



QUARTERLY INFORMER



July, August, and September 2026 Edition



Ready or Not...Here Comes Another School Year!

It feels like summer just started, but here we are—backpacks are coming off the shelves, school supplies are filling shopping carts, and we are getting ready for another school year.

At Families Helping Families of Southwest Louisiana, we're getting ready too. While students are busy preparing to meet new teachers and settle into new routines, our staff is busy planning the trainings, workshops, resources and events we'll be offering during the new fiscal year that started July 1st. We spend a lot of time talking about what families are asking for, what challenges you're facing, and how we can make sure we're providing information that is practical, relevant, and easy to understand. Our goal has never been to tell you what to do. Our goal is to help you feel confident asking questions, understanding your options, and knowing you're not alone.

Some of you are sending your child to school for the very first time. Others are navigating middle school, high school, transition planning, or adult services. Every stage brings new questions, and that's okay. We've learned that no one has all the answers—but together, we usually know where to find them.

Over the coming months, you'll see opportunities to learn about IEPs, transition, behavior supports, community resources, advocacy, and so much more. Whether you're brand new to the disability community or you've been walking this road for years, we hope you'll join us.

And if there's a topic you'd like us to cover, let us know! Some of our best trainings have come directly from questions families have asked.

As always, thank you for allowing Families Helping Families to be part of your journey. We look forward to learning, growing, and advocating alongside you throughout the coming year.

Here's to a great school year—and we hope to see you at a training soon!

FHFSWLA Board of Directors: **Chair** - Molly Morgan, **Vice Chair** - Leslie Knox, **Treasurer** - Bernadette Courville, **Secretary** - Kimberlee Gazzolo, Mona Timpa, Howard Foreman, Leah Fuselier, Khaja Moinuddin, Rachel McClelland, Harriet O'Neal, Demita Dozier

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FHF SWLA Mission:

Our mission is to enable and empower individuals with disabilities and their families by providing information, referral, education, training, peer support, and advocacy skills.

Like Us On Facebook
Want to keep up to date with
FHF of SWLA?

Like our Facebook page!! You will receive event information
and other bulletins about what is going on in the
SWLA region!
www.facebook.com/fhfswla/

Major Shift In Louisiana SNAP Program - These Benefits Are Going Away

There have been many recent changes to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, which many families in Louisiana rely on. One of the major changes as of late has been the reclassification of items that can be purchased using the benefits. Another major change, which will take effect this summer, could see some Louisiana families actually lose a portion of their benefits.

The key date Louisiana SNAP users will want to have marked on their calendar is June 27, 2026. That is when the latest change just announced by the Louisiana Department of Health will go into effect.

New SNAP Rules Go Into Effect in June – How Many In Louisiana Are Affected?

It is estimated that the change announced by the Louisiana Department of Health will affect over 790,000 individuals in Louisiana. Current statistics suggest that almost 400,000 households in the state utilize the benefits.

Of those households, almost 70% of them include children, so the potential loss of benefits could have a major effect on parents who are providing for young children at home.

Based on information provided by the Louisiana Department of Health on June 27th, unused SNAP benefits that have not been used for nine months after issuance will be removed from the beneficiary's account. Those funds will not be replaced. In simpler terms, use it or lose it. Basically, if you have benefits on your EBT or SNAP card and they have been there for nine months and you haven't used them, they will be recalled from the card. So, make sure you are using all of the benefits that are allocated to your account.

How Does the New SNAP Policy Differ From the Previous SNAP Policy?

This is a change of policy. Previous policy suggested that if an EBT account was active and the account holder had used a portion of the benefit, the remaining portion would remain on the card. Under the new policy, any unused benefits that are nine months or older will be removed from the card.

The policy is not a "Louisiana only" policy. According to the State Department of Health, the expungement method is in accordance with USDA Food and Nutrition Service policy. Again, the change in how the SNAP benefits will be administered takes place on June 27, 2026.



HEALTHY EATING TIPS WHEN YOU ARE LIVING WITH DISABILITIES

HEALTHY EATING HELPS TO IMPROVE OUR GENERAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING, AS WELL AS OUR MENTAL HEALTH. IT IS IMPORTANT TO SET GOALS FOR EATING A BALANCED, HEALTHY DIET. A HEALTHY DIET IS ESPECIALLY IMPORTANT IF YOU ARE LIVING WITH A DISABILITY.

HERE ARE OUR BEST TIPS FOR HEALTHY EATING WHEN YOU ARE LIVING WITH A DISABILITY:

HAVE PLENTY OF VARIETY

VARIETY TRULY IS THE SPICE OF LIFE. TRY TO HAVE PLENTY OF VARIETY IN YOUR DIET, INCLUDING:

- A VARIETY OF VEGETABLES AND FRUIT (YOU CAN EVEN TRY MIXING IT UP BETWEEN FRESH AND FROZEN). ** BONUS TIP - COOK YOUR VEGETABLES WITH AS LITTLE WATER AS POSSIBLE TO PRESERVE BOTH NUTRIENTS AND FLAVOR. STEAMING IN THE MICROWAVE IS A HANDY AND EASY WAY TO RETAIN NUTRIENTS.
- ENJOY A VARIETY OF PROTEINS, INCLUDING FISH, CHICKEN, LEAN MEAT, AND EGGS
- VARY YOUR DAIRY. MIX IT UP WITH YOGHURT, MILK, OR CHEESE (IF YOU HAVE TROUBLE DIGESTING DAIRY PRODUCTS, CHOOSE SOY, RICE, OR ALMOND SUBSTITUTES WITH CALCIUM ADDED)

IN GOOD COMPANY

ENJOYING A HEALTHY DIET IS MORE ENJOYABLE WHEN YOU SHARE A MEAL WITH FRIENDS OR FAMILY. PERHAPS YOU COULD INVITE A FRIEND OVER FOR LUNCH OR TAKE PART IN A SHARED MEAL WITH FRIENDS AT SCHOOL OR THE COMMUNITY SERVICES YOU ARE INVOLVED IN.

