

Child Provider Specialists



Assisting with One Small Miracle Each Day

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THE LAW AND HELPING YOUR CHILD

When attempting to gain assistance for their children who struggle to manage academic demands, parents are often frustrated and confused by the mixed signals, delay strategies, and lack of awareness they encounter at both public and private school settings. Parents can avoid such frustration, in part, by educating themselves about legislation that has been crafted to assist individuals, who as a consequence of a disability cannot access their education without modifications and/or accommodations in the delivery of the curriculum and the design of the learning environment. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004), Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA, 1990) are the major pieces of federal legislation governing the provision of needed services.

Intended to serve the educational needs of children with disabilities, the IDEA provides for identification of all public and private school students with disabilities. The purpose of this legislation is to ensure that children who meet IDEA criteria for being handicapped receive free and appropriate public education, which includes comprehensive evaluations of

their educational needs and specially designed instruction and related services (e.g., occupational therapy, physical therapy, speech and language therapy). Theoretically, tax dollars also make these services available to private school students through their local public school. As compared to IDEA, which mandates the creation of an Individual Education Plan (IEP), Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act are both civil rights laws that protect children and adults with disabilities from discrimination. Schools are required to provide reasonable modifications and accommodations to ensure that students have access to educational programs, but they are not required to develop an IDEA-specified IEP to serve the child. Instead, schools generally develop a 504/ADA plan, which denotes the modifications and accommodations that a student will receive.

In South Florida public schools, students are first considered for special services under IDEA. If they fail to meet the criteria for an IDEA program, they are then considered for accommodations under Section 504 or ADA. Qualification for protection under Section 504 or ADA is

different from under IDEA. The student must have a "physical or mental impairment that substantially limits at least one major life activity"(ADA 1990), but there is little further definition of such terms as "substantial" or "limits." As a result, qualifying as "disabled" under Section 504 or ADA is typically less stringent than qualifying under the IDEA. Sometimes the issues go beyond meeting criteria and developing a plan to serve each child's needs. Funding for each student must also be considered. Schools do not receive any federal funding for providing Section 504/ADA accommodations, so there is less financial incentive for serving children under these laws. This can be a real tragedy for some children, as needed services may be withheld until a struggling child falls far enough behind to qualify under the IDEA. Unfortunately, securing services for a child that is struggling in school can often be more challenging than the learning disability itself. Knowing the policies and procedures that govern the system from which the services are being procured, however, is the first step in ensuring that the child will receive the assistance needed to make school an enjoyable and rewarding process.

WHEN INSIGHT, STRATEGIES, AND HOPE ARE NEEDED

Our very own Michael Rizzo, Ph.D. is a regionally acclaimed school psychologist and motivational speaker. He has a unique perspective on living with and managing learning disabilities, as he himself is dyslexic. In his role as the primary coordinator of psychological services at the Miami Children's Hospital, Dan Marino Center in Weston, he provides services directly and oversees the quality of services provided by his staff of over 15 psychologists. He has become recognized as a regional expert in the diagnosis and treatment of at-risk children.

Dr. Rizzo generally conducts 20 to 30 trainings per year. Thus far this year, Dr. Rizzo has been asked to speak at many private institutions and on behalf of several not-for-profit organizations. Some of the highlights include the following:

- Broward County Schools - South Area ESE Resource Fair - "Behavior/Social Skills and the Special Needs Child"

- Florida Independent Association of Schools at the Broward Convention Center - "Special Interest Track-Neuropsychology" and "Looking Beyond Behavior: ADHD-Not Always What it Seems"
- Presidents of the Principals and Administrators Council for Jewish Day Schools at the Greater Miami Jewish Federation
- Epiphany Catholic School in South Miami - "Frequently Asked Questions About Services for Special Needs Children" (question and discussion session for faculty and staff).
- Saint Agnes Academy on Key Biscayne - "Learning Styles and Teaching Styles"
- Keshet Program at Hillel Community Day School in North Miami Beach - "Current Research on Attention Deficit" and "Strategies for Teachers in the Classroom"
- Early Intervention Development Center in Miami - training seminar for interns and

practicum students.

- Nemours BrightStart! Dyslexia Initiative at the Nemours Children's Clinic in Jacksonville - "Everyone Can Read! Community Literacy Seminar" and presentation to the teaching staff
- North Broward Preparatory School in Boca Raton - "Ingredients for Student Success: Parents and Teachers Coming Together for the Success of the Children"
- Yeshiva High School in Boca Raton - "Learning Disabilities, ADHD and Emotional Intelligence - How They Interact"

Dr. Rizzo is available to host a wide-array of speaking engagements, with presentation topics that can be adjusted to accommodate the needs of the specific audience. For more information or to make arrangements for a presentation, please call (954) 577-3396.

- Sandra Cirulnick, *Director of Operations*

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What is the difference between accommodations and modifications?

- ▶ Accommodations include changes in how academic materials are presented and/or in how learning is assessed. The expectation placed upon the student remains essentially unchanged.
- ▶ Modifications include changes in the actual curriculum in order to make the material more accessible to the child.

