



## Handbook for Parents & Guardians of Children with Special Needs



Edition #1 - June 2023

## Introduction

Hello, fellow parents and guardians. It's nice to meet you!

Parenting involves many emotions. There is the **joy** of welcoming a new addition to the family and the **pride** you feel as your child grows. You may also feel worried, impatient, or upset, sometimes.

When you are the parent or guardian of a child with special needs, you might feel concerned when your child misses milestones or frustrated when typical parenting tips do not work for you. You might fear that your child's disability will make their life harder.

As fellow parents on the path of special needs, we are here to offer another sentiment: **hope!** The path is not always easy, but information and support make it easier.

This guide was written, with love, by members of the [Special Needs Advisory Committee \(SNAC\)](#) of the New Frontiers School Board (NFSB). We hope this handbook provides you with new tools and renewed confidence.

Above all, we want you to know that **you are not alone.**

*This handbook was written by parents and should not replace the advice of your child's medical, psychological, or school team. However, it was written with love. From our hearts to yours, you are not alone.*

Tip from a SNAC Parent

**Take it Day by Day.** - Cindy D.

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## About the Special Needs Advisory Committee (SNAC)

SNAC is the Special Needs Advisory Committee, composed of a group of elected parents and representatives from the NFSB school team. SNAC members dedicate their time to **advocate** for students with special needs and **advise** the NFSB on the organization of services for students with special needs.

**What are special needs, anyway?** When we use the term “special needs,” we mean students who require one or more aspects of the school routine and/or curriculum to be adapted in order to be successful. If your child has an IEP, they may require extra support and/or may have special needs. You are invited to check out a SNAC meeting.

There are often special presentations at monthly SNAC meetings to share information on various topics of interest to parents of children with special needs. Here are some of the topics from previous meetings:

- Individualized education plans (IEP);
- Organization of support and budgets for students with special needs;
- Tools and strategies for parents for children with special needs;
- Healthy relationships, consent, boundaries, and safety for children with special needs;
- Neurodiversity in girls, and how special needs can be expressed differently in females;
- Living with learning disabilities: personal accounts, tools, and strategies from three ambassadors for the Montreal Centre for Learning Disabilities;
- Student self-regulation and co-regulation: tips and tools from an occupational therapist

SNAC is a **community** of dedicated parents and guardians of children with special needs who **encourage, inspire, and support** each other. If your child has an IEP and/or special needs, we invite you to join us!

Visit the following link to learn more: <https://www.nfsb.qc.ca/snac/>

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Meeting Notes(note-taking sheet)

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## Chapter I

# IDENTIFYING and PLANNING for your CHILD'S NEEDS

### I.1 DEVELOPMENTAL MILESTONES

What are milestones? Milestones provide a broad overview of how children's skills are expected to develop at each age. Being aware of milestones can help you to know if your child is developing in a way that is typical for their age. This data provides a strong indicator of the child's future development and how their learning may progress.

Milestones cover four major areas of a child's development:

- ❖ **Physical/gross motor & fine motor:** how the child moves their body
- ❖ **Social/emotional:** how the child interacts with others; how the child feels
- ❖ **Language/communication:** how the child communicates both listening (receptive) and speaking (expressive)
- ❖ **Cognitive:** how the child's mental processes work

As a parent, you may want to keep in close contact with early childhood educators and teachers, and to communicate any information such as delays, struggles, or challenges your child is having. Educators and teachers are trained to keep an eye out for them, as well. Early detection of developmental concerns gives an opportunity for early intervention and possibly a shift in the child's developmental trajectory, thus optimizing their potential.

Tip from a SNAC Parent

**Trust your Gut. Trust your Gut.** ~ Robyn I.

*If you are interested in learning more about milestones, there are many **examples** available online, such as this guide from the Canadian Paediatric Society:*

[https://caringforkids.cps.ca/handouts/behavior-and-development/your\\_childs\\_development](https://caringforkids.cps.ca/handouts/behavior-and-development/your_childs_development).

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Here are some **examples** of milestones that we assembled from various sources as a quick reference. For a complete description of milestones, we recommend consulting **your child's doctor**.



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## Milestone Notes

My child's likes & dislikes:

My child's strengths & successes:

### Developmental Milestones where my Child is Struggling or Delayed

Physical/gross motor & fine motor
Social/emotional
Language/communication
Cognitive

### Relevant Information to Share about my Child

Medical reports/diagnoses
Assessments
Family history/background information
Other

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## 1.2 FIRST STEPS AS A PARENT IN GETTING SUPPORT FOR YOUR CHILD

### 1.2.1. Be mindful of your child's development

You play an important role in your child's education. You know your child best and have watched them grow up (i.e. milestones, strengths, needs, likes, dislikes, successes, and challenges). Trust yourself and explore anything that just doesn't feel right, no matter what other people think.

