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Circuit is a quarterly publication of South Dakota Parent Connection.

Circuit is intended to be a reference publication packed with information and is provided electronically and in printed format.

South Dakota Parent Connection also produces an electronic semi-monthly newsletter (weConnect) with current events and time-sensitive information.

Circuit

Offering information and assistance to parents and families caring for children with a disability or special need.

***In this Issue:
What Parents
Should Know....
About Paving the Way
for a Successful
School Year.***

"A positive parent-teacher relationship helps your child feel good about school and be successful in school.

This positive relationship makes a child feel like the important people in his life are working together."

Diane Levin, Ph.D., Wheelock College



Making the Most of Parent-Teacher Conferences

Reprinted with Permission from the Learning Community

You consult with your doctor about your child's physical health. It's just as important to consult with your child's teacher about academic subjects, social skills and emotional development. Remember, you and the teacher are a team—working together. These tips for parents will help you be better prepared for parent-teacher conferences.

A conference should not be a confrontation. A parent-teacher conference is not an opportunity to list all the deficiencies you see in the teacher, the classroom, and the school system. Nor should it be a time when the teacher lists your failings as a parent and your child's failings as a student.

The conference is an information exchange. You bring to the conference information about your child's interaction with people outside of school, his home life, and previous experiences that might affect confidence or interest in school. The teacher brings information about your child's interaction with others in school, performance on tests, and knowledge of learning strategies. Pooling your information gives you both a better picture of your child's strengths and weaknesses, and lets you develop an effective plan for helping your child succeed.

Conferences help you become a more effective parent. If your child is really learning "nothing" and never has any homework, you need to know why.

(Continued on page 4)

Navigator Program Provides Individualized Guidance for Parents and Schools

The Navigator Program, a partnership between the South Dakota Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs and South Dakota Parent Connection, provides individualized guidance to parents of children and youth with disabilities or special health care needs and school professionals at no cost. Peer Navigator Consultants are located around the state and have expertise in issues related to special education, disability, special health care needs, communication and conflict resolution.

Navigators remain objective and neutral as they:

- Help families understand and participate in the IEP process.
- Help school personnel support family involvement.
- Help parties locate and utilize resources.
- Help parties improve communication.
- Help parties partner to improve results/outcomes for students.
- Help parties reach or make progress towards agreement.
- Help families gain confidence and skills to proceed independently.

While each situation is unique, communication strategies a Navigator might use include (but are not limited to) clarifying views of participants, taking notes, offering suggestions or resources, explaining technical terms, serving as a reality check, focusing on

issues that can be resolved rather than past issues that cannot be changed, helping parties develop and evaluate options, helping parties prioritize issues, and diffusing tension and emotions.

Navigators are not parent advocates, decision-makers, IEP team members or service providers, mediators, compliance advisors or monitors, or legal advisors. When agreement cannot be reached or compliance issues arise, the Navigator will refer parties to the appropriate programs and agencies that can help.

Working with a Navigator is an informal, time-limited, problem-solving process and does not limit a parent's right to use formal processes such as the help of an advocate, filing a complaint, requesting a facilitator or mediator assigned by the state, or filing for a due process hearing.

For information or assistance, please call **1-800-640-4553** or e-mail sdpc@sdparent.org



Building Bridges

SDPC helped guide us through the IEP process and other school-related challenges. We have had professional, resourceful Navigator representatives that encouraged each side of the parent/school relationship to be honest, open and productive.

Parent

We have been very pleased with how we work together as a team. It's been a win/win situation. We love the Navigator! Thank you for your dedication, patience and knowledge while working with the team to meet the needs of the student.

School Representative

Tana Full, Paula Souhrada Join SDPC

Tana Full and Paula Souhrada have joined the SDPC team as Projects Coordinator and Navigator Program Coordinator, respectively.

Paula has been employed in a wide variety of roles at Communication Services for the Deaf beginning in 2000, including program coordination and management positions.

Tana is a recent graduate of South Dakota State University and has experience working with people with disabilities.

Communication Tools for Parents, Students and Educators

Communication is key to building strong relationships with your child's educators. Person-centered thinking offers tools and skills for schools and families to use in special education programs.