KEEP YOUR FOOD SAFE

TRY TO PREVENT FOOD-RELATED ILLNESSES BY KEEPING YOUR FOOD SAFE. THROW AWAY FOOD THAT IS SPOILED AND AVOID FOOD THAT MAY BE RISKY. SOME FOODS MAY BE HARMFUL IF THEY ARE UNDERCOOKED, LIKE CHICKEN, MEAT, EGGS, OR FISH. IF YOU NEED ASSISTANCE WITH FINDING HEALTHY MEALS THAT YOU DON'T NEED TO COOK YOURSELF, ASK YOUR CARER TO INVESTIGATE OUR READY-MADE MEALS THAT ARE DELIVERED TO YOUR DOOR.

PORTION SIZE

ARE YOU EATING LARGE PORTIONS AT MEALTIMES? TRY REDUCING THESE, EVEN SLIGHTLY. FILL UP TO HALF YOUR PLATE WITH VEGETABLES OR SALAD. ALTERNATIVELY, HAVE ONE OF OUR GOOD MEAL CO MEALS. THEY ARE ALL PORTION-CONTROLLED TO ENSURE YOU ARE EATING THE RIGHT AMOUNT.

STAY HYDRATED

AN IMPORTANT PART OF A HEALTHY DIET IS STAYING HYDRATED. MAKE SURE YOU DRINK PLENTY OF WATER THROUGHOUT THE DAY. HAVING A BOTTLE NEARBY OR WITHIN EASY REACH MAKES IT EASIER TO KEEP HYDRATED AND LESS OF A CHORE. TRY TO REPLACE SUGARY DRINKS WITH UNSWEETENED SPARKLING MINERAL WATER, MILK, OR IF YOU TOLERATE CAFFEINE, TEA AND/OR COFFEE.

FOCUS ON HOW YOU FEEL AFTER EATING

THE HEALTHIER THE FOOD YOU EAT, THE BETTER YOU'LL FEEL AFTER EATING. THE MORE JUNK FOOD YOU EAT, THE MORE LIKELY YOU ARE TO FEEL UNCOMFORTABLE, NAUSEOUS, OR DRAINED OF ENERGY.

BE CAREFUL BETWEEN MEALS

MAKE HEALTHIER CHOICES WHEN BUYING SNACKS. TRY SWITCHING BISCUITS OR CHIPS FOR FRUIT OR NUTS, OR EVEN WARM MILK. IF YOU NEED MORE SUPPORT IN MAKING HEALTHY CHOICES, WE RECOMMEND SEEING YOUR GP OR MEDICAL PROFESSIONAL OR CHATTING WITH YOUR CARER TO GET FURTHER ADVICE.



Deadline Looms For Healthcare Providers to Improve Accessibility

New rules mandating greater disability access in healthcare are about to take effect, but recent actions suggest that federal officials may be mulling a delay.

A 2024 regulation from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services updated Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act to bar disability discrimination in healthcare. The rule said that people with disabilities should not be denied medical treatment due to biases or stereotypes, established standards for accessible medical diagnostic equipment, and more.

Starting this month, provisions detailing what providers need to do to ensure that their websites and mobile applications are accessible to people with disabilities are supposed to begin taking effect. The standards apply to most new web content, mobile apps, and medical kiosks offered by hospitals, doctors, social services providers, and others who receive funding from HHS.

“HHS issued these new requirements because many recipients offer their services through websites and mobile applications that are not accessible to persons with disabilities, creating barriers to participation in federally funded programs,” HHS said in a fact sheet about the regulation. Examples of barriers include pictures and maps that can’t be understood by those using screen readers or videos that lack captioning, the fact sheet said.

“Accessibility requirements for web and mobile apps will help ensure that people with disabilities have access to a recipient’s programs and activities,” the agency said.

Per the regulation, large providers — those with 15 or more employees — must meet the new web accessibility requirements by May 11, while smaller entities have another year to come into compliance.

It’s unclear how prepared healthcare providers are to meet the new expectations. A recent review of 300 websites subject to the new 504 rule, which was conducted by accessible, which provides web accessibility software, found that 84.3% had “measurable accessibility gaps.”

However, there are now signs that this deadline could be moved back. Last month, the Department of Justice delayed implementation of a similar rule just days before the planned deadline. That regulation, under the Americans with Disabilities Act, requires that online offerings from state and local governments meet certain accessibility standards.

Around that same time, HHS sent an interim final rule to the White House Office of Management and Budget regarding the 504 regulations.

“We understand that it is a similar extension to the DOJ Title II regulations on web accessibility,” said Alison Barkoff, a health law and policy professor at George Washington University who led HHS’ Administration on Community Living under the Biden administration. “The delay of these website accessibility standards under both the Section 504 and DOJ regulations is very concerning, particularly with the significant role that digital technology plays in so many aspects of life.”