***What are Special Needs?*** Special Needs can relate to any of the following areas: learning, intellectual, communication/social, physical, behavioral, etc. Every child is different. Just because they have the same diagnosis on paper does not mean they have the same learning needs.

### 1.2.2. It is helpful to share pertinent information with the school team

If you see your child is not meeting milestones or suspect your child has special needs, it is recommended that you communicate this to the school and follow up. We encourage you to gather any related formal assessments, medical reports, milestone observations, language struggles at an early age, diagnoses, IEPs, report cards, medical concerns, family history/background info, and share this info with the school team. The more information the school has on your child, the better able they will be to support them, and to recommend further assessment if needed.

Tip from a SNAC Parent

***One day, I went to the dollar store and bought a big binder. I put every document about my son's special needs into it. I suddenly felt less overwhelmed.*** ~ Jane L.



You could include the following in a binder:

- Report cards
- IEPs
- Samples of school work
- Reports from professionals
- Receipts for services
- Contact info of people who have worked with your child
- A list of when your child met their milestones & other notes
- A photo of your child, for an extra special touch

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### 1.2.3. It's a good idea to consult with your child's learning team

If you have any concerns about your child, arrange a time to meet with their teacher(s). Meet with them early in the year and share your concerns. Ask them for feedback as they are most familiar with your child's daily school experience. They will be instrumental in helping to identify your child's needs, and eventually will be part of making a plan to support your child in the school/classroom environment.



- Is my child working at grade level? If not, what are the challenges?
- What benchmark is my child at for various subjects?
- Is my child completing projects and assignments?
- What are my child's strengths in the classroom?
- What are my child's strongest subjects?
- Does my child receive extra support from an attendant or technician or resource teacher? Who works with them?
- How is my child interacting with peers during structured and unstructured time?
- Does my child do group work with other students? How is it going?
- Overall, how is my child managing in class?
- What strategies are working for my child?
- What can I do at home to support my child's learning?

### 1.2.4. We encourage you to follow recommendations from teachers

Your child's teacher or learning team may refer your child for additional support at school, make suggestions for types of interventions with professionals, and/or recommend additional assessment of your child's difficulties. See [1.3 The process through which the school provides support](#) for more information.

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- What are the different ways to get my child evaluated in psychology, speech & language (S&L) or occupational therapy (OT)?
- Do I need a referral? Who initiates the referral?
- Is written parental consent required for screening assessments?
- What are the priority levels for screening or assessments within NFSB?
- What support will my child receive at school before an evaluation takes place? And after?

#### **1.2.5. You might consider asking about implementing an IEP**

An Individualized Education Plan (IEP) is created to help a student meet learning objectives and goals. Goals and strategies are put in place to support your child's education if they have a physical, mental, intellectual, and/or learning disability, social-emotional difficulty, etc. You can find more information on IEPs at

<https://www.nfsb.qc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/2021-2022-IEP-Parents-Guide.pdf>.

Did you know that any child that is “at risk” for learning, or struggles with social-emotional or behavioural issues can have an IEP? If you are concerned that your child is struggling or if there are temporary events affecting them, don't be shy to ask what services are available to them at school, and if putting an IEP in place for them would be beneficial.

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An **accommodation** is a change that is made to help a student better succeed at school. An accommodation can take the form of:

- **Adaptations** - general strategies that are put in place to support learning. Strategies can be instructional, environmental, or for assessment. Adaptations do not change what the student is expected to learn at their current grade level. Strategies aim to “level the playing field” to help the student be successful.
- **Modifications** - put in place when a student is not working at their current grade level in one or multiple subjects. Individual objectives are created at the student’s instructional level, not their current grade level, with the aim of building their capacity and skills to achieve individual success.

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Here are examples of accommodation strategies to support IEP Goals



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- What accommodations would support my child in his/her learning?
- How will I know if my child is following an adapted or modified curriculum?
- How will a modified curriculum impact my child's educational options? Will he/she graduate?
- Will I be consulted before my child's curriculum is modified?
- Is my child meeting existing IEP goals? If not, why do you think that is?
- How much extra time will my child receive to complete their tasks or tests?
- Will the IEP automatically follow them to high school?

