

What Does a Parent Center Do?

Federally funded Parent Training and Information Centers (PTIs) are found in every State, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands. Large States have more than one PTI. In addition, thirty federally funded Community Parent Resource Centers (CPRCs) focus on unserved or underserved populations throughout the United States and territories. Together, the PTIs and CPRCs (collectively referred to as Parent Centers) can play a vital role in supporting your work with Exceptional Family Members in your communities. The following information is a quick fact sheet on what a federally funded Parent Center is required to do through their grants and some suggestions on how you can utilize them effectively.

The activities required of all Parent Centers are defined in statute, specifically Section 671 of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Parent Centers must serve families of children with the full range of disabilities specified in IDEA, as follows:

Provide training and information that meet the needs of parents of children with disabilities, particularly underserved parents, to enable their children with disabilities to:

- Meet developmental and functional goals, and challenging academic achievement goals that have been established for all children.
- Be prepared to lead productive independent adult lives, to the maximum extent possible.
- Serve the parents of infants, toddlers, and children with the full range of disabilities described in section 602(3).
- Ensure that the training and information provided meets the needs of low-income parents, and parents of limited English proficient children.

Assist parents to:

- Better understand the nature of their children's disabilities and their educational, developmental, and transitional needs.
- Communicate effectively and work collaboratively with personnel responsible for providing special education, early intervention services, transition services, and related services.
- Participate in decision-making processes and the development of individualized education programs under part B and individualized family service plans under part C.
- Obtain appropriate information about the range, type, and quality of options, programs, services, technologies, practices, interventions and resources available in school and at home.

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- Participate in activities at the school level that benefit their children, to include participation in school reform activities.
- Resolve disputes in the most expeditious and effective way possible, including encouraging the use, and explaining the benefits, of alternative methods of dispute resolution.
- Understand their rights and responsibilities.
- Understand the availability of, and how to effectively use, procedural safeguards.

Parent Centers are encouraged but not required to provide training and information to teachers and other professionals to assist them in improving results for children with disabilities. In addition, parent centers are required to network with organizations and others that work with families of children with disabilities.

The federal funding for parent centers is provided through competitive grants that fund projects for up to five years. Statute requires that only non-profit parent organizations can receive funding as parent centers. Many of the organizations that have Parent Center grants also receive funding from other federal programs focused on supporting families of children with disabilities, such as Family Health Information Centers funded through Health and Human Services. State education departments and lead agencies for early intervention also often provide additional financial support the organizations that serve as Parent Centers. Therefore, families contacting parent centers often have access to multiple programs with one phone call.

Here are some tips on how you might use the expertise of Parent Center Staff within your State or community.

- Reach out to Parent Centers in your State. If you are not sure who that would be, please go to [our website at www.branchta.org](http://www.branchta.org) and click on your State to find contact information for your Parent Center.
- Build a relationship by inviting them onto the installation or military setting where your office is located.
- Meet with them to find out more about the programs their organizations and community partners administer, and share information about your program, so that you can both make informed mutual referrals.
- Include Parent Center staff in resource fairs and events occurring within your military community.
- Ask for their business cards and brochures to share with families who are in need of assistance.
- Ask if they would like to participate in Advisory Committees or forums to include them in military related issues.

The Branch (MPTAC) Staff may be able to assist you further in making those connections through either e-mail or teleconference. Just contact us!