Riddle

**What does nobody want,
yet nobody wants to lose?**



Answer on the last page



Allen Parish - August 12, 2026
Beauregard Parish - August 5, 2026
Calcasieu Parish - August 13, 2026
Cameron Parish - August 6, 2026
Jeff Davis Parish - August 14, 2026

ImCal Behavioral Health – Lake Charles

Imperial Calcasieu Human Services Authority, Lake Charles, will be discontinuing our Walk-In Clinic option beginning **July 1, 2026**. We are returning to scheduled appointments for clinical assessments. During this transition period, we will offer a hybrid model, accepting walk-ins and scheduled appointments.

Clients who are present at the clinic will still be able to see our Access Unit Staff to complete intake paperwork, insurance verification, and complete our initial screening. From this point, they will be scheduled for a clinical assessment appointment with a behavioral health provider at a time that is convenient for them. If we have someone in crisis or with an urgent need, we have contingencies in place to make every effort to see them that day.

We know this is a change for the community, as we have offered a walk-in clinic for over 12 years. However, given current needs and utilization, we feel it is time to modify our practices.

Feel free to contact us if you have any questions.

ImCal Behavioral Health
Lake Charles
4105 Kirkman Street
Lake Charles, LA 70607
(337) 475-8022 | imcalhsa.org



The Social Security Administration's Direct Express program is changing:

DIRECT EXPRESS CARD CHANGE (STARTING MAY 18, 2026)

IMPORTANT: If you get Social Security on a debit card, this affects you.

The Social Security Administration (SSA) has announced a change to the Direct Express® program, which is the debit card used by many people to receive their benefits.

What is changing?

- The company that manages the Direct Express program is changing.
- Old company: Comerica Bank
- New company: Fifth Third Bank

Fifth Third Bank will begin taking over the program in May 2026, with changes for current card users starting in summer 2026.

Whom does this affect?

This change affects you if you receive your benefits on a Direct Express debit card instead of having your money deposited into a bank account.

What you need to know

- You will receive a new debit card from Fifth Third Bank.
- This new card will replace your current Comerica card.
- Keep your mailing address up to date so you don't miss important information.
- Watch your mail for:
 - Notices from Social Security
 - Your new Fifth Third Bank debit card

Can you still use your current card?

Yes.

You can continue using your Comerica Direct Express card until your new Fifth Third card arrives.

What happens next?

Once you receive your new Fifth Third card:

- Follow the instructions to activate it
- Start using it to access your monthly Social Security benefits

Need help or have questions?

Visit the Direct Express FAQ page:

👉 <https://www.usdirectexpress.com/faqs>

Simple summary

- ✓ A new bank (Fifth Third) is taking over Direct Express
- ✓ You will get a new card in the mail
- ✓ Keep using your old card until the new one arrives
- ✓ Make sure your mailing address is correct

If you have a Fifth Third card, you'll find this text on the back



If you have a Comerica card, you'll find this logo on the front



Sun Bucks

Louisiana SUN Bucks provides families with a ONE-TIME payment of \$120 for each eligible school-aged child (5 to 18 years old) to buy groceries during the summer break.

Families should make sure their mailing address is correct on their child's Medicaid, FITAP, or KCSP case and with their child's school. EBT cards will be sent to the mailing address that is on file. Email sunbucks@la.gov for help updating your mailing address.

Who is Eligible for SUN Bucks?

Most eligible children will get SUN Bucks automatically.

You do not need to apply if:

- Your child was born between August 20, 2007, and July 1, 2020, and received Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Family Independence Temporary Assistance (FITAP), Kinship Care Subsidy Program (KCSP), or income-based Medicaid benefits (household income below 185% of the federal poverty level) anytime between July 1, 2025, and August 20, 2026.
 - Your child attends a school that participates in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) or School Breakfast Program (SBP) and was individually approved to receive free or reduced-price school meals, and the school provides this data.
- Some families will need to apply for SUN Bucks. Applications for this summer will be accepted until August 20, 2026. Any applications received after August 20, 2026, will be considered for summer 2027.

You will need to apply if:

- Your child attends a Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) school where all students receive free or reduced-price lunch, but did not complete an application for NSLP or SBP.

Even if your child doesn't fall into one of the above categories, they may still be eligible for SUN Bucks based on your household income.

How do I Apply for SUN Bucks?

Most eligible children will receive SUN Bucks automatically and do not need to apply. Families of students who are not automatically eligible can apply at louisiana.summertimeapp.com. Applications for summer 2026 will be accepted until August 20, 2026. Any applications received after August 20, 2026, will be considered for summer 2027.

How are SUN Bucks Issued?

Eligible children will receive a ONE-TIME \$120 SUN Bucks benefit for summer nutrition support.

How Benefits Will Arrive

- SNAP households and households that received SUN Bucks last summer: Benefits will be added to your existing SNAP or SUN Bucks EBT card.
 - All other households: Benefits will arrive on a preloaded EBT card in a plain white envelope addressed to your child.
- Important Note: If you have multiple children, their cards may arrive separately.

How do I activate my child's SUN Bucks card?

Activate your child's SUN Bucks card using one of the following options:

- Download the LifeInCheck app
- Call 888-997-1117
- Visit LifeInCheckEBT.com

To activate your child's SUN Bucks card, call the EBT customer service line at 888-997-1117 and enter the 16-digit card number. To authenticate the card, you will need the last four digits of the child's Social Security number, the child's date of birth in DD/MM/YYYY format, and the child's mailing address zip code.