Among the core person-centered thinking skills are listening "differently" and using what we hear to help children with disabilities or special health needs be more successful. Person-centered thinking and planning allows those with special needs to have positive control over their lives. If people with special needs are to have self-directed lives within their own communities, then those around them, especially those who do the day-to-day work with them, need to utilize person centered thinking skills.

South Dakota Parent Connection (SDPC) has offered two training programs based on the person-centered thinking model.

Families Planning Together is for families who have a son, daughter or other family member with a disability or special health care need.. The workshop facilitators are parents of children with special needs. The Families Planning Together workshop helps families plan and problem solve; communicate effectively with school personnel, providers and others; and develop a one-page introduction – a great tool to help others "get to know" your family member in a meaningful way beyond the disability. Families are using one page introductions to take to doctor appointments, share with respite providers, teachers and other school personnel.

Families Planning Together is sponsored by SDPC and made possible through a grant from the South Dakota Council on Developmental Disabilities.

Upcoming Families Planning Together Workshops

- **Rapid City, September 23, 5:30 to 8:45 p.m.**
City School Administration Center, 3rd Floor Conference Room, 300 6th Ave.
Register at <http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/HYLW5HT>
- **Sioux Falls, September 26, 5:30 to 8:45 p.m.**
SDPC office, 3701 W. 49th Street, Suite 102
Register at <http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/5CRKDZX>.

If you would like to have a Families Planning Together workshop in your community contact Brenda Smith at mbsmit@msn.com or call SDPC at **361-3171** or **1-800-640-4553**.

With support from the South Dakota Department of Education, SDPC also recently completed a pilot program, Person Centered Thinking for Educators.



SDPC Wants To Hear From You About the FILE



The Folder of Information of Life Experiences (FILE) helps you organize the information you gather, information you need and information you share with others along the way.

SDPC is surveying families who are using the FILE or have used it in the past. Visit <http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/75YSF2Y>

to complete the survey or call **1-800-640-4553** to complete the survey over the phone. Your feedback will help improve the FILE, and support funding to reprint and distribute additional copies. Thank you for completing the survey.

Tips to Make Parent-Teacher Conferences More Effective

(Continued from page 1)

Your child may not understand the class work, she may have vision or hearing problems, or she may be “tuning out” subjects that don’t interest her. Or the “no homework” syndrome may be the result of work that is too easy and quickly done, something more challenging may be called for. Perhaps your child doesn’t understand the importance of homework or is avoiding the responsibility of completing it.

You may initiate a conference with the teacher. You don’t have to wait for an invitation. If the standard answer to “What did you learn in school today?” is “Nothing,” then it’s time for a meeting. If your child is fearful of school or is frequently sick, get together with the teacher to find out why.

The conference makes the teacher more effective. Knowing that “my child is fascinated by stars” may give the teacher the means to excite interest in reading. The more the teacher knows about your child, the better the child’s needs will be addressed.

Parent-teacher conferences let you take part in your child’s education. Knowing what is being taught at school lets you direct the conversation in your family to issues being studied in school. Such reinforcement of school work at home makes a big difference in your child’s understanding, motivation, and school performance.

Tips for Parents to Make Your Conference More Effective

- **Prepare questions in advance.** What groups has my child been assigned to? Is my child finishing the work assigned in class? The most important question of all is “How can I help my child at home?”
- **Let the teacher know if there is a particular topic you want to discuss.** If you want to talk about your child’s progress in reading, let the teacher know. He’ll be able to have test scores, textbooks, and other material on hand to aid your discussion.
- **Be specific.** Bring with you any work that is of concern. Describe clearly any situations in the classroom that make your child uneasy. Ask the teacher to describe your child’s strengths and weaknesses. Ask to see your child’s work.
- **Exchange information.** Let the teacher know about any situation at home that may affect your child’s school work, such as a death in the family, a new baby, or a change in family living arrangements.
- **Take notes.** Your conference may result in several actions for both you and the teacher. Taking notes will help you remember what was discussed and what was agreed upon.
- **Start with a positive attitude.** Don’t waste valuable conference time by focusing on the negative. You and the teacher are a team. Positive comments such as “How can we solve this problem working together?” will be the first step in coming up with good solutions.
- **Support yourself.** If you are not confident about your communications skills, bring someone to help. If your

(Continued on next page)

Why Attend Parent-Teacher Conferences?