Why do some students need accommodations and/or modifications in order to be successful?

- ▶ Despite intelligence, a child's ability to compete at the same level as his/her peers may be compromised as the result of a disability. When this is the case, that child should be provided with appropriate support, just as a hearing impaired, visually impaired, or physically impaired individual would be.

How can accommodations/modifications be implemented in the regular classroom?

- ▶ Many strategies can be implemented in a way that does not limit or interfere with the education of the remaining students. Following are examples of ways to provide assistance in the mainstream classroom: preferential seating, nonverbal cues, laptop use, provision of notes, FM system, repeating/paraphrasing directions, templates/ guides, lecture tapes, extended time, focusing on content mastery over volume, oral testing, curriculum modifications, enlarged text, audio books, readers, and buddy systems.

Why are accommodations and modifications fair for students with learning disabilities?

- ▶ They create the opportunity for the child to compete with non-disabled peers, in spite of his/her disability. It would be unfair to not provide accommodations/modifications for these children, as it would be similarly unfair to ask a hearing or visually impaired child to compete without appropriate accommodations.

Many teachers feel it is unfair to give students fewer questions or more time or to allow the student to print their responses, etc.

- ▶ If a child truly has a handicap that precludes him/her from being able to successfully manage these aspects of school, it is unfair to not modify the curriculum (in which case items will have more weight) or to provide extra time. These changes do not put other students at a disadvantage, as those without a disability will not benefit substantially from extra time, etc. They have a certain amount of knowledge and can demonstrate it within the expected time parameters, making the extra time unnecessary.

ADVOCATES

Generally, once children's needs are clearly defined and the reasoning behind a request for assistance is clear, school personnel are cooperative and eager to help. At other times, while the law is clear, acquiring services can be a tricky process. Occasionally, parents are dismissed or bullied in the process of seeking appropriate services for their children.

It is clearly "EASIER TO GET BEES WITH HONEY THAN WITH VINEGAR," but when a child's future is at stake and NO ONE SEEMS TO CARE, it becomes necessary to play hardball. One must take all steps to resolve these situations through reasonable means; however, when requests fall upon deaf ears or bureaucratic red tape interferes with

helping a child while valuable time is slipping away, it becomes necessary to take a more assertive posture. CPS works closely with Parent Advocates, and when necessary, specialized legal counsel, to assist families in the rare situation when this tactic becomes essential.

PEER SUPPORT GROUPS

Social challenges are widely varied and exist for a multitude of reasons, but despite the cause, all children want to be accepted by their peers. Through the combination of social skills training and group support, children can be taught how to earn peer acceptance, initiate friendships, and act appropriately so that others will want to engage their company. At CPS, we understand the value of such "people" skills and have historically put in place several programs to assist children in need of social skills development and peer support. In order to manage the growing demands for such programs, we are

pleased to announce that Katie Plonskier, MSW has joined the CPS team as an individual therapist and our full-time Social Skill Group Facilitator. A graduate from New York University's Masters in Social Work program, Katie comes to us with excellent experience serving New York and South Florida children of all ages in various clinical roles, such as individual and family therapist. We are excited to see what she has in store for the children. Historically, we have run a variety of social skills groups in a format where children gain experience in managing social behaviors in real world settings.

Katie will be launching several new groups in which children will be introduced to appropriate interaction skills, given an opportunity to practice these skills under the guidance of clinicians, and shown that they can be accepted unconditionally by their peers. Families interested in learning more about available groups in their community should contact Katie Plonskier at (954) 577-3396 to arrange an intake meeting, where your child's unique needs and the appropriateness of our groups for meeting those needs will be discussed.

MULTILINGUAL TEAM

Anyone who has spent any amount of time in South Florida understands the diversity of the population and the need for multilingual professionals to best meet the needs of those who are culturally and linguistically more comfortable working with psychologists in their primary language. In order to keep up with the cultural demographics in the area, CPS has developed a team of highly specialized psychologists of various

cultural and ethnic origins to assist families for whom English is not the primary language. Currently, CPS has psychologists who are able to provide services to families in French, Russian, Spanish, and Creole. Simply translating tests or asking questions in one's primary language is not an appropriate method for helping children whose first language is not English. Our clinicians have been specially trained in

understanding specific variables that should be considered in testing culturally and linguistically diverse students and go beyond simply translating measures. We are proud of our team and feel confident that when English is not one's primary language, we can accurately assess and generate scores for these youngsters that truly reflect their needs, not their language limitations.

CATCHING READING PROBLEMS EARLY

Early identification of students at risk for reading difficulties is crucial. Research in the last ten years has clearly demonstrated that the ability to manage sound at the most basic levels (i.e., auditory processing and phonological processing skills) is critical to the development of reading skills. Specialized brief assessment measures exist to identify students as

young as four and five years of age who are at risk for these struggles. These strategies are being utilized in public schools throughout the state. In order to assist students who do not have the luxury to access such services through their local public schools, selected staff members from our organization are available at our Dan Marino Center location to provide

such screenings. These services are provided at no charge to any family in the community that believes their child may be at risk for reading problems. If you have a 5-year-old and are concerned, please contact Shaun Ally at (954) 385-6200, and a screening can be set up for your child.