Early Steps would like to invite you to participate in the
**State Interagency Coordinating Council (SICC) and the
Regional Interagency Coordinating Council (RICC)**

to discuss early intervention strategies for the state of Louisiana and the Southwest Louisiana Region. All family members are invited to attend, including providers and other early intervention personnel. Our mission is to: -Provide a way for participants to represent regional issues in the SICC and RICC.



The SICC meeting will be held on:

Thursday, August 13, 2026

1:00 p.m.- 2:30 p.m. via Teams

&

The RICC meeting will be held on:

Wednesday, June 17, 2026

1:30 p.m.- 3:00 p.m. via Teams



Please get in touch with Patrick Juneau for Teams information
at (337) 359-8748 or email: Patrick.Juneau@LA.GOV

Thank you in advance for your participation. If you have any questions or concerns, please don't hesitate to contact me.



The FHF Office will be closed
Monday, September 7, 2026

In observance of
Labor Day.



Great Ideas for Teaching Your Children to Manage Their Dollars and (Spending) Sense

Managing money is a vital life skill that can help a middle-schooler with attention deficit disorder (ADHD or ADD) become an independent young adult. Money management is hard for kids with ADHD because they usually lack the math and organizational skills to do it.

So how can you help your child develop money management skills through routine activities? Here are five ideas to use with your kids to help them be masters of their money.

Give an allowance. An allowance connects money management to the completion of job responsibilities. First, create a small list of chores from which he can choose. This will give him buy-in to the chores he tackles. Next, connect the amount of the allowance to his level of responsibility. As he completes the jobs, think about “promoting” him to more challenging tasks, with increased pay for a job well done. He will earn your approval as well as the benefits of a pay increase.

Take a trip to the bank. Take your child to the bank with you to open a checking and savings account. Writing checks reinforces basic math skills as he balances his checkbook. Open a debit card account as well to teach him about how credit works. Some banks may allow only older children to open savings accounts, but it is never too early to start teaching the skills they will need to manage their money.

Make a visual spending plan. A spending plan is nothing more than a visual representation of a budget. His plan will empower him to track his money so that he can set financial goals that are important to him, such as buying a new video game or going to a movie that has just come out. If your child struggles with math, an app like Fudget will help him manage his budget.

Create a savings chart. Middle-schoolers want more responsibility. You can make money management meaningful to your child by using a savings chart to track his financial goals. Post it on the refrigerator for daily reminders as he saves his dollars and makes progress toward his goal.

Go grocery shopping. A big part of personal money management is daily decision-making. Grocery shopping provides an opportunity for you to show your child decision-making in action. So, take your middle schooler with you when you go grocery shopping. Give him your list and tell him how much money you have to spend. Have him track your spending based on your budget. Your example must translate into his practice.



“Be the change that you wish to see in the world.”

— Mahatma Gandhi

HORRICANE

PREPAREDNESS TIPS

Essential Tips to Keep You Prepared!



Create an Emergency Kit

Prepare an emergency kit with:

- Non-perishable food and water for at least 3 days
- First aid supplies, cash, legal documents, and medications
- Flashlights, batteries, a charger, and a battery-powered radio



Develop a Family Emergency Plan

- Identify a safe room or the safest areas in your home
- Plan evacuation routes and meeting places
- Ensure all family members know the plan and practice it regularly



Stay Informed

- Monitor weather forecasts and updates from trusted sources
- Sign up for local emergency alerts
- Have a NOAA Weather Radio for real-time updates



Protect Your Home

- Secure windows and doors with storm shutters or plywood
- Bring in outdoor furniture and secure loose items
- Trim trees and shrubs to minimize damage



Know Your Evacuation Zone

- Learn your community's hurricane evacuation routes
- Follow the instructions of local officials during an evacuation order
- Have a plan for your pets



Stay Connected

- Charge all electronic devices and have backup power sources
- Keep a list of emergency contacts
- Use social media responsibly to stay updated and inform others of your status

For more detailed tips and resources, visit <https://www.aarp.org/home-living/emergency-preparedness/>



Louisiana 988 Helpline

About the Helpline

988 is more than just an easy-to-remember number — it's a direct connection to compassionate, accessible care and support for anyone experiencing mental health-related distress — whether that is thoughts of suicide, anxiety, depression, feeling overwhelmed, dealing with a substance use issue/crisis, or any other kind of emotional distress. People can also contact 988 if they are worried about a loved one who may need emotional support.

Texts and chats are routed to VIA LINK, LACG, and to specified call centers outside Louisiana. To chat, visit Louisiana988.org or text 988. To text with a Spanish-speaking crisis specialist, text AYUDA to 988.

The helpline provides free and confidential support 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Louisiana988.org

[Louisiana 988 Fact Sheet](#)

Louisiana has two certified helpline centers, VIA LINK and the Louisiana Association on Compulsive Gambling (LACG), who are ready to respond to 988 calls, chats, and texts. VIA LINK provides primary coverage for area codes 504, 225, and 985.

LACG provides primary coverage for area codes 318 and 337.

[VIA LINK](#)

[Louisiana Association on
Compulsive Gambling \(LACG\)](#)



5 Must-Do Steps to Get Ready to Vote

From local initiatives to national policies, every elected official on the ballot plays a crucial role in shaping decisions that affect our communities. All Americans are allowed to vote, including a person with disability; They have a right to ask for accessibility accommodations that make it easy for them to vote. The [Americans with Disabilities Act \(ADA\) checklist on polling place accessibility](#).

