



Communication in the Special Education Process

Individualized Education Program (IEP) meetings and other school meetings are crucial parts of a child's educational program. A parent's responsibility extends beyond giving consent and accepting explanations. Asking questions, bringing up issues to discuss, gathering information, and clarifying points are all part of the parent's role.

Parents can bring someone else to the special education meetings. All participants are working together to benefit the child. The parent is a very important member of the team.

Effective communication is two-way, generating the understanding and support the professionals and the parents all need to make effective decisions about the child's educational program. To foster meaningful communication, parents can:

- Make sure the focus stays on the child.
- Be prepared. Know in advance the important points to discuss and questions to ask. Write them down and check them off as they are addressed.
- Listen. Listening will help you gather information about your child and help you understand other viewpoints.
- State your issues clearly. Communicate in an honest and direct manner.
- Ask questions. Asking questions can be an effective way of clarifying a point and keeping the line of communication open.
- Comments and questions should be directed to the person who can best address or answer them.
- Restate your concerns if you are not heard the first time.
- Be confident. A parent never has to feel guilty or embarrassed asking questions or assertively pursuing the appropriate services for the child. It is your role and your right.
- Work together. Remember that neither you nor the professionals have all the answers. Work together as a team to find solutions. Everyone at the meeting has the same goal — to provide an appropriate educational program for the child.

The key to effective communication is preparation and willingness to be actively involved in planning the child's educational program.