BRINGING IN THE CAVALRY

According to a 2007 study by the Centers for Disease Control, 1 in 150 children in America have some type of Autistic Spectrum Disorder. Given the large number of children affected, specialized diagnosis and treatment is crucial to ensure that each child's needs are met appropriately. We at CPS have made a concerted effort to develop a sub-group of highly specialized clinicians extensively trained in the diagnosis of and treatment planning for children suspected of having spectrum disorders. Sheri Silverman, Psy.D. has led this team for the past 5 years. With the increased demands for evaluations,

additional experienced clinical staff members have been recruited to assist Dr. Silverman. We are pleased to announce that Michele Major-Sanabria, Ph.D. has joined this team of highly trained professionals. Dr. Major-Sanabria spent five years as a psychologist in the Palm Beach County schools, specializing in the diagnosis of Autism. Since that time, she has become a full-time faculty member of the psychology graduate program at Barry University. CPS is also fortunate to have Dr. Sheryl Sugerman, N.C.S.P. joining this team. Dr. Sugerman is a nationally certified, licensed school psychologist

who has been in the education field for over 20 years. She has 18 years experience working with individuals with Autism and related disabilities in a variety of positions. Beyond her clinical experience, she served as the Director of Program Development and Therapeutic Services for Baudhuin School of Nova Southeastern University. She has performed numerous assessments in both the public and private sectors and has provided professional development seminars and workshops nationally on best practices in assessment and parent education for students with Autism and related disabilities.

PERSONAL TRAINERS FOR SCHOOL

We are pleased to announce that several new affiliates have been added to our current providers of educational interventions. For the past several years, we have worked closely with Levy Learning Center in providing specialized tutors and educational coaches to assist students with prescriptive interventions, as deemed necessary by our psychologists. In addition to Levy Learning Center, we have also created a collaborative relationship with Bridges to Better Learning, which is owned and operated by Diane Wander, Ed.D. Dr. Wander has her doctoral training in reading and served for many years as the principal of the

largest Jewish day school in South Florida. Several years ago, she decided to leave her role as a school administrator and enter the private sector as an educational consultant. Currently, in addition to that role, she prepares and oversees a cadre of specially trained educational coaches and ADHD coaches who use prescriptive remedial and study skills strategies and work in concert with our psychologists in providing educational therapies. Also available to provide educational therapy is Kimberly Freeman. Kim has been in the field of education for over 10 years, specializing in teaching children with various disabilities. She

graduated from the University of South Florida with a degree in Special Education and has developed over time a strong background in language. She utilizes a multisensory approach to therapy and provides an individualized approach to learning. An assessment is given to each child, and Kim interprets the results to find out where each child's strengths and weaknesses lie. She specializes in reading using the Lindamood-Bell approach. Parent training is also provided to show parents how to advocate for their child and how to work toward improving their child's academic performance.

ASSISTING WITH RESEARCH

Continuing research in the field of psychology is always in demand, as there are constant developments in the field, and new and improved ways for diagnosing and providing services are frequently being discovered. This need for research is particularly pronounced in the area of Autism. CPS is joining Barry University in a study of children with high functioning Autism or

Asperger's Disorder. This research project will focus on the subtle characteristics of these children's abilities to make abstract interpretations of incoming auditory (listening) and visual (reading) information. In order to examine this phenomenon, CPS will assist Clara Wolman, Ph.D. and Michele Major-Sanabria, Ph.D. in launching a one-year investigatory trial into

understanding more specifically the characteristics of comprehension skills as they differ between clinical and non-clinical children. We are proud to be working in conjunction with highly respected faculty from Barry and hope that this project represents only the first step in the movement toward larger scale collaborative research in the future.

NEW LOCATION

For the past 3 to 5 years, families from North Broward and Palm Beach Counties have driven long distances to access our services. As our staff has grown, we have trained and identified selected psychologists to launch a new office location in Boca Raton and are pleased to announce the opening of that office. Besides Dr. Rizzo, who will see patients at this location on selected days, Monika Schuelke, Ph.D. and Jason Speilman, Psy.D. will be available to provide services at the Boca Raton office beginning this fall. The new office will be located at the Glades Medical Center, 9325 Glades Road.

For more information regarding our services or to make an appointment, please call: (954) 577-3396

OUR LOCATIONS

WESTON

Miami Children's Hospital
Dan Marino Center
2900 S. Commerce Parkway
Weston, FL 33331

COOPER CITY

SHERIDAN PROFESSIONAL
CENTER
11011 Sheridan Street, Suite #303
Cooper City, FL 33026

NORTH MIAMI

BEACH/AVENTURA
1031 Ives Dairy Road, Suite #228
North Miami Beach, FL 33179

SOUTH MIAMI/KENDALL

St. Timothy Parish School
5400 SW 102 Avenue
Miami, FL 33165

BOCA RATON

Glades Medical Center
9325 Glades Road, Suite #208
Boca Raton, FL 33434