- Build a good working relationship with your child’s teacher before problems arise.
- Learn the rules of the class/course and the teacher’s expectations.
- Learn how your child is doing academically and socially at school.
- Share insight on your student that may not be available to the teacher, including observations about school/homework strengths or challenges, social strengths or challenges, and how your child learns/works best.
- Let the teacher know your child is on an IEP/504 Plan and needed accommodations.
- Learn how you can help your child at home.
- Send your child the message that school is important and that teachers/parents work together as a team.



understanding of English worries you, bring a friend to interpret. Or notify the school of your need for an interpreter.

- **Discuss the whole child.** Your child's social and emotional development is as important as academic success. Include questions about her interaction with other children and willingness to participate in class discussions.
- **Allow enough time.** Take time to do the task well. That may mean freeing up your schedule by taking leave time to attend the conference.
- **Leave with a plan.** The conference should end with a clear statement of what you will do and what the teacher will do. Schedule follow-up meetings or telephone calls to be sure the plan is working.

Don't Think You Can Attend or Participate? Try these Tactics to Remove Barriers...

- Ask for a conference date/time that allows you to participate.
- If transportation, childcare or other unmet needs are barriers to participation, ask the school if they can help in some way.
- Ask for a phone conference if you cannot attend in person.
- Inform the school as soon as possible that you need an interpreter. If you cannot fully understand what the teacher is saying or the teacher cannot fully understand you, an interpreter should be utilized. It is an investment in your child's education.

Preparing for an IEP – A Few Suggestions

Being prepared for an IEP meeting can help alleviate stress parents feel and can help to facilitate a successful meeting.

Marshall Peter with the National Center on Dispute Resolution in Special Education offers these tips for parents.

- Prepare notes about what you want to learn/find out at the meeting.
- Prepare notes about what you want your child to learn in school.
- Bring a picture of your child if they won't be attending.
- Use a "If this were your child...?" – questioning strategy.
- Ask for additional time to consider important decisions if you're uncomfortable making them on the spot at the meeting or want to get additional input.
- Look for opportunities to express gratitude to teachers and related staff.
- Bring someone along as a source of support.
- If compromising, define how and when to evaluate if the compromise is working.
- Try to remain calm.
- Saying "I don't know what you mean" is a demonstration of confidence and competence.

To learn more visit
<http://www.directionservice.org/cadre>.

Additional Resources for Parents

<http://www.greatschools.org/search/contentSearch.page?q=parent+teacher+conferences>

<http://www.pacer.org/mpc/pdf/MPC-67.pdf>

<http://www.pacer.org/mpc/pdf/mpc-40.pdf>

If you don't have access to a computer, contact SDPC at **1-800-640-4553** and we will mail you copies of the information.

Thank You SDPC Donors

SDPC Honor Roll of Donors

September 1, 2012 - August 31, 2013



Thank You for making
a difference for me.

Connecting families of children with disabilities or special health care needs to information and resources in an environment of support, hope and respect is at the heart of SDPC's work. Thank you to the individuals and business who supported SDPC's mission and made a difference for children such as Aiden (above).

SDPC was able to double the impact because donors like these rose to the challenge offered by two anonymous donors to match contributions made during November and December. Every contribution made double the difference for families served by SDPC!

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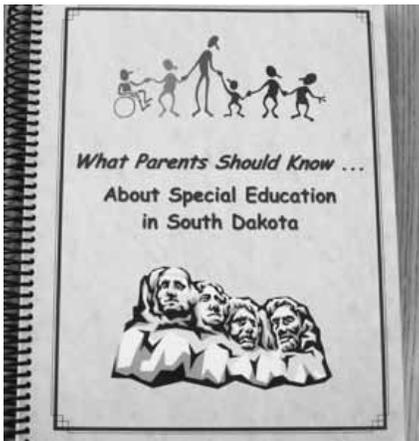
SDPC Receives Excellence Awards

South Dakota Parent Connection received a national Parent Center Standards Excellence Award presented by the Parent Technical Assistance Network. The Parent Center Standards for Excellence were developed by the national Parent Center network of more than 100 Parent Centers funded by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs. The Standards are a self-assessment tool that Parent Centers use to engage in a process of continuous improvement.

