

Your Special-needs Child

Parenting resources offered in the Bay Area

Hardly a day goes by when Mitch and Charlene Sigman, co-founders of the School of Imagination in Dublin, aren't counseling the parent of a special-needs child and helping them navigate the myriad resources available in the East Bay.

"It's often difficult for parents to know where to begin after their child is diagnosed as having special needs," Mitch Sigman says. "They are often unsure who to call for appropriate classes, tutoring, therapy and other support services for their child."

bring out the extraordinary in every child."

The Sigmans' nonprofit is one of many East Bay organizations that offers services to special-needs children and their families. The following list offers a road map to some of the valuable resources available throughout the East Bay.

Where to begin

Parents who suspect their child has a developmental delay can obtain an evaluation through their pediatrician or through **The Regional Center of the East Bay**, which serves infants and young children in Contra Costa and Alameda counties. This nonprofit also offers early intervention, counseling, childcare, parent training and more. *7677 Oakport St., Ste. 300, Oakland and 2151 Salvio St., Ste 365, Concord. 510-383-1200 or 925-798-3001. rceb.org.*

If your child is over the age of 3 and you suspect he or she has special needs, contact the director of special education at your local school district. Begin with a letter on why you feel your child should be tested and then follow up with a phone call. Also request a copy of the parents' rights and the school's legal timeline for testing and services.

Families can call the **Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund** to speak to one of its advocates about special-education options and obtain resources to help make informed decisions about your child's education and other individual needs. *2212 Sixth St., Berkeley. 800-348-4232. dredf.org.*

The **Contra Costa Child Care Council** offers an inclusion specialist to help parents locate agencies and resources to help their special-needs child's development. *2280 Diamond Blvd., Ste. 500, Concord. 925-676-5442, ext. 3113. cocokids.org.*

Support services

The **CARE Parent Network** offers peer support, healthcare information and helps parents find the best resources to meet their child's individual needs. *1340 Arnold Dr., Suite 115, Martinez. 800-281-3023. contracostaarc.org.*



THE SCHOOL OF THE IMAGINATION

The School of Imagination in Dublin is often an initial source of information on resources available to parents of special-needs children.

The Sigmans' nonprofit serves more than 300 Bay Area children each week and provides hundreds of free screenings and support services to families. In addition, the School of Imagination operates an inclusion preschool and offers a variety of tutoring services. (925-829-9552. happytalkers.com)

For many families, the Sigmans' serve as a starting point once their child has been diagnosed with autism, dyslexia, ADHD or developmental delays.

"Every parent leaves here with a plan of action," says Sigman. "By offering free screenings, as well as education and support, we strive to