



—LOOK—

Before
You
Leap!

Revolutionary Common Sense

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Every day, the policies of a given school district, human services agency, or other organization have a direct and personal impact on the lives of children and adults with disabilities and their families. In turn, these children and adults may be unhappy, frustrated, and/or confused about the services they are/are not receiving and how they're being treated.

Some of these dilemmas may be prevented if we look before we leap! Before accepting services or becoming involved with any type of organization, first ask, "What are your policies?" This will enable us to know what to expect *and* be aware if the policy is not being followed.

What if you attended your school board meeting and asked (in a polite, respectful manner), "What is the school district policy on the education of students with disabilities?" The school board members might react with the deer-in-the-headlights look. Some might not even know there *are* students with disabilities in the district! However, your question might tweak their interest or, at the least, make them realize they *should* know what the policies are. You might be told, "You'll have to check with the Special Ed director about this." Fine. That's what you'll do next.

If the Special Ed director is at the school board meeting, politely approach him and set an appointment to review special ed policies. If he's not there, call him the next day to set up an appointment. You

might learn a great deal once you get your hands on the "official" policies. *And*, if the school has no policy, that will tell you a great deal, too, won't it?

Do the same thing with service providers. Of course, they're not going to show you "internal" or "confidential" operating procedures (just as a school district won't), but there should be other "policy" or "operating" guidelines that *are* for public consumption.

If nothing else, get hold of the organization's mission statement or other "public information," to get a better feel for who the organization is, why and how it was founded, its purpose, and so forth.

Before getting involved in community organizations, check them out, too. This is an especially important strategy if, for example, the local Park and Rec department has been resistant to including people with disabilities. If their mission statement says something like, "To increase participation for the residents of Podunk . . ." You can politely point out that the implication is "*all* residents."

You've probably noticed that I've used the word "politely." It's important to remember that we need to develop more allies instead of more adversaries. To that end, perform your "intelligence-gathering" using your very best manners and a friendly smile. Make some new allies! Positive changes can occur when *others* know that *you're* "in the know." And remember to look before you leap!