Your vote is your voice, and our freedom to vote enables us to work toward a more sustainable future for all. To make sure you're ready to make your voice heard on or before! Election Day, here's what you can do right now:

- 1. Make sure you're registered to vote
- 2. Learn the voting options in your state
- 3. Learn what's on your ballot
- 4. Share your voting plan with your friends and family
- 5. Know your rights as a voter

VOTE

Social Security Administration Disability Redetermination Now In-House

Social Security Administration Brings Medical Continuing Disability Reviews In-House
Strategic decision offers greater federal accountability and relief for states to focus on faster adjudication of disability claims.

Baltimore, MD – The Social Security Administration (SSA) today announced that it will transition the processing of medical Continuing Disability Reviews (CDRs) from State Disability Determination Services (DDS) to its federal processing site, Disability Case Review (DCR). Bringing in-house CDRs will improve service to our most vulnerable Americans. CDRs are conducted as part of SSA’s ongoing program integrity workload, supported by Congress, to determine whether a person receiving disability benefits is still eligible to receive them. Aligning medical CDRs under SSA’s direct oversight means all CDRs, including non-medical CDRs, are solely the agency’s responsibility.

“By centralizing medical continuing disability reviews under Social Security, we are taking another important step towards operational excellence, reducing improper payments, and providing best-in-class service to Americans in critical need of support,” said Commissioner Frank J. Bisignano. “With complete ownership and accountability of CDRs and the proven track record of our DCR, our state disability determination service partners will be able to focus on the adjudication of initial disability claims and reconsideration cases, provide eligible individuals with expedited access to benefits, and further reduce initial disability claims backlogs, which are already reaching historic lows.”

DDS can now focus its attention on expediting disability claims for residents of their state, which will enable efficient decisions for claimants, resulting in eligible individuals receiving the critical benefits they need promptly. In June of 2024, the DDS initial claims backlog was at an all-time high with over 1.26 million pending claims. With a focus on process improvement and operational excellence, the backlog has been reduced by more than 33 percent to 831,000 as of February 2026. The shift in responsibilities and continued partnership between SSA and state DDSs will continue to significantly improve the processing times and reduce the initial claims backlog.

The agency’s Disability Case Review, with its experience processing initial disability claims, reconsideration cases, and medical CDRs, will now handle medical CDRs for the entire country—allowing DDS sites to focus on reducing wait time on initial and reconsideration claims for citizens in their state. Non-medical CDRs, which do not require the same expertise as medical CDRs to process, will continue to be handled by the agency’s field offices and processing centers.





Community Dances

6 PM to 8:30 PM

Lake Charles Event Center

(Exhibition Hall)

900 Lakeshore Drive

Lake Charles, LA 70601

337-475-3100

**Friday,
August 14, 2026**



Moving To The Next Grade With An IEP

By: Mylinda Elliott

In Louisiana, every school has a special group of educators called the School Building Level Committee, or SBLC for short. This committee has several big responsibilities. One of them is to look at student data to decide if a student is ready to move up to the next grade.

While most students have to pass specific state tests to move on, the rules are a little different for students with disabilities. Under Louisiana's educational laws (specifically a policy called Bulletin 1566), the SBLC has the authority to promote a special education student even if they don't meet the standard requirements. They usually do this for two main reasons, though there are other reasons.

First, the SBLC looks at a student's Individualized Education Program (IEP). Teachers, specialists, and parents created this plan. Instead of comparing a special education student to everyone else in the state, the committee works with the IEP team to see if the student met their own personal learning goals. If the data shows the student is making good progress based on their unique abilities, the SBLC can and often does promote them. This keeps the student moving forward with peers their own age, which helps their social and academic development.

Second, the SBLC can use what is called a Good Cause Exemption. Sometimes, a student's disability makes it difficult for them to show what they know on a timed, standardized state test like the LEAP exam. When this happens, the SBLC doesn't just look at a test score. Instead, they look at a collection of the student's daily schoolwork, their attendance, and how they responded to extra help throughout the year. If this portfolio proves the student is learning and growing, the committee can choose to exempt them from the standard test rules and promote them, if the parents and school principals agree.

The SBLC's job is to make sure promotion rules are fair. By focusing on a student's individual growth rather than a single test score, the committee ensures that students with disabilities are supported and given a fair chance to succeed in school.

If you need to discuss these reasons for promotion or other reasons, please call us.

For More Information, contact

Families Helping Families at:

(337) 436-2570 ♦ 1-800-894-6558

info@fhfswla.org



Free Mind for Teens

A blueprint for better mental health that reduces your risk of overdose.

Your mental health and physical health are closely connected.

Think about how being sick affects your ability to focus. Or how being tired can slow you down in the gym or make it hard to stay awake in class.

The same goes for how your mental health is related to your risk for substance use disorder.

Mental health conditions and substance use disorders (SUDs) are often co-occurring. This means that when someone has an SUD, they are likely to also have a mental health condition.

And if they have a mental health condition, they are more likely to use drugs.



Mental Health Condition

A serious and ongoing change in thinking, mood, or behavior that causes distress and problems.

Examples include anxiety, depression, and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).

- **Substance Use Disorder (SUD)**
The frequent use of alcohol and/or drugs causes problems in daily life.

