



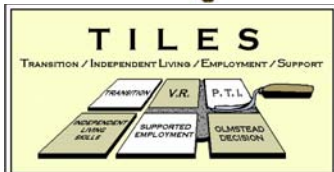
Fundamentally For Families

The Quarterly Newsletter for Families and Advocates of Children and Adults with Disabilities, Special Needs, or At-Risk and the Professionals Who Work With Them.

The Heart ♥ Network



PARENT
EDUCTION
NETWORK
Parents Educating Parents
in the Community
(PEP)



Sharing The Commitment



DADVOCATES

INVOLVING FATHERS IN THE LIVES OF CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

I AM A DADVOCATE

As the fortunate parent of four children, two of whom have disabilities, I know that my kids are the best thing that's ever happened to me. They've taught me at least as much about life and living as I hope I've taught them. I also know that being a parent is my most important job in this life. That may sound trite, but I don't mean it to be. When I introduce myself when I'm speaking before an audience, I say that I'm the Executive Director of FND, but, I say that, more importantly, I am a parent. I am an advocate for my sons with disabilities. I am a Dadvocate.

That's not a title that I take lightly. In our Dadvocates workshops, we talk about barriers to fathers' involvement in the lives of their kids with disabilities. There are many – such as work, divorce, and the perception of traditional roles – but the greatest barrier is most times really between our ears. Many fathers get hung up somewhere around the realization that your son may not be the star quarterback or you may not get to have a typical father-daughter dance. Don't stay stuck here. That may really suck – for your kid and for you – but you still have a vital role to play in your child's life. Don't check out. Don't let your wife handle "all that disability stuff" while you focus on work and providing for your family. You're shortchanging everybody – including yourself - if you do that.

You may have guilt – did you do or say something to your child that you now realize was related to their disability and that you now regret? Go and apologize – even if it's not your style. You won't be any less of a man. Your child will admire you for it and you'll be able to heal that relationship. You'll be a better father and a better advocate – dadvocate – for your child. I'm not preaching from on high here, guys – I'm talking from my personal experience. If you think that your child will not respect you for apologizing, or that you'll be less of a man if you do so, you're not living in the 21st century. As fathers, we're not the all-powerful symbols of yesterday, when children weren't supposed to speak unless spoken to, when showing your feelings or apologizing was supposed to be a sign of weakness. Our kids expect that we'll apologize if we make a mistake – which we do. I think we taught them that this is the way the world is supposed to work.

Family Network on Disabilities of Florida, Inc. (The Heart ♥ Network)

2735 Whitney Road, Clearwater, FL 33760-1610

(800) 825-5736 or (727) 523-1130 fax: (727) 523-8687

FND Web Page: <http://fndfl.org> FND e-mail: fnd@fndfl.org

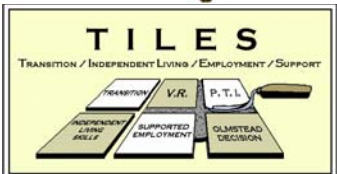
Executive Director: Rich La Belle e-mail: richlabelle@fndfl.org



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Your kids need you and your family needs you. Your wife needs you. Don't let her do all the work for your child – like handling all the medical matters, going to IEP and other meetings by herself, getting up to speed on what your child's rights are. I know she may be willing to do it and that you may think she's better at that kind of stuff than you are. But it takes a toll and we see that toll every day here at FND. The divorce statistics for families of kids with disabilities are in the 85% - 95% range. We believe in strengthening families for many reasons, including that the effects of divorce on children with disabilities are much more serious than on other kids (which we all know are already serious enough). Your involvement will be appreciated.

Your involvement also changes the entire tone of the discussion. We have seen how, time and time again, a mother goes into a meeting asking for certain things and gets rolled over by the authorities on the other side of the table. The father gets involved and, like magic, doors open and the things the mother has been asking for are suddenly agreed to. It shouldn't work like this, but it does. Realize this and get involved for your child.

We need you. I have to be honest, guys. I'm getting lonely. In every meeting I go into – except the Dadvocates workshop – I am a distinct minority. It doesn't matter if it's at the local, state, or national level – I'm usually either the only guy in the room, or one of only two or three. This has to change, and not for any silly sexist reasons. It has to change for the good of our kids. Every child with a disability has a mother and a father. We, as fathers, need to step up.

