



Advocating for Behavioral Health Services for your Child

Prepared by the
Pennsylvania Health Law Project

(800)274-3258 or (866) 236-6310 TTY
www.phlp.org

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Tips For Effective Advocacy in Getting or Keeping Behavioral Health Services for Your Child

Get Organized and Keep a Record!

At times it may seem you are the only person who knows what is going on with your child's care, and even you are having trouble keeping it all straight! You get different messages from people who should be talking to each other. Your child's MCO says they didn't get faxes or letters that you know that you sent. You have talked to so many people that you can't remember what each one has said. And there are tons of papers to sort through. Here are a few tips that may help:

- 1) **KEEP A NOTEBOOK** where you record information about your efforts to get the services you are seeking. Your notes should include:
 - a. **names of every person you speak to about your effort to get services**
 - b. **their telephone numbers**
 - c. **when you called (date and time)**
 - d. **what was discussed**
 - e. **what each of you agreed to do as a result of the conversation**
 - f. **next steps for you**

- 2) **KEEP A FILE OR A THREE RING BINDER** where you put any written documents that you get or send about your child's need for services and your effort to get services. If you can organize it by the kind of document and the date on the document this may help you find things when you need them. This file should include:
 - a. **Correspondence: Letters, faxes, and print-outs of e-mails that are sent to you by any providers, MCO representatives, State or County Officials and any letters, faxes, print-outs of e-mails that you send**
 - b. **Evaluations: Any written evaluations of your child and supplements to evaluations**
 - c. **Treatment plans**
 - d. **TSS progress notes**

- 3) **GET AND KEEP THE FAX CONFIRMATION PAGE**, if you send a fax. The fax confirmation page says that your fax went through to the person you are sending it to. If you haven't saved your fax confirmation pages, you may still be able to get a record of the faxes you have sent by having your fax machine print a log of the faxes it has sent.
- 4) **Do not send your original documents to anyone!** Keep the originals for your records, send copies to the MCO, providers, the Hearing Officer etc.
- 5) **Make all of your requests in writing.** If you make a request over the telephone or in person, follow up that request with a written request.
- 6) **Be Prepared. Carefully read the evaluations, treatment plans and other documents about your child so that you know what is in them.**
- 7) **Know the beginning and ending dates of the child's authorized services.** If you aren't sure call the MCO representative involved with your child's case to find out.
- 8) **Know when your child is due for a re-evaluation (when the next psychological or psychiatric evaluation should be done).** Again, if you aren't sure call the MCO representative involved with your child's case to find out.

Communicate Effectively

- 1) **Communicate regularly with your child's providers**
Try to communicate regularly with your child's providers to make sure they all agree on your child's treatment needs and that they are all working toward the same goals. If a provider identifies a new problem or thinks that a behavioral problem needs to be addressed in a different way, the BSC will need to modify the treatment plan and submit those changes to the MCO.

- 2) **Create positive relationships with those who can assist you.** Often your child's treatment team, staff at her school or daycare, individuals at the MH/MR and others can be extremely helpful in supporting your efforts to get the right care for your child.

- 3) **Be as polite, respectful and flexible as possible but be persistent.** If you are not getting anywhere with a particular individual, ask to speak to their supervisor.

- 4) **Don't be afraid to ask for something to be repeated, to admit you don't understand, or to ask that it be put in writing.**

For More Information, Advice or Assistance

Contact the Pennsylvania Health Law Project. PHLP offers information, advice and direct representation to individuals accessing health care benefits under Medical Assistance. You can contact us at 1-800-274-3258 or visit our website at www.phlp.org

Other Resources:

PIN of PA – The Parents Involved Network, a project of the Mental Health Association of Pennsylvania helps families through their web site, newsletter, and help line. Contact them if you have questions or need support. www.pinofpa.org
1-800-688-4226

Your county CASSP Coordinator – CASSP stands for “Child and Adolescent Service System Program.” If you don't know who the CASSP coordinator is in your area, call your county's MH/MR Office – they will direct you to the right person. The CASSP coordinator is supposed to ensure that children and adolescents who need mental health services get appropriate services that are:

??child-centered and family-focused,

??provided in the community whenever possible, and

??provided in the least restrictive or intrusive setting appropriate for the child.

The CASSP Coordinator should also work to ensure that:

??services are planned in collaboration with all other agencies and systems involved in the child's life, and

??that services recognize and respect the behavior, ideas, attitudes, values, beliefs, customs, language, rituals, ceremonies and practices characteristic of the child's and family's ethnic group.

If you are not able to get the help you need from your local CASSP Coordinator, you can contact one of the **Regional Offices for the Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services and talk to their Children's Specialist.**

Pittsburgh Field Office CASSP Contact:

Elaine Bobick

412-565-5432

Fax: 412-565-5393

Email: EBobick@dpw.state.pa.us

Harrisburg Field Office CASSP Contact:

Deborah Hardy - Western Counties (Bedford, Somerset, Blair, Cambria, Center, Franklin, Fulton, Huntingdon, Mifflin, Juniata, York, Adams)

Diann Carter - Eastern Counties (Columbia, Montour, Snyder, Union, Cumberland, Perry, Dauphin, Lancaster, Lebanon, Lycoming, Clinton, Northumberland)

717-705-8396

Fax: 717-772-6650

Email: dhardy@dpw.state.pa.us; dcarter@dpw.state.pa.us

Scranton Field Office CASSP Contact:

Celia Brown - 570-963-4941 or

Tammy Saunders - 570-963-3016

Fax: 570-963-3050

Email: MikeO@dpw.state.pa.us

Philadelphia Field Office CASSP Contact:

Marge Boehmler

610-313-5426

Fax: 610-313-5845

Email: MBoehmler@dpw.state.pa.us

Statewide CASSP Contact

Sherry Peters

717-772-7855

Fax: 717-772-7827

Email: SPeters@dpw.state.pa.us

Your Child's School or The Education Law Center -- www.elc-pa.org
412-391-5225 or 215-238-6970

- ? Meeting educational goals is not the responsibility of Medical Assistance (or the MCO) but rather is the responsibility of your child's public or private school. Educational goals include: progress with academic subjects like spelling, reading, or math.
- ? There may be services or programs available to your child through the school system.
- ? Contact your child's teacher, guidance counselor, or principal to find out how to get help through the school.
- ? If your child is not yet of school age, contact the Intermediate Unit in your area to find out what early intervention services your child is eligible for.

The Disabilities Law Project -- www.dlp-pa.org 215-238-8070 or 412-391-5225

- ? DLP Provides free legal assistance to people with disabilities, their families, and their organizations.
- ? DLP's main purpose is to advocate for the civil rights of persons with mental and physical disabilities, especially their right to live as integral parts of their communities.