- **Break Free For Your Future**
Prioritizing your mental health is a good way to reduce your risk of developing an SUD or experiencing an overdose.

Below are four steps to help you free your mind for your future based on tips from teens just like you:

Understand your risk.

Mental health challenges are a major problem teens face. From social media to the pressures of school and social life, there's a lot on your plate. Not to mention the role your surroundings and your support system play in your mental health. We've come a long way as a society in our treatment of mental health conditions and SUDs. However, it still can be hard to reach out for help. And it's even harder when others blame you for these challenges, tell you it's all in your head, or say you're just making excuses.

Take action to protect yourself.

It's important to know that YOU have the power to protect your mental well-being. You have the right to step back from situations or people that are disturbing your peace. It's also okay to lean on friends and family when you're struggling. If you feel that you don't have the support system you need, look for encouragement from trustworthy mental health accounts on social media to give you a daily dose of support. When you take action, it makes a big difference.



Find ways to cope without turning to drugs or alcohol.

There will come a time when you need to deal with the pressures of life on your own. How you choose to deal can have an impact on your mental and physical health in the present and in your future. If you're dealing with stress, choose to channel your energy into your passions. Be yourself. Do the hobbies and activities that feel right and bring you the most joy. These could be sports, video games, reading, art, spending time with your pets, cleaning — anything that's positive and puts you in a better mental space.

Recognize you aren't in this alone.

Nearly all of us will experience a mental health challenge in our lives. In a recent survey, 40% of teens reported feeling sad or hopeless, and teens who've had a major depressive episode were more likely to use illegal drugs or alcohol. Coping like this can have lasting consequences. In addition to increasing your risk for developing an SUD, you increase your risk of overdose.

By knowing about the link between mental health and drug use, understanding you have the power to act, and empowering yourself to deal with challenges in a healthy way, you can free your mind from the risk of SUDs and overdose.

Learn the toxic traits of different drugs.

If you're struggling, help is available:

- [988 Lifeline](#)
- [Get Smart About Drugs, DEA](#)
- [Find Treatment](#)

SOCIAL SECURITY TO FULLY TRANSITION TO ELECTRONIC PAYMENTS

As of September 30, 2025, federal law and Executive Order 14247 require federal benefits to be paid electronically. To improve efficiency, reduce costs, and enhance security in federal payments, the Department of the Treasury is phasing out paper checks. Social Security plans to complete the full transition to electronic payments for all beneficiaries this year.

To read more...



7 EXPERT TIPS TO POTTY TRAIN KIDS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

For parents of children with developmental disabilities, potty training can be life-changing. Not only is it more convenient, cleaner, and cheaper than diapers, but it can also open doors: no more social shame and stigma around having an older child who is still in diapers, and the ability to enroll in pre-school (most won't accept students who aren't potty trained).

We understand and are here to help. Below are our seven favorite potty-training tips curated by MeBe's Co-Founder and Executive Director, Abigail Bunt, M.Ed., BCBA; and Director of Quality Assurance, Elizabeth Jordan, MA, BCBA. Say hello to an easier, more successful potty-training experience.

1. Look for the signs

Is your child uncomfortable when they're wet or soiled? Are they indicating when they need to use the restroom? These are signs that they may be ready for potty training.

On the other hand, if you're running into a lot of resistance behaviors when trying to make the transition from diapers to toilets—like acting out, accidents, or simply not understanding the concept of potty training, then it may be too early. Give it a few months and try again.

2. Party without pants

When your family is ready to make the leap, jump in with both feet. "Start with a fun potty party weekend," says Abigail. "Let your child spend the day naked, give them lots of fluids, and try to catch them when they need to go. Explain that they need to indicate when it's restroom time and try to read their behavior throughout the weekend. If your child isn't indicating well and it's causing accidents, switch to a scheduled bathroom break every 30 minutes to help them get the hang of it."

3. Don't be too hard on yourself

Scheduling a fun potty weekend is one thing; stressing yourself out is another. "Being consistent is more important than going all out," explains Elizabeth. "If you can't do a weekend potty party because of work commitments or other children, that's fine!

Just try to schedule some time every day to potty train, like breakfast to noon or dinner time to bedtime. Do what you can do, enjoy your time with your child, and try not to stress out too much. It may not always feel like it, but potty training can be a fun and exciting experience."

4. Reward wins

You know that treat your child can't get enough of? Keep a stash of it handy to reward wins and make potty time more enticing. Oh, and feel free to party a little every time they get it right. Praise, cheers, and hugs can be even better than M&Ms (though those don't hurt, either).

5. Use what works

According to Abigail, those little plastic toilets can be lifesavers. “Before potty training my kids, I didn’t understand those small plastic toilets. To be honest, they seemed kind of gross and inconvenient. Once we started having accidents, though, it didn’t take long to change my mind.

You can take the plastic toilets everywhere you go, so there’s no anxiety about leaving the house and not having a potty accessible. There’s no need to wait in long lines when your kiddo just can’t make it. Plus, some children fear using unfamiliar toilets when first training, which can lead to accidents. The plastic toilets were lifesavers for our family, and they taught me an important lesson: use whatever works for you!”

6. Gather your village

You know what they say: it takes a village. Gather your forces—nannies and babysitters, your child’s teachers and school care team, your MeBe Board Certified Behavior Analysts (BCBAs)—for a united potty-training front. Let them in on your strategies and supply them with the extra special treats you dole out for successful toilet trips.

