



## **A Few Ideas for Communicating with Your Child's School and IEP Team**

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*Students are best served when every member of their Team -- their teachers, parents, therapists, and others – are all working together to meet that student's goals. Making this happen is not easy, and it requires clear communication, trust, and collaborative problem-solving when there are disagreements. Here are some tips for how to make that happen.*

### **Written Communication:**

- **Write your Parents Concerns and Vision Statement for the IEP** – email it so it can be input directly into the IEP
- **Write a letter documenting agreements and concerns:** sent to Team Leader, Special Ed Director, Superintendent, Principal, teachers, etc.
- **Create a Parents Report for your Meeting** – include your concerns, observations, direct input from your child. Also include your child's interests and extracurricular activities so teachers know what is motivating for your child. Circulate it to your IEP Team before the meeting
- **Share your Parent's Agenda for Meeting:** send it to your Team Leader in advance so s/he can ensure that the Team discusses things that are important to you.
- **Share Your own Meeting Notes:** distribute to the whole Team for clear communication and reminders of commitments made
- **Write a Summary of your child's History:** this can be especially helpful when transitioning to a new school or new Team.
- **General Strategies in Written Communications:**
  - Be clear, concise and consistent
  - Be respectful
  - If you are emotional, sleep on it – or have a friend or spouse read it before you send it out
  - Know when to send an email and when to mail a letter, make a phone call or call a Team meeting

## Verbal Communication:

- **Remember that How you Say It Matters!** Research shows that 55% of what is perceived and understood by others is based on your body language; 38% is based on how you say your words and only 7% is based on the actual words spoken!
- **Be an Active Listener:** make people feel that they are being heard and valued. Provide some feedback so they know you are listening
- **Use Reflective Listening skills:** paraphrase what you have heard to confirm understanding. Reflect on the perceived emotions of others. Summarize what others have said to paint a larger picture.
  - Example: "What I am hearing you say is that Susan needs more help in..."  
"Based on what has just been said, it sounds to me like the sense of the Team is..."
- **Ask Questions!** As a parent, one of your legal obligations is to provide "informed consent" when agreeing to an IEP. In order to be informed, you need to ask clarifying questions so you understand what you will be asked to sign. Questions can also open up conversations: "How do we make that happen?"

## Barriers to Effective Communication:

- **Attacking** (Interrogating, Criticizing, Blaming, Shaming)
- **"You" Messages** – telling someone what you think they should do. Better to use "I think it would be more effective to..." and define why, then allow them to respond.
- **Nonverbal barriers** like eye rolling, arms and legs crossed, doodling, excessive fidgeting with materials.

