

Effective Ways that Regional Center Service Coordinators Can Advocate for Individuals with IDD and Their Families

Summary: Service coordinators can be strong, practical advocates – inside the regional center and across systems – by using the IPP process, documenting needs, coordinating assessments and services, negotiating with vendors/schools/health plans, and connecting families with legal/advocacy resources when needed. Below are specific actions they can take, limits to their authority, a simple step-by-step checklist families can use, and sample language to use when asking the coordinator for help.

What service coordinators can do to advocate

- *Ensure that IPP goals are:* person-centered, measurable, and tied to specific services and timelines. And insist that supports match assessed needs.
- *Document need and functional impact:* gather and add medical reports, therapy notes, behavior assessments, school IEPs, and any crisis/hospital records to the file to justify services.
- *Request and justify Purchase of Services (POS):* prepare and submit well-documented POS requests for funding, justify exceptions or non-routine services, and follow up on authorizations.
- *Arrange assessments and specialist evaluations:* request timely behavior, psychological, adaptive, or medical assessments through the regional center or community providers.
- *Seek interim/emergency support:* request short-term or interim services when there's an urgent need while longer-term plans are developed.
- *Coordinate across systems:* work directly with schools (IEP/transition teams), Medi-Cal, IHSS, county behavioral health, housing agencies, and employers to reduce gaps and streamline supports.

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- *Negotiate provider/vendor issues:* help find vendors, request vendorization of new providers, facilitate meetings between families and providers, and pursue alternatives when a provider refuses or is not a good match.
- *Develop crisis and behavior plans:* coordinate with clinicians to create, fund, and implement behavior support plans and safety/crisis plans.
- *Monitor service quality and compliance:* track delivery against the IPP, document missed services, request corrective action, and ask for provider changes if needed.
- *Use internal appeals and formal process:* explain and initiate the regional center appeal/complaint process, request mediation, or file for a fair hearing when services are denied or reduced.
- *Raise issues with:* a supervisor, clinical director, vendor development, or executive staff; or request expedited reviews for urgent needs.
- *Connect families to external advocacy and legal help when needed.* Refer to Disability Rights California, local Independent Living Centers, parent-run organizations, and other community advocates.
- *Coach family self-advocacy* by preparing families for IPP meetings, teach how to document contacts and outcomes, and model advocacy language.

What service coordinators generally cannot do

- Provide legal representation, give legal advice, or act as an attorney.
- Make legal or financial decisions for a competent adult (unless appointed conservator/guardian).
- Guarantee funding outside regional center policy or beyond available resources (but they can request exceptions and justify them).
- Force a private provider to accept an individual if the provider has a lawful reason to refuse.

Practical step-by-step checklist for families to use with a service coordinator

1. State the problem clearly: what's happening, why it's a safety/quality-of-life issue, and what supports you believe are needed.
2. Ask the coordinator to document the need in the record and to add supporting reports/assessments.
3. Request a specific action and timeline (e.g., "Please submit a POS request for 20 hours/week respite and request an expedited review by X date").
4. Ask for interim supports during review (e.g., short-term respite, emergency behavior services).
5. Get confirmation in writing (email) of what the coordinator will do and by when.
6. If no action or denial: ask for supervisor review, request mediation, and/or file for a fair hearing. Ask the coordinator to document the appeal.
7. If you need legal help: ask for a referral to Disability Rights California or another legal advocate.

Sample language to use with the service coordinator

- "I'm concerned because [describe impact]. Can you add these medical/IEP/behavior reports to the record and request an IPP revision to address this?"
- "Please submit a POS request for [specific service, frequency, provider] and ask for expedited review due to [safety/health/behavioral reason]. Can you confirm submission by email and tell me the expected timeline?"
- "We need interim supports while the POS is reviewed. Can you authorize short-term [respite/behavior support] until the main request is decided?"
- "If the request is denied, please initiate the appeal process and provide the notice of action so we can consider mediation or a fair hearing."

If you need to ask for more help

- Ask to speak to the coordinator's supervisor, the clinical director, vendor development, or the regional center's executive team.

- Use formal remedies: request mediation or file for a fair hearing (Lanterman Act protections).
- External advocates: contact Disability Rights California (protection & advocacy), local parent/family support organizations, and county advocates. They can provide legal advice, help prepare for hearings, or represent rights.
- Document everything: keep dates, names, copies of reports, emails, and notes of calls – this is crucial for appeals.

Examples of common advocacy actions

- Securing behavior support teams and positive behavior support plans tied to funding.
- Getting residential placement or supported living authorizations when home care is no longer safe.
- Vendorizing a new, culturally or linguistically appropriate provider.
- Coordinating transition from school to adult services and linking to employment supports.
- Getting assistive technology or environmental modifications justified and funded.

Sources

- [Lanterman Developmental Disabilities Services Act](#) (California Welfare & Institutions Code, Division 4.5).
- California Code of Regulations, Title 17 (regulations implementing the Lanterman Act). Title 17 is searchable via the [California Office of Administrative Law](#)
- [California Department of Developmental Services \(DDS\)](#)
- [Disability Rights California \(DRC\)](#)