In addition, SDPC and South Dakota Advocacy Services have been named one of three exemplar pairs for their long-standing partnership in helping to empower families of children with disabilities. They will be assisting other Parent Training and Information Centers and Protection and Advocacy Systems across the nation to develop successful partnerships to improve outcomes for children with disabilities.



Lisa Sanderson, Associate Director, (left) and Elaine Roberts, Executive Director of SDPC, accept the Parent Center Standards of Excellence Award at the National IDEA Leadership Conference this summer.



Free Reference Guide for Parents

What Parents Should Know About Special Education in South Dakota is an easy-to-understand comprehensive guide that explains laws related to special education. The guide was a collaborative effort of South Dakota Advocacy Services, the South Dakota Department of Education Office of Special Education and South Dakota Parent Connection.

To obtain a free copy call SDPC at **1-800-640-4553** or email sdpc@sdparent.org

If you are one of the thousands of individuals who has received a copy of *What Parents Should Know...About Special Education in South Dakota*, contact at sdpc@sdparent.org or **1-800-640-4553** for updates to pages 150 and 180.

Give Us Your Input

If you are a parent user of the guide who has not yet completed a brief survey about the guide, please do so now.

Visit: <http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/LLKGNHC> or call **1-800-640-4553** to complete the survey over the phone.

Your feedback will help us improve the guide and support funding to reprint and distribute additional copies. Thank you for completing the survey.

Parent Tips... Preparing for Special Education Meetings

- Be sure you understand the purpose of the meeting and who is invited. Review the meeting notice for this information. Is there someone who has not been invited but should attend? If your student should attend, does he/she need any preparation?
- Make a list of your priorities, in order of importance, before the meeting. This will allow you to address the most critical items if time runs out. Provide the list to your case manager and ask that it be included in the meeting agenda.
- If a problem or unmet need is to be discussed at the meeting, decide on what you believe are the important points that should be considered, and why they are most important. Stay focused on these few points as you share your concerns with the team. Bring ideas for possible solutions as well.
- Remember that decisions in special education are based on data. Review your student's most recent IEP, evaluation reports, progress or discipline reports, report cards, graded assignments, notes from the teacher, etc. These documents provide the data that is needed to determine if the current services are supporting the student adequately and areas where additional supports may be needed.
- Avoid blame and finger pointing and focus on ways to improve the situation and support the student.
- Prepare to really LISTEN to the input, concerns and ideas of others. **Educators and service providers have expertise in their fields, parents are the expert on their child. The best decisions are developed when team members work together to help the student succeed in school.**

Apply Now for Partners in Policy Making Year 22

The deadline to apply for Partners in Policymaking Year 22 is almost here. South Dakota Advocacy Services is seeking applications from interested people who have disabilities or who are parents of children with disabilities for the next Partners in Policymaking class. Partners in Policymaking has over 500 graduates in South Dakota and over 8,000 nationwide. Year 22 training sessions will begin in November.

Training sessions are FREE and all participants are reimbursed for mileage. Meals and lodging are provided at no cost to the participant, as well as respite/attendant care. Participants develop a personal network, friendship and alliance with others who have common interests in achieving positive systems change; learn effective leadership skills which can impact disability services at all levels; experience personal growth through contact with national leaders. Participants also experience group exercises and role-playing, class assignments and public policy projects. Partner graduates join a growing international network.

Applications can be obtained by contacting Sandy Stocklin Hook at SD Advocacy Services **1-800-658-4782**, hooks@sdadvocacy.com, or visiting the website at <http://www.sdadvocacy.com>.

Involve Your Child in the IEP Process

From *How Can My Child Be Involved in the IEP Process*, National Family Advocacy and Support Training Project (FAST) © [2010]. Used with permission from PACER Center Inc., Minneapolis, MN, (952) 838-9000. www.pacer.org. All rights reserved.



Children need as much practice in self-advocacy as possible before they turn 18, when parental rights transfer to the special education student, unless guardianship or conservatorship has been established. Self-advocacy skills prepare students for the world and their future beyond high school.

The IEP conference provides an excellent opportunity for self-advocacy and learning important life skills by helping the student:

- Practice goal-setting and teamwork.
- Understand the impact of his or her disability.
- Learn how to ask for and accept help from others.
- Understand his or her own strengths and needs.
- Express his or her own needs and concerns.
- Participate in a process of resolving differences.