I know all the reasons why you can't – and I know all the reasons why you can – and why you must. If I did it, you can do it. You don't have to know everything. The only thing you have to know to start being a Dadvocate is that you want to help your child. And – isn't that what a dad is supposed to do, anyway?

Childhood years go by fast enough as it is. If you don't get involved, you're going to miss an opportunity you'll never get back. That's right - I said an opportunity. I consider it to be a great opportunity for me to be able to help my children learn how to lead independent lives and to be the best persons they can be, regardless of whether or not they have a disability.

Start out simple – take your kid to a ballgame. All sports venues should be accessible – and, if they're not, doesn't that really make you mad that you can't share that experience with your child because someone didn't comply with the law? Or take them hunting or fishing.

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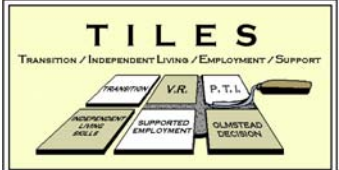
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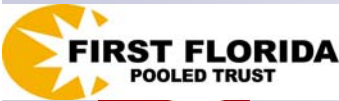
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Check out the Florida Disabled Outdoors Association, www.fdoa.org, 850-201-2944. You'll be amazed. Or take them to the beach. It's still warm enough. Can't get through the sand? Check in with your local Center for Independent Living – www.floridacils.org or www.flailc.org. They can probably hook you up with mobility devices to go through the sand. We recently helped a boy scout attend scout camp over the summer with the help of Caring and Sharing Center for Independent Living here in Pinellas County by getting him a chair that could go through sand and into the water. He was able to participate in all of the typical physical activities that the rest of the scout troop did. He had a great time and the other members of his troop appreciated him being able to join them – and I'm sure they learned a lot, also. My point is that there are options out there. Lots of times, all you have to do is ask. Do you want to talk to other dads who've been through this? Check out www.flafathers.com.

I know it can be difficult, but there's help available. We have partnered with a fantastic organization called All Pro Dad, founded by Tony Dungy. If there is a classier guy than Coach Dungy who's ever walked the face of the earth, I don't know who it is. All Pro Dad – www.allprodad.com - offers very practical, useful, and quick ideas that you can use in your daily life. They have a daily email that takes no longer – literally – than a minute to read. I can't tell you how many times I've used their tips with my family.

Here's their Ten Ways To Be An All Pro Dad:

- Love your wife.
- Spend time with your children.
- Be a role model.
- Understand your children.
- Show affection.
- Enjoy your children.
- Eat together as a family.
- Discipline with a gentle spirit.
- Pray and worship together.
- Realize you're a father forever.

You may not hit on all of them, but they're good, common sense reminders. By the way, we are not endorsing any religion by including #9 here.

C'mon – get in the game. We're waiting for you. Most importantly - so is your child.

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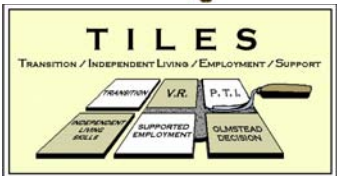
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All Pro Dad is Family First's innovative program helping men to be better fathers. All Pro Dad's 43 NFL spokesmen, multiple NFL seminars, 550 All Pro Dad's Days, and Play of the Day daily emails that reach almost 31,000 fathers each day, all inspire and equip fathers to be actively involved in their children's lives. And every month, over 90,000 fathers log onto AllProDad.com to benefit from insightful fatherhood resources.

Monthly Breakfast

WHAT IS ALL PRO DAD'S DAY?

All Pro Dad's Day is a one-hour monthly breakfast held before school or on a Saturday where fathers and their children meet with other dads and kids at school or a local restaurant. At this gathering they discuss a wide range of family topics, spend time together and are equipped with resources to strengthen their relationship. All the materials provided for your All Pro Dad's Day are FREE OF CHARGE and include:

- A DVD Speaker Library
- Father/Child Discussion Cards
- T-shirts and Hats
- Brochures and Flyers
- Your Own Webpage
- Door Prizes
- Personalized Customer Service

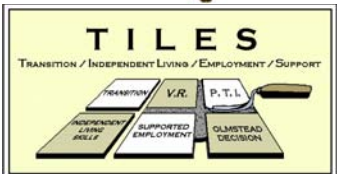
For general comments and questions, please e-mail us at: Bryan@familyfirst.net

All Pro Dad is the fatherhood program of [Family First](#)

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Father's Special Needs Support

I'm a father of a special needs child How do I go about finding support?

