

DIVORCED PARENTS AND FAMILY DISAGREEMENTS: PLANNING FOR ANGELA

Background: Angela, who has AHD, has just turned 16 and is in her first year in your secondary vocational program. You are considering a variety of work experiences for her, but you are faced with a difficult family situation. Angela's parents have gone through an adversarial divorce, and they are not on speaking terms with each other. Her mother has legal custody and regularly attends parent-teacher conferences and IEP meetings, and she communicates often using a notebook that goes between home and school. Her father has child-support responsibilities and visitation rights, and he has expressed an interest in being kept informed of what is happening with his daughter.

Angela's mother is concerned with Angela's functional academic and socialization skills. She has strongly expressed her preference that Angela stay in school and spend her days attending general education classes, such as home economics, child development, computing, and reading.

Angela's father wants his daughter to spend as much time working as possible and has a friend who owns a clothing store. The friend has told Angela's father that Angela will have a job there when she graduates. The father believes that if Angela begins vocational training now, she can graduate at 18 and go to work at the clothing store.

Angela spent part of last year working in an office. She was very proud of her job, but she was sad when school ended and she was no longer working. Angela has expressed her desire to work again. Lately, she has been moody and disruptive.

Issue: Whose Preferences Are Acted Upon?

Discussing this issue with both parents is going to be difficult. They are at opposite ends of the spectrum, yet both have valid reasons for their positions. Whatever your decision, you are concerned with siding with one parent or the other. In addition, respecting Angela's preference, who appears to be making an informed decision, is crucial.

You want to get together with Angela, her parents, friends, advocates, and other professionals to formulate a picture of what Angela's life could look like and to develop an action plan; however, bringing together Angela's parents in a large-group situation may prove extremely difficult or detrimental to the process as a whole.

- What are your options?
- What are pros and cons of each?
- What exactly will you do?