet soup. Don't assume that they intend to leave you in the dark when they use abbreviations, just ask them to explain terms that are not familiar to you.
6. Request what you want clearly. Our experience as advocates has shown us that most special education disputes arise out of ineffective or incomplete communication. Even if you believe you have made your requests for your child's IEP obvious, other members of the team may not always recognize as clearly that you are expecting them to either accept or reject a specific proposal. If in doubt, ask again. If you still don't get the response you need, go home and follow up in writing. A written request is often the most effective way to make things happen. Be specific. Let the rest of the team know that you are making a request and that you expect it to be included in the IEP if they agree, or that you expect to receive your written notice of refusal if they do not agree.
7. Take notes. Many parents find it helpful to take notes at the IEP meeting so they can review them later. If you find it is too difficult to participate and take notes at the same time, it is perfectly acceptable to ask someone to accompany you to the meeting to take notes. As a matter of courtesy, always inform the school if you intend to bring someone else to the meeting. Parents often ask if they can tape record meetings. The short answer is, yes, you can. Although, a better question is, should you record a meeting? That depends on your reasons. It has been our experience that the presence of a tape recorder at an IEP meeting tends to make people overly conscious about what they say and often distracts from the work that needs to be done. If you need a tape recorded record because you have trouble remembering or can't take useful notes, make it clear to the other members of the IEP team that you would like to record the discussion just for that use. If you think you may be able to “catch” someone saying something you don't like and “use it against them,” you are better off leaving the tape recorder at home.

8. Negotiate. As a parent, you want the best for your child, and it is often emotionally difficult to accept anything less. However, to be an effective IEP partner, you must be able to consider compromise and do some give-and-take negotiating for what your child needs. Whether we like it or not, the reality is that school districts have limited resources — limited time, limited staff, and limited money.

The IDEA promises children with disabilities a “free appropriate public education.” Over the years, our courts have interpreted that to mean that children must get more than a “minimal” benefit, but not necessarily a “maximum” benefit from their public education. We often use the examples of a serviceable Chevy and a top-of-

the-line Cadillac (or maybe Lexus). What most parents want for their child is a “Cadillac” education, fully loaded, with all the extras, but what the school owes to your child under the law is a sound, serviceable, and road-worthy “Chevy.” The difference between the Cadillac and the Chevy makes conflict very natural, so as a parent you need to learn to negotiate. Work hard to get all the services and supports that you think are vital to your child's success in school and life, but be willing to let go of some of the relatively minor “extras” you would like to have the school provide.

9. Engage your child in the discussion. Talk to your son or daughter about school—the things they like and don't like, the things that are easy or hard — and think about how their feelings impact the IEP. Depending on your child's age and abilities, you may want to have them participate in the meeting, or at least a part of it, to discuss the goals that they are going to be working on during the school year. Students often are the first to know what works for them and what doesn't, and can be very helpful in identifying the services and supports they need. Children do well when they can—it is the job of the IEP team to identify the barriers to your child's success and create a road map that will help your child reach his or her goals.
10. Recognize success. Don't get so caught up in the fight that you fail to notice when you win. If you start viewing your relationship with the school as a constant battle, you may not be able to recognize the things that are going well for your child and the things the school and AEA have done to make that happen. Let the other members of the IEP team know that you appreciate their efforts. It is their job to educate your child, but even so, everyone likes to have their hard work acknowledged. Educators have a responsibility to do the best they can for your child and all the other children they serve, but they often get the feeling that no matter how much they do, it will never be enough for the parents. They are probably right about that - as a parent you will always want more and better opportunities for your child. Just remember to say “thank you” for the Chevy that starts and runs faithfully every day, even if you still have your eye on the bright, shiny Cadillac in the showroom.



## New in the Parent & Educator Connection Library

These books/DVDs may be checked out by any parent or educator simply by contacting your Parent & Educator Connection Facilitator.

1. How Does your Engine Run? A Leader's Guide to the Alert Program for Self-Regulation
2. Superparenting for ADD: An Innovative Approach
3. Autism Spectrum Disorders and Visual Impairment: Meeting Students' Learning Needs
4. Understanding Sam and Asperger Syndrome
5. Learning and Behavior Problems in Asperger Syndrome
6. 1001 Great Ideas for Teaching & Raising Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders
7. Teaching Math to People with Down Syndrome and Other Hands-On Learners: Book 1, Basic Survival Skills
10. Teaching Math to People with Down Syndrome and Other Hands-On Learners: Book 2, Advanced Survival Skills
11. Therapeutic Parenting & Interventions for Traumatized Children Manual
12. ADHD in the Young Child: Driven to Redirection: A Guide for Parents and Teachers
13. The Explosive Child: A New Approach for Understanding & Parenting
14. Smart but Scattered: The Revolutionary "Executive Skills" Approach to Helping Kids Reach Their Potential
15. The Out of Sync Child Has Fun revised addition
16. Raising A Sensory Smart Child



## Take Time to Smell the Coffee

**Coffee Club helps parents of children with special needs learn more about a variety of topics related to special education, disabilities, and advocacy — all over your morning coffee! Coffee Club is a convenient way for parents to connect with one another and with an ASK Resource Center Family Support Coordinator to get the answers they need to be an even stronger advocate for their children. All from the comfort of your own home!**

**Coffee Club will meet via conference call on the first Friday of each month at 10:00 a.m. The call-in number is 1-866-305-2467 and the guest code is 339565.**

ASK Resource Center is now introducing...

## Pajama Party

*With a Purpose!*



Pajama Party is ASK's new program for parents of children with special needs to learn more about a variety of topics related to special education, disabilities, and advocacy, all from the comfort of your own home (in your pajamas, if you prefer!). Parents have a very busy schedule and sometimes the only time they can spare is after the kids go to bed. Pajama Party gives you a convenient way to connect with one another and talk with an ASK Resource Center Family Support Coordinator to get the answers you need to be an even stronger advocate for your children.

Pajama Party will meet via telephone on the first Thursday evening of each month at 9:00 p.m. The call-in number is 1-866-305-2467 and the guest code is 339565.

## Positive Solutions for Families Workshop

This workshop, designed by the Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning (CSEFEL), provides information for families of toddlers on how to promote children's social and emotional skills, understand their problem behavior, and use positive approaches to help children learn appropriate behavior. The sessions are designed to give parents general information on key strategies that may be used with all children. Sessions are not designed to offer parents specific advice for their child's individual issues. Family members interested in this workshop can register at:

<http://www.solutionwhere.com/mbaea/cw/showcourse.asp?2049>

This workshop starts on March 31, 2010 and will be held in the evenings at Mississippi Bend Area Education agency in Bettendorf. There is no cost to register.