Some parents have concerns about involving their children in IEP meetings. Here are some common parent concerns and suggestions on how best to involve your child.

I think my child is too young to participate.

Ask your child if she has anything she'd like you to share at the meeting. Afterward, sit down with your child to explain the goals you and the school discussed for the next year. Talk with your child about these goals before you sign the IEP.

I've never taken my child before.

Discuss the meeting process with your child. Would he like to attend? Would he like to attend part of the meeting (at the beginning to introduce himself and his interests or at the end to review what the team has proposed)? Would your child be willing to share ideas and opinions at the meeting or on paper? How would your child react if something negative were said about him?

My child chooses not to attend.

Discuss what your child would like you to say to the team on her behalf. Consider taking notes to read at the meeting, or read what your child has written. Ask your child:

- What do you want to learn this year?
- What are your special concerns for this school year?
- How do you learn the best?
- What do you need to be successful?
- What would make learning easier for you?

The meetings are too stressful, too negative for my child.

Talk with your child about what he wants to say. Help him phrase and practice statements before the meeting, or help him write notes or an outline of what to say. Consider inviting your child to only part of the meeting. Ask your child to share his strengths, interests, and accomplishments at the beginning of the meeting. You can also let him invite someone who will help him feel more comfortable. If a meeting becomes too difficult for your child, the meeting can be stopped or the child could be allowed to leave.

My child attended, and it didn't work.

Rethink the circumstances and what happened. Can any of the above suggestions be tried? Don't let one incident determine that the child will never participate again.

Available LIVE Online and Through DDN... Parent Education Sessions Focus on Behavior

The **Free Parent Education and Support** series will begin on **Thursday, September 12**, and will be held the second Thursday of the month through May at 7 p.m. (Central Time) 6 p.m. (Mountain Time). Sessions will be available:

- **LIVE Online**

Visit <http://www.sdparent.org> under the Family Life/Parent Education Series tab for details on how to join the live session via the internet or call **1-800-640-4553**.

- In **Sioux Falls** (Wegner Health Center at 1400 W. 22nd Street)
- In **Rapid City** (School of Mines and Technology Classroom Building, 501 S. Saint Joseph Street)
- In **Salem** (McCook Central School, 200 E. Essex)

The sessions are appropriate for all parents and those working with or supporting children with special needs. Child care is not provided. Pre-registration is encouraged, but not required. Register at <http://www.sdparent.org> where you will find materials which may be provided in advance of the presentation and information on future as well as previously recorded sessions. You may also call **605-361-3171** or **1-800-640-4553**.

Upcoming Sessions

September 12

Positive Parenting

Learn how to change child behavior and attitude for the better by rewarding positive behaviors. Parents will learn specific behavioral change techniques that they can use with their own children ages 2-12. Presented by Larry Ling, CSW-PIP, Clinical Therapist, Lutheran Social Services.

October 10

Pick Your Battles — Negotiating With Your Teen or Tween

As your children get older, it becomes increasingly more important that they learn to take responsibility for their actions. Using Collaborative Problem Solving established by Dr. Ross Green, author of "The Explosive Child," presenters will teach you how to work with your child to collaboratively solve behavioral problems. You will learn effective discipline techniques — including appropriate consequences, follow-through and the power struggles to avoid. Presented by Joanna Zimmer-Dingman, MA, Home-based Therapist, and Renee Bracey, MA, Homebased Therapist, Southeastern Behavioral Healthcare, Inc.

November 14-

Relationships Trump Consequences

While children need to be held accountable for poor choices, the caregiver — child relationship should not be compromised in that process. Let's be "present" for children and, if warranted, issue a consequence when the "storm" has passed. Presented by Sue Williams, M.Ed., LPC, LMFT, Program Director, Children's Home Society of South Dakota.