#### **1.2.6. We suggest that you get started with a health professional**

While every family's journey is different, the process may proceed as follows:

1. Talk to your child's pediatrician or family doctor. Share any recommendations from the school team.
2. The doctor can provide a referral for the right professional (psychologist, speech & language pathologist, occupational therapist, physical therapist, etc.). These services are coordinated through the Centres intégrés de santé et de services sociaux de la Montérégie-Ouest (CISSMO); they are also available privately.
3. Contact the CISSMO to have your child added to the waiting list for services. The wait can be long (sometimes taking years), so start now!

Tip from a SNAC Parent

**Get your child's name on the recommended lists EARLY!** ~ Brenda B.

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## **I.3 THE PROCESS THROUGH WHICH THE SCHOOL PROVIDES SUPPORT**

### **1.3.1 Academic Assessments by Teachers**

At the elementary level, informal assessments, and common formative assessments are done at every grade level. This allows teachers to see if their teaching strategies are working, as well as to recognize the individual strengths and needs of each student. Some assessments are:

1. **Common Formative Assessments in English, French, and Math** - these assessments help determine a student's strengths and challenges as it relates to the learning expectations of the grade level
2. **Early Literacy Formative Assessment** - this is used in Grades 1-3 to pinpoint areas of struggle for students who are learning to read
3. **PM Benchmark** - this tool is used to assess a student's ability to read and understand texts in English
4. **GB+** - this tool is used to assess a student's ability to read and understand texts in French
5. **GRADE** - this is done in Grade 6 and assesses a student's grade level in various subjects

### **1.3.2 Input from Professionals at the School Board**

Based on the results of academic assessments and/or other observations, a teacher might indicate that a child needs additional support at school. The school board employs professionals such as occupational therapists, speech & language pathologists, and psychologists who can assist in determining what support is needed.

**Some signs** that a student might need additional support at school:

- Academic struggles / low report card marks
- Behavioral concerns (fighting with classmates, difficulty following rules)
- Difficulty concentrating in class
- Difficulty following instructions
- A lot of emotional upsets at school
- Speech delays
- Delays with fine or gross motor skills
- Challenged by daily tasks like packing their school bag
- Trouble gripping the pencil / trouble with handwriting
- Coordination concerns (tripping, falling down)
- Physical or emotional discomfort in the classroom

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Tip from a SNAC Parent

***Talk to the teachers. You are not bothering them, you are not asking for too much. Always reach out and ask questions, give suggestions, build the relationship. At the end of the day, your child's teachers want the same things as you do - for your child to see their own success. Working together with the school team is one of the best ways to support your child. ~ Jill S.***

Similar to how teachers use academic assessments, the school board's professionals have the ability to screen students to better understand their needs and provide recommendations for ensuring that their needs are met.

You may be curious about how this process unfolds. Here is a general idea:

1. The teacher(s) indicate that they think a student needs additional support. Or, you as the parent or guardian indicate that you are worried about your child and may want to request a meeting.
2. A resource team meeting takes place at school. This meeting includes the child's teacher(s), a school administrator, and relevant professionals from the school board. You, the parent, or guardian, are also invited. While each resource meeting is as unique as the student being discussed, these multi-disciplinary meetings focus on what actions can be taken to help the student flourish. If it is decided that a professional assessment would be helpful, you will be asked to sign a consent form by a school board professional prior to any assessment being performed.
3. Rest assured that the school board's professionals (as well as teachers) will share their recommendations with you. A follow-up meeting might take place, or communication can happen through email and phone calls. Don't be shy to follow-up with the school team.

**What might be recommended for your child?** Everyone is focused on the best interests of your child, and to that end, next steps will be recommended. These can include:

- ❖ Strategies that can be used in the classroom (an IEP might be created or updated for the student).
- ❖ Small changes that can help at home, such as hanging a calendar on the wall to help your child understand time.

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❖ Recommendations for an additional assessment.

**Additional assessments** can be performed through the school board. External options for assessments (through the CISSSMO or private clinics) are also available. If you are unclear about the process or would like recommendations, ask your school team for guidance. Your school team can help guide you in requesting CISSSMO services, and you can coordinate with your child's doctor for referral forms for private clinics.

The school board offers a variety of screenings by their professionals such as occupational therapy screeners, speech & language screeners, and psychological consultations. However, the school board does not offer vision or hearing tests. You may want to have your child's vision and hearing tested as a first step toward understanding their challenges.

Keep in mind that your child's family doctor is a resource for you. You can talk to them.

### 1.3.3 What is a Psycho-Educational Assessment?

On your journey down the path of special needs, you may hear the term "psycho-educational assessment." Performed by a licensed psychologist, a psycho-educational assessment is intended to provide a complete picture of a child's learning profile. Certain conditions such as learning disabilities, intellectual disabilities and ADHD can be diagnosed through a psycho-educational assessment.