Being a father is probably the most important thing a man will ever do. But sometimes we need to ask the question who's 'going to be there for us?

Fathers can cope better if they can get some support and encouragement not just from other fathers but family members and friends. It may seem hard to find information and support for any father let alone a father of a special needs child but there are signs of change happening. There is Fathers who are having a say and are starting to be heard, and they are asking for advice and support not just for their child but for themselves and by this happening gradually fathers groups are starting up all over the country.

But where can I go for help?

There are many sources of information on special needs issues but sometimes you need advice and support at a time to suit yourself but advice and support is becoming more available for Fathers nowadays. Thou I must say that not all of these are welcoming or supportive of fathers, this is why fathers need to feel genuinely understood and valued - and we are often likely to get that from another father

What will I get from a fathers' group?

Most of the fathers groups that are available are concentrating on how the starting point of that group should value what fathers have to offer. But not all groups are the same as us fathers are all different.

Though you will find that some are local groups around and some are national and well-established, you need to check out what is available for fathers in your area, for example some fathers groups meet in fathers own houses. Other groups are mainly social and fun, and activities can involve either fathers alone or fathers with their children, some groups focus on counseling or mutual support, with an emphasis on personal development and understanding the impact of childhood experiences on fathers' relationships with their own children.

For more information on Fathers Groups please contact:

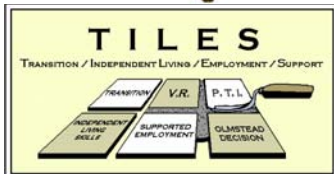
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Father's Support

NATIONAL/STATE RESOURCES

Center for Successful Fathering

www.fathering.org

Offers conferences and workshops throughout the country.

Dads and Daughters

www.dadsanddaughters.org

Support and resources for fathers of girls and advocacy for girls' rights.

Dads at a Distance

www.daads.com

For fathers who are away from their children much of the time.

National Fatherhood Initiative

www.fatherhood.org

Advocates of involved fathers.

301-948-0599

Fathers Network

www.fathersnetwork.org

For fathers of children with special needs

Father Resource Network

www.father.com

Support for fathers facing challenges, such as divorce or incarceration.

National Center for Fathering

www.fathers.com

Research, statistics, advice, tips and online training programs.

Postpartum Dads

www.postpartumdads.org

Information and support for new fathers and dads with depressed partners.

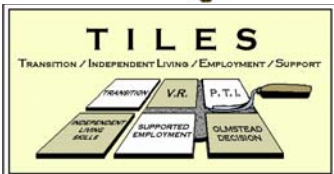
408-268-1098



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SportsAbility is the premier event of the Florida Disabled Outdoors Association (FDOA). This event is about enhancing the lives of people with disabilities by promoting active living. SportsAbility provides first hand access to resources and demonstrations of activities designed to encourage participation regardless of age or ability level.

People who attend SportsAbility learn about the value of recreation and active leisure for everyone – especially people with disabilities. People discover the latest in equipment, trends, and resources. This event provides an opportunity for people to network with people with disabilities, resource providers, and community organizations. There is **NO CHARGE** to participants.

Florida Disabled Outdoors Association

2213 Tallahassee Drive
Tallahassee, FL 32308
850 668 -7323 or (850) 201-2944
850 894 -0875 Fax

Travel aboard a 28' pontoon boat with an experienced Captain Guide. Ideal for families and kids it features a sun protection roof, and sun deck.

This boat is perfect for family outings and is wheelchair accessible. A variety of other activities are available.

Fish in Key Largo

Call: 305-451-2102





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PLEASE HELP SUPPORT FND

All donations are tax-deductible. Please send donations with this form to:
Family Network on Disabilities of Florida, Inc.
2735 Whitney Rd. Clearwater, FL 33760

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| <input type="checkbox"/> \$ 250.00 | <input type="checkbox"/> \$ 25.00 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$ 100.00 | <input type="checkbox"/> Other \$ _____ |

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