If you’re potty training at multiple locations, don’t forget to prime your child as well. They may not instinctively understand how to use the toilet at school or daycare, even if they’re great at home. They may even be scared to use an unfamiliar toilet. Explain that toilet time will be a little different elsewhere, but that they still need to indicate their intent to use the restroom, whether that indication involves a signal, an item, or a communication device.

You could say something like: “At school, when you must use the potty, you won’t be naked like at home. That’s okay. When you must go, give your teacher one of your potty tokens, and she will take you to the bathroom, okay? Then you pull down your pants and use the potty as you do here.”



Virtual Family Support Group for Parents & Caregivers

Being part of a family with a member who has a disability can bring unique joys and challenges. This group offers a safe, supportive space where parents and caregivers can connect, share experiences, and encourage one another. Join us to talk about the stresses, celebrate the wins, and build friendships with others who truly understand.

Upcoming Dates

12 PM on Wednesdays on Zoom

August 26, 2026

September 23, 2026

October 28, 2026

November 25, 2026

December 16, 2026

**Family Connections: Coffee with a Purpose – A Support
& Information Session for Parents & Families of Children
with Disabilities at The Buzz Coffee & More**

Upcoming Dates:



August 5, 2026
September 9, 2026
October 7, 2026
November 4, 2026
December 2, 2026



**10 AM on Wednesdays at Buzz Coffee & More,
1530 East McNeese St, Suite 8, Lake Charles, LA 70607**

Beyond Limits Soccer

Sulphur Parks and Recreation has officially launched our first Adaptive Sports program under our new direction. We wanted to provide an opportunity to either register your child or let us know how you may be interested in supporting the program—whether through volunteering on program days or helping promote the initiative within the community. We are very excited about this opportunity and hope to see participation in whatever form works best for you or your organization.

How to Register for Beyond Limits Soccer

1. Visit SulphurParks.com
2. Click the green "SPARC" button on the right side of the screen.
3. Create an account (if you do not already have one).
4. Select "Adaptive and Inclusive Recreation" under the program categories (green circle).
5. Click "Beyond Limits Soccer."
6. Complete the registration process.
7. Registration is complete when you receive a receipt at the end.



If you have any questions about registration, the program, or any of the steps above, please contact me, and I will be happy to assist you.

Caleb Frank: Caleb.Frank@sulphurparks.com 337-527-2500





Special Education FAQ 3.0 Workshop

1 PM – Wednesday, July 22, 2026



Special Education Workshop Series: Part 3 of 3 Parts

Part 3 will cover transition from high school to adult life for students with disabilities. We invite you to attend this informative workshop where we will cover some of the questions most asked by parents about the transition process for students with disabilities.

Who can attend: parents of high school students with disabilities, high school students with disabilities, & professionals who provide services to high school students with disabilities

**You have the option of attending
in person or virtually!**

Register to attend in person for snacks & door prize drawing!

At Families Helping Families of SWLA
324 West Hale Street, Lake Charles, LA 70601

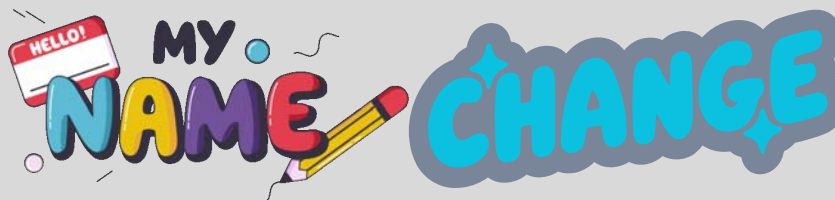
**For More Information call (337) 436-2570
or email info@fhfswla.org**

Link for In Person Registration:

<https://tinyurl.com/SPEDFAQ3-72226IPR>

Link for Virtual Registration:

<https://tinyurl.com/SPEDFAQ3-72226VR>



The Office for Citizens with Developmental Disabilities (OCDD) is now known as the Office of Intellectual and Developmental Disability Supports (OIDD) under Act 702 (2026). This new name better reflects our mission of supporting people with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities in achieving their goals and living fully integrated and valued lives.

New Name, Same Vision.

Our name is changing, but our vision is not. We continue to provide the right services at the right time in the right place, and we work hard to ensure people with disabilities can live, work, and engage in the community of their choice; receive quality supports and services; and increase their independence.

CONTINUE



Your Rights in Special Education Webinar

Thursday, August 6, 2026
1 PM – 2 PM

Join us as we discuss the rights of parents and students regarding special education and related services, including parental participation, access to education records, informed consent, prior written notice, the right to disagree with the school, and more.



Link to Register:

<https://tinyurl.com/080626Rights>

Upcoming Webinars co-hosted by Families Helping Families of Greater New Orleans & FHFSWLA



The Bridge from High School to Post-Secondary Services Webinar

11 AM – Thursday,
September 10, 2026

The Bridge from High School to Postsecondary Services - In this webinar, we will discuss the IEP process in place to help students transition from High School to postsecondary education and related services. We will also provide an overview of programs and resources available to students entering post-secondary life.

Watch our website and our Facebook page for more information about when to register for this webinar!

Accommodation v. Modifications Webinar

11 AM - Tuesday, July 21, 2026

Accommodations v. Modifications - These 2 terms are not interchangeable! If understood and used correctly, these words can greatly impact the success of a child's educational program. Get answers to these questions and more:

How can accommodations and modifications help my child in the general education classroom?