Psycho-educational assessments can be performed by the school psychologist. Alternatively, you may choose to pursue this type of assessment through the public or private health sectors. For many students, a psycho-educational assessment is not necessary, while for others, it provides great insight into their needs.

**If you are wondering if your child needs a psycho-educational assessment, we recommend asking your school team for guidance.**

In addition to asking the school team for guidance, we also recommend that you look inside your own heart. For some parents and guardians, they feel it is important to have as much information as possible about their child as early as possible, while other parents and guardians wait for feedback from

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the school should an assessment be recommended at some point during the child's school career.

Also, there are practical considerations:

- In the public sector, wait times for an assessment may be very long.
- In the private sector, the fees for an assessment are expensive.

## I.4 PLANNING

There is no sugar coating, if your child has any type of special need, it may require you to plan ahead and be involved in your child's education. It may be time consuming, frustrating, complex, exhausting, and disappointing at times, and it will all be worth it! Keep the faith and take it one day at a time. By taking proactive steps and seeking support, parents and guardians can help ensure that their child has the resources and opportunities they need to thrive.

Tip from a SNAC Parent

***Keep asking questions until you understand and are comfortable.*** ~ Nadia P.

The school will be involved with your child for a few years, but you will be involved for a lifetime. Here are some steps for parents and/or guardians to consider for gaining peace of mind while ensuring the child has the resources and support they need at all stages of their education.

### 1.4.1 Understand your child's needs

Learn as much information as you can about your child's diagnosis and how this impacts their development, education, and future needs. It is also important to remember that planning for a child with special needs is a process that may require ongoing adjustments and adaptations.

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- What is the long-term outlook for my child?
- How common is this diagnosis/special need?
- Are there any lifestyle changes that we can make to optimize my child's life? For instance, changes with diet, sleep routine, exercise, etc.
- Are there books or other resources to help me and my child understand this special need?
- Are there support groups (in person or through social media) that focus on this special need?
- How do I explain this to my child? At what age?

#### **1.4.2 Familiarize yourself with the NFSB system**

*The following is a summary of information from the "Students with Special Needs" section of the NFSB website. This information may change periodically. For up-to-date information, consult the following webpage:*  
<https://www.nfsb.qc.ca/students-with-special-needs>.

Our schools support students with special needs with specialized classes, modified curriculum, learning resources and access to professional evaluation and guidance through our Complementary Services Department.

All NFSB schools have a range of services and supports which can vary according to needs of the students at any given time. School-based personnel may include:

- ❖ resource teachers
- ❖ special education technicians
- ❖ attendants
- ❖ social work technicians
- ❖ guidance staff
- ❖ Our schools that have Learning Centers and Nurturing Support Centers also benefit from the above-mentioned personnel.

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Professional services may include:

- ❖ speech and language therapists
- ❖ psychologists
- ❖ counselors in re-education
- ❖ occupational therapists
- ❖ consultants in inclusive education and in autism
- ❖ and other educational professionals

Preventative support programs for students at-risk or those with identified difficulties may include:

- ❖ homework assistance programs
- ❖ mentoring programs
- ❖ social skills programs
- ❖ the use of adaptive technology
- ❖ and many more.

Your child's school administrator can provide you with information about the support available in your child's school.

Tip from a SNAC Parent

***You have to be on top of things & advocate for your child.*** ~ Dora M.

### 1.4.3 Educational planning

Review the special education programs within NFSB and find out where your child stands and what services your child will have access to. Many children with learning challenges are included in traditional classrooms and have access to additional resources as per their IEP. Others, who demonstrate greater needs, may be eligible for the Learning Centres and/or the Work Oriented Training Path (WOTP) with built-in support and resources. An entente or inter-board agreement may be offered when the school board determines that an outside placement is necessary because reasonable support services are not available locally to meet a child's needs. Note that inter-board agreements need to be renewed yearly.

There is a path for every child, no matter what their needs are, and many will benefit from some type of post-secondary education or training. Look ahead and evaluate the pathways available within NFSB such as:

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- ❖ Vocational Trade Programs
- ❖ Continuing Education

Inquire about requirements for each program. The school team can help you determine which path may be suitable for your child.

#### 1.4.4 Prepare for Transitions

Any type of transition may be especially challenging for you, the parent/guardian and your special needs child. Planning long before the actual event can help ease the transition and the anxiety that goes with it.