December 12

The Behavior- Communication Connection

The majority of inappropriate behavior in children, adolescents, and adults with developmental disabilities occurs because they are trying to communicate something to us. Individuals who lack an effective way to communicate often exhibit challenging behaviors to communicate wants, needs, and emotions, especially frustration. Behavior Analysts and Speech/Language Pathologists work closely together in order to first determine the reason for the behavior, and second, to teach a skill the person can use instead of exhibiting the behavior. When this process all comes together success is two-fold: Reduction of inappropriate behavior and a new found ability to communicate. This workshop is designed specifically for parents and will provide ample time for questions and discussion. Presented by Vicki L. Isler, Ed.D, BCBA-D & Stephanie Sherard, M.A, CCC-SLP, Children's Care Hospital and School.

The Parent Education and Support series is sponsored by SDPC and the University of South Dakota Sanford School of Medicine Center for Disabilities. For more information, contact SDPC at **1-800-640-4553** or sdpc@sdparent.org.



Follow YOUR Yellow Brick Road to Aberdeen in 2014

If you are a parent or caretaker of a person with a disability or have a disability of any kind, you won't want to miss the 2014 Dare to Dream Conference in Aberdeen from June 8-10, 2014. The mission of the biennial Dare to Dream Conference is to provide people with disabilities and others the opportunity to gain knowledge, enhance skills, develop friendships and have fun! The theme of the 2014 conference is "Follow Your Yellow Brick Road," in recognition of Frank Baum, a former Aberdeen resident and author of the Wizard of Oz. For the latest information about the Dare to Dream Conference, check the Dare to Dream tab at www.sdparent.org.



Individuals and organizations, including people with disabilities and family members, are encouraged to submit proposals for presentations at the conference. **Share your special insight with other attendees.** Submit a proposal to be a presenter by **November 15, 2013**. Download Call For Presentation information or at <http://www.sdparent.org> or call **1-800-640-4553** to have a proposal packet sent to you. To help sponsor Dare to Dream visit <http://www.sdparent.org> or call **1-800-640-4553**.

YOUth Retreats Help Transition to Independence

Transition into adulthood can be challenging for a YOUth with special needs. South Dakota Parent Connection is sponsoring a series of YOUth Retreats across South Dakota. The first retreat will be October 4-5 at Joy Ranch in Watertown. Registration is closed for the Joy Ranch Retreat, but three more are in the planning stages. Any high school freshman through age 21 with a special health care need (diabetes, asthma and many other conditions, hearing or vision impairments or any disability from mild to severe) who wants to be included on the mail list for future YOUth Retreats should call **1-800-640-4553** or email sdpc@sdparent.org and ask to be added to the YOUth Retreat mail list.

The YOUth Retreats are being offered to a YOUth and a parent at no cost. In addition to lots of fun activities, YOUth will have an opportunity to make new friends and be introduced to the MyFILE system, a new record keeping system designed for YOUth moving to adulthood. Each YOUth participant will receive a MyFILE valued at \$40 and will learn how to make the most of the life-long learning tool for managing life experiences.

The MyFILE system was developed through a collaborative effort to assist parents and their transition age YOUth to organize their personal information more independently. The MyFILE is a compact, portable storage for YOUth.

The YOUth Retreat will focus on three of the 20 sections of the MyFILE so that YOUth with the support of their families can take charge of their health care, be prepared for getting a job, and develop independence in maintaining their important records.

The YOUth Retreats are offered by SDPC with support from the South Dakota Department of Health and Lutheran Outdoors of South Dakota. For more information about the YOUth Retreats and the MyFILE, contact SDPC at **1-800-640-4553** or email sdpc@sdparent.org.





SOUTH DAKOTA
ParentConnection
Resources for families of children with disabilities.

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Next Sibshops Will Be November 2



Enjoying Zumba at Sibshops

Thanks to a contribution from Avera McKennan Hospital four Sibshops will be offered in Sioux Falls during the 2013-2014 school year.



The Sibshops program is designed specifically for brothers and sisters, ages 6-12, of children with special needs or disabilities to enjoy friendship, activities and learning together. **The next Sibshops will be held on Saturday, November 2, from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m., at Here4YOUth, 1721 W. 51st Street, Sioux Falls.**

Contact SDPC at sdpc@sdparent.org

sdparent.org, call **1-800-640-4553** or visit <http://www.sdparent.org> (Family Life/Siblings) to register online. Pre-registration is required.

Sibshops is a joint project of South Dakota Parent Connection, Here4YOUth and Childrens Care Hospital and School.

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