How are accommodations and modifications Included in an IEP?

Which accommodations are allowed for state testing?

Link to Register: <https://tinyurl.com/072126Accom-v-Mod>



Preparing Louisiana Youth with Special Health Care Needs and Disabilities for Adulthood

For many families, the transition from childhood to adulthood can feel overwhelming. As youth with special health care needs and disabilities approach their teenage years, families often find themselves navigating new systems, services, and expectations. Questions about healthcare, education, employment, independent living, and community participation become increasingly important.

In Louisiana, successful transition planning begins early. Families, healthcare providers, educators, and community organizations all play a critical role in helping youth develop the skills and supports they need to thrive as adults.

What Is Health Care Transition?

Health care transition is the planned movement from pediatric (child-centered) healthcare to adult healthcare. This process helps young adults learn to manage their own health needs, communicate with providers, understand medications, schedule appointments, and make informed decisions about their care.

Research shows that youth who actively participate in transition planning are more likely to experience improved health outcomes, increased independence, and greater confidence as adults.

When Should Transition Planning Begin?

Experts recommend beginning transition discussions as early as ages 12 to 14.

Early planning provides opportunities to:

- Build self-advocacy skills
- Learn about healthcare and insurance options
- Explore post-secondary education and employment opportunities
- Discuss independent living goals
- Understand legal considerations, such as supported decision-making and guardianship
- Connect with adult service providers before graduation

Transition planning is not a one-time event but an ongoing process that evolves as a young person's needs and goals change.

Louisiana Resources for Families

Louisiana families have access to several programs and organizations that can assist with transition planning, including:

Families Helping Families Resource Centers

Louisiana Family-to-Family Health Information Center

- Louisiana Parent Training Information Center
 - Louisiana Bureau of Family Health
 - Louisiana Department of Health
 - Louisiana Department of Education
 - Louisiana Rehabilitation Services
 - Medicaid and Medicaid Waiver Programs
 - Louisiana Postsecondary Inclusive Education Program
-

These organizations can provide information, training, referrals, and support to help families navigate available services and opportunities.

Tips for Families

Families can support a successful transition by encouraging youth to:

- Participate in medical appointments
- Learn about their health conditions and medications
- Practice communicating with healthcare providers
- Develop daily living skills
- Explore career interests and work experiences
- Set personal goals for the future
- Build a network of support within their community

Every young person deserves the opportunity to pursue their goals and live a meaningful, fulfilling life. With planning, preparation, and the right supports, Louisiana youth with special health care needs and disabilities can successfully transition into adulthood.

How the Louisiana Family-to-Family Health Information Center Can Help

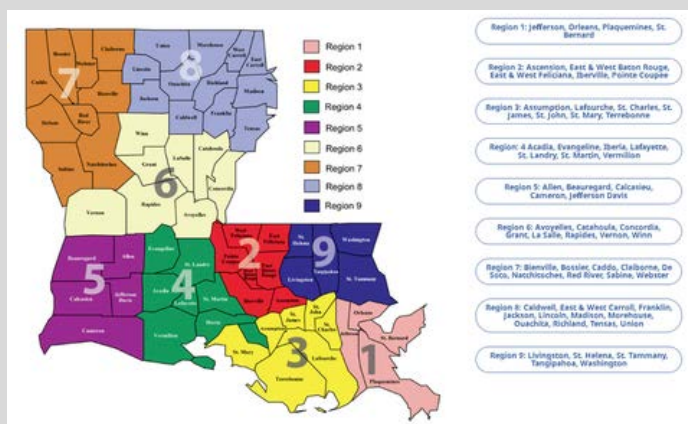
The Louisiana Family-to-Family Health Information Center provides free information, education, resources, and peer support to families of children and youth with special health care needs. Our staff understands the challenges families face because many of us have lived experience navigating complex healthcare and disability systems.

If you have questions about transition planning, healthcare coverage, community resources, or advocacy, we are here to help connect you with information and support.

Together, we can help Louisiana youth prepare for a healthy, successful future.

Sources:

- Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), Maternal and Child Health Bureau
- Got Transition National Resource Center
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)
- Louisiana Department of Health
- Louisiana Department of Education
- Louisiana Rehabilitation Services
- Family Voices



Families Helping Families of Southwest Louisiana

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(337) 436-2570 • 1-800-894-6558 • (337) 436-2578 FAX

EMAIL: INFO@FHFSWLA.ORG

WEBSITE: [HTTPS://WWW.FHFSWLA.ORG](https://www.fhfswla.org)

FACEBOOK: <https://www.facebook.com/fhfswla>

Families Helping Families
It's Who We Are!
It's What We DO!

Riddle Answer: Work

Invest in Families Helping Families of Southwest Louisiana.

FHFSWLA is a 501 (c)3 nonprofit agency that relies on donations to meet the needs of our agency's mission and vision. By donating to FHFSWLA you are investing in the lives of

people with disabilities and their families. If passion paid, we would be the richest nonprofit in SWLA. Unfortunately, passion alone does not fully support our organization.

Please consider making a contribution so families who are touched by disability can be assured this one of a kind, family directed resource center is always here when they need us.

Contributions can be made to:
Families Helping Families of Southwest Louisiana
P O Box 1627
Lake Charles, LA 70602

FHF is funded in part by a contract
from the Louisiana Developmental
Disabilities Council.