1. **Talk** to your child early in their education about their hopes, dreams, and aspirations for the future.
2. **Together**, set some academic and development goals and hold onto that vision through the highs and lows.
3. **Be prepared** to revisit your plan as your child develops and their true abilities are revealed.
4. **Remember to embrace** all the small wins along the way.

Be reassured that options for every student, no matter the need(s), are continually expanding. There are many viable resources and options for special needs currently within the school system and new opportunities are opening up in the community and workforce as well.

We would suggest not to compare yourself to others or hold yourself/child to a specific path or time frame. Focusing on your child's "abilities" instead of "dis-abilities" will allow you to see who they truly are! Our role as parents of special needs kids is to journey with them to help them discover the special gifts, unique skills, and talents they need to bring to our world. Seeing your child overcome obstacles and thrive is a most rewarding experience as a parent.

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## **General Recommendations for Transitions for Children with Special Needs**

- Help bridge transitions. Always think ahead and/or ask “what new skills will my child need for the next step”? Start working on those skills as early as possible.
- Listen to your child’s concerns about transitions.
- Stay positive and supportive.
- Encourage as much independence and decision making as possible at every transition.
- Be flexible and patient.
- Ask for guidance or help. You do not need to do this alone.
- Attend orientation events and/or open houses for school or programs. Let them know you want to play an active role in your child’s education.
- Inform yourself and advocate every step of the way as needed.
- Give your child age-appropriate knowledge of their special needs.
- Strengthen and reinforce your child’s self-advocacy.
- Make sure your child has an IEP, that it reflects the current situation, and that it is being followed.
- Anticipate more dysregulation from your child in anticipation of the transitions.

## **Transition to School**

- Visit the school and meet with the school team to discuss your child’s needs.
- Find out what services and/or accommodations will be available for your child.
- If your child is currently receiving services from CISSSMO, CRDI-TED, CRDP, or any professional, ask for a meeting with the agency and your school team to strategize & plan before or early into the school year.
- Don’t leave things to a chance meeting; call and ask ahead of time so you and your child can be prepared.
- Have your child visit the school and future classroom if possible while they are in session. It will seem a lot less scary!
- Keep a record of requests - get everything in writing.

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## **Transition to Preschool**

- Attend orientation sessions or organize to meet teachers and visit the classroom before the first day of school if no orientation is planned.
- Get out of your comfort zone and meet some other parents and kids. You will be glad you did and they could end up being a great support for you!
- Ask about phased entry if that would be beneficial for your child.
- Practice school schedule (i.e. routines, daily schedule, activities, etc).

## **Transition to Elementary School**

- Prepare your child for the changes going from preschool to elementary (ex. sitting at desk, play vs work, multiple teachers, lunch time, napping, daycare, transport, full day vs half day, etc.).
- Ask to visit the class in progress in advance and so your child can see the school and meet the teachers.
- Take kids shopping for their own school supplies.
- Consider a communication book as a way to stay in touch, and update it with daily/weekly life/family events that may be affecting the child.
- Share strategies that are working for you at home with your child's learning team and vice versa; apply strategies used at school for home to create consistency.
- Set a homework routine and work with your child to discover the optimal time, place, tools, and strategies needed to support them.
- Have them be involved (if appropriate) in the IEP process so they can learn about their special needs, their strengths, and areas they need support on.

Tip from a SNAC Parent

***Do not be afraid to reevaluate your child. Just because they have a diagnosis doesn't mean that new things might pop up along the way.*** ~ Cristina G.

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## Transition to High School

Going from elementary to high school is a big jump for any child, let alone a child with special needs. They will have to adjust to multiple classrooms/teachers, larger schools, more kids, new transportation (possibly public transit), complex schedules, and increased academic and social demands, just to name a few. Oh, and let's not forget puberty and hormone changes! Basically, your child will have much more autonomy, independence, and be expected to take on a lot more responsibility.

- If you think the increased responsibility of high school will be a challenge for your child, GET INVOLVED early on with your child's learning team. DO NOT WAIT for someone to reach out to you.
- Work with the school team to put a strategy in place for things like time management, organizing their homework, learning study habits, breaking down assignments, anxiety, socialization, etc.
- Double-check to see what adaptations are available to your child as per their IEP. This could include note taking, alternate format texts, assistive technology, interpreters, tutoring, exam accommodations, etc. See [Sample IEP Accommodations](#) for inspiration.
- Some teens benefit from having a peer or mentor to help them participate in extracurricular activities or sports.
- Involve your teen in their IEP and encourage conversation about their special needs.
- Teach them to be their own advocate.



Some teens struggle and even suffer at school because they do not understand the expectations or cannot keep up. They may be embarrassed to ask for help or fear social ostracization. Help your teen understand what their special need is, how best to overcome the obstacles associated with it, and what tools/strategies/accommodations will help them to be on an equal playing field with other students.

- Revisit the academic and development goals that were set, and look ahead at requirements for vocation, trade, post-secondary programs, and/or independent living. Your child may be a good candidate for TEVA (Transition de l'école vers la vie active). This prepares for the

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smooth transition of your child from school to active life. By grade 9, start the discussion with your child's school team; they will advise the next steps for you and your child.

### **Transition to Post-Secondary Education**

Note that the IEP does not follow a student to post-secondary schooling. It is the responsibility of the student (with parental support if needed) to inform the adult education sector of any needs they may have. Providing them with their IEP from the youth sector is helpful and appreciated. Resources, support, and accommodations may be available for those who advocate for themselves. Ask the high school guidance counselor for information. You can also contact the post-secondary school to find out their policy. Proof of diagnosis or special needs may be required.



- What are my child's specific needs for this next transition?
- What information do I need to share for this transition?
- What skills will my child need?
- What are the criteria for admission? Is there a waiting list, and what are the costs & fees?
- What supports and accommodations will be provided?
- Will my child follow a regular curriculum?
- What services are available – at school, community, groups, social, etc.?
- What are requirements for Post Secondary Education, Vocational Training, and Employment?
- What support does my child need for Independent Living?

#### **1.4.5 Get involved and build a support network**

You don't have to do this alone! The challenges you will experience with a child with special needs may make you feel alone and isolated at times.

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Connecting with other families who have children with special needs is food for your soul and a great source of information and inspiration. Get involved in their school, join committees such as SNAC, attend school events, volunteer at the school, check out local support groups, and seek out resources in your community.

Tip from a SNAC Parent

***Don't allow yourself to feel alone, get involved. Knowledge is such a great ally, not just power.*** ~ Candy C.

#### **1.4.6 Develop a long-term plan**

The TEVA (Transition de l'école vers la vie active) will give you and your child guidance for long term planning. Review and update this plan regularly since your child's needs and circumstances are likely to change over time.



You may want to consult an accountant or financial planner and/or explore government financial assistance programs to help support you and your child, now and in the future.

If the child is being followed by a social worker, they can provide some guidance in this area.

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## Disclaimer

*The following information was collected from websites at the time that this handbook was written. This is for information purposes only. Parents are responsible for their own due diligence. Programs may have changed, so please visit the respective websites for the most up-to-date information.*

**Financial Assistance from the Government:** Both the federal and provincial governments offer financial assistance for individuals with disabilities. At the time of writing, both cases require the parents to submit a form that has been filled out by themselves and by a healthcare professional. The forms ask for details about the disability and how it affects the child's life. There are a variety of healthcare professionals who are authorized to fill out the forms, depending on the type of disability (for example, a medical doctor, a nurse practitioner, a psychologist). Medical professionals in Quebec are familiar with these forms. The medical professional sometimes charges a fee for completing the forms.

### **Federal (Canada) Disability Tax Credit:**

<https://www.canada.ca/en/revenue-agency/services/tax/individuals/segments/tax-credits-deductions-persons-disabilities/disability-tax-credit.html>

### **Provincial (Quebec) Supplement for Handicapped Children / Supplement for Handicapped Children Requiring Exceptional Care:**

[https://www.rrq.gouv.qc.ca/en/enfants/enfant\\_handicape/Pages/enfant\\_handicape.aspx](https://www.rrq.gouv.qc.ca/en/enfants/enfant_handicape/Pages/enfant_handicape.aspx)

**Registered Disability Savings Plan (RDSP):** If a child has been approved to receive the federal disability tax credit, they are eligible to have a registered disability savings plan (RDSP) opened for them. The RDSP is a way to create long-term savings for a person with a disability. The Canadian government offers grants and bonds to supplement a family's contributions to an RDSP, an additional way to save for the future.

<https://www.canada.ca/en/revenue-agency/services/tax/individuals/topics/registered-disability-savings-plan-rdsp.html>

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**Social Assistance and Social Solidarity:** As an adult, your child's disability may entitle them to receive support from the Quebec government through the Social Assistance and Social Solidarity program (informally called welfare).

<https://www.quebec.ca/en/family-and-support-for-individuals/social-assistance-social-solidarity>

**Transport Adapté:** Quebec's Transport Adapté program facilitates transportation for people with disabilities.

<https://www.transports.gouv.qc.ca/fr/modes-transport-utilises/transport-adapte/Pages/transport-adapte.aspx>

Tip from a SNAC Parent

***We paid a lot of money for parking when my child was hospitalized. I was surprised when my child's social worker said we could be reimbursed. Luckily, we had saved the receipts!*** ~ a SNAC mom

**Le chèque emploi-service:** If a child requires help in the home, the provincial government's chèque emploi-service could be of assistance to the family. Indeed, the Quebec government offers funding to facilitate home healthcare services for people with disabilities.

<https://publications.msss.gouv.qc.ca/msss/fichiers/2008/08-513-02F.pdf>

## Chapter 2

# COMMUNICATION

### 2.1 HOW TO CONTRIBUTE TO YOUR CHILD'S TEAM AT SCHOOL

Get to know your child's learning team, support staff, and principal. Let them know you want to play an active role in your child's education.

- ❖ Provide information in a timely manner from outside services such as the pediatrician and specialists (speech & language pathologist, audiologist, psychologist, behavior interventionists, etc.).
- ❖ Be sure to share what your child's strengths and interests are.
- ❖ Build ongoing relationships. Connect regularly and ask for feedback.
- ❖ Share your child's success or progress and/or thank the school team from time to time. It will make someone's day!
- ❖ It is OK to be honest about your thoughts, concerns, and fears.
- ❖ Get involved! Volunteer, join a committee, and attend events.
- ❖ Be open to discussion and flexible to consider other options.
- ❖ Take it one day at a time; this is a 13+ year journey!

Tip from a SNAC Parent

***Connect regularly with your child's learning team and ask for feedback! Let them know you want to play an active role in your child's education. ~ Judy C.***

### 2.2 HOW TO COMMUNICATE WITH THE SCHOOL TEAM EFFECTIVELY

If you have concerns, questions, or simply want to discuss your child with their teacher, start by requesting a meeting in person or online with your child's teacher and let them know what the topic is. This will give them the opportunity to schedule the appropriate amount of time and invite other members of the learning team or school team, if necessary.

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Here are some ways to cultivate a **positive mindset** when communicating about your special needs child:

1. Always keep in mind that you are all working toward supporting your child in the best way possible.
2. Being kind, respectfully assertive, diplomatic, and cooperative is a great communication style.
3. Approach with curiosity instead of accusations.
4. Always say thank you and give positive feedback when things work out or genuine efforts are made.

- ❖ Set an intention for the meeting and the outcome you would like.
- ❖ Be prepared with facts, questions and concerns before your meetings. Time goes by very quickly.
- ❖ Keep notes from your meeting. Record date, topic, names of attendees, role of each person, recommendations, commitments, and follow-up dates. Investing in a notebook dedicated to school meetings/information will be very helpful.
- ❖ Stick to the topic! Withhold any personal judgments or opinions.
- ❖ You may be outnumbered in a meeting and feel intimidated. Keep in mind, everyone is there to support you and your child.
- ❖ Ask as many questions as you need for clarification. Make sure you have a clear understanding and next steps before the meeting ends.
- ❖ Ask how you can support their strategies at home. Consistency is key!
- ❖ Follow up regularly! Patience will be required to give teachers and the school time to investigate and/or implement the changes.
- ❖ Keep knocking on doors to make them aware of unresolved concerns.
- ❖ If appropriate, involve your child or other support people (ex. therapist) in the meeting.

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## Meeting Notes

Date of Meeting:

Who Attended:

My intention for the meeting: \_\_\_\_\_

Main takeaways

Actions for me/my child to take

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## Meeting Notes

Date of Meeting:

notes

My Questions in Advance	Answers

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## 2.3 HOW TO ADVOCATE FOR YOUR CHILD

**What is an advocate?** An advocate is someone who supports or speaks up for another person's rights, needs, and interests. They can provide assistance, advice, and guidance to help children with special needs. Advocating can be as simple as requesting a specific table or section in a restaurant or more complex like getting funding or resources for your special needs child.

**Why Advocate?** *If not this, what? If not you, who? If not now, when?* Trust your instincts and the years and years of experiences with your child. You know them, their needs, and what they need to be successful. If you are thinking it, likely other parents or someone in your child's learning or school team is thinking it too. Advocating creates awareness, acceptance, builds empathy, and contributes to change over time for our special needs kids. What you do makes a difference.

### **Strategies to consider when advocating:**

- ❖ Understand the issue.
- ❖ Know the facts.
- ❖ Understand your child's needs.
- ❖ Be on your child's side.
- ❖ Speak positively about your child.
- ❖ Think about what you want for your child.
- ❖ Present a solution instead of complaining.
- ❖ Never lose sight of why you are doing this.
- ❖ Be flexible and stay open to other options. It is not about being right!
- ❖ Learn how the system works and follow protocol.
- ❖ Be aware of the system's realities, especially related to funding.
- ❖ Create allies, not enemies.
- ❖ Cultivate the mindset that everyone is doing their best, within their power, to help your child succeed.

## 2.4 QUESTIONS TO ASK AT MEETINGS

Asking questions will help you to gain clarity and understanding of the academic or behavioral difficulties your child is experiencing. It is not useful to rehash events, point fingers, or feel defeated by a situation or

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challenge that happened. Instead, focus on what skills, support, and strategies your child needs to thrive.



- What behavior is my child displaying that is causing concern?
- Are there any specific triggers you have noticed related to these events?
- Are there any social issues with peers that I need to be aware of?
- How would you describe my child's learning style?
- What strategies are working well for my child?
- Is my child meeting grade level expectations and/or IEP goals?
- Where can I get my child assessed for a learning or behavior difficulty?
- What resources are available in the school and/or in the community?
- How can I get my child some additional support and/or tutoring?

## 2.5 HOW TO OPTIMIZE YOUR CHILD'S SUCCESS

Education is a two-way street: the school team has roles and responsibilities to fulfill, as do we as parents. Your active participation is crucial to follow-up on recommendations in a timely manner, seek out support services, reinforce learning & skills at home, monitor your child's emotional state, and act as the lead organizer of your child's progress.

Here are some strategies to help your child at school:

- ❖ Request to meet with the school team to get input from all of the support service representatives. Collaboration is important.
- ❖ If further evaluations are recommended subsequent to the resource team meeting at school, ask the school team for a list of specialists/programs they recommend (e.g. pediatrician, speech &

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language pathologist, audiologist, ophthalmologist, behavior interventionist, etc.).

- ❖ Be ready and available to work with the school.
- ❖ Ask what you need to prepare prior to a meeting or an assessment.
- ❖ Try to reinforce applicable recommended strategies and skills at home.
- ❖ Speak to your child; get a good sense of their emotional state.
- ❖ Focus on progress not perfection with your child. It will change everything including your child's confidence.
- ❖ Listen to your child. Special needs challenges are real and present differently for everyone.
- ❖ Ask school about access to accommodations, as needed.
- ❖ Be proactive by planning ahead for transitions and preparing your child.
- ❖ Be aware of services within the school and the community that are available. Know how to access them.
- ❖ Involve your child. Prepare and support your child to self-advocate.
- ❖ Remember you are not alone! There are lots of us out there. Seek support.

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## Additional Resources to Explore

Name of Resource*	Website
Office des personnes handicapées du Québec	<a href="https://www.ophq.gouv.qc.ca/">https://www.ophq.gouv.qc.ca/</a>
Montreal Centre for Learning Disabilities	<a href="https://ldmontreal.ca/">https://ldmontreal.ca/</a>
<i>Handbook for parents of children with special needs</i> by the Fédération des comités de parents du Québec	<a href="https://www.fcpq.qc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/GuideEHDA-ENG-Under-revision.pdf">https://www.fcpq.qc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/GuideEHDA-ENG-Under-revision.pdf</a>
Specialized services for Intellectual disabilities and autism spectrum disorders (SRSOR)	<a href="https://www.santemonteregie.qc.ca/en/specialized-services-intellectual-disabilities-and-autism-spectrum-disorders">https://www.santemonteregie.qc.ca/en/specialized-services-intellectual-disabilities-and-autism-spectrum-disorders</a>
Centre Montréalien de Réadaptation (CMR)	<a href="https://www.santemonteregie.qc.ca/installations/centre-de-readaptation-en-deficience-physique-de-chateauguay">https://www.santemonteregie.qc.ca/installations/centre-de-readaptation-en-deficience-physique-de-chateauguay</a>
CISSS de la Montérégie-Ouest (CISSMO)	<a href="https://www.santemonteregie.qc.ca/en/west">https://www.santemonteregie.qc.ca/en/west</a>

\*We left room so that you can add the names of resources that you discover.

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## Thank You for Reading this Handbook!

For more information, join us at the next SNAC meeting! Visit the following link to learn more: <https://www.nfsb.qc.ca/snac/>.

Please send any feedback or ideas for updated editions of this handbook to [snac@nfsb.qc.ca](mailto:snac@nfsb.qc.ca).

**Fonts:** Roboto font family (Google Fonts)  
**Cover Art and Graphics** were created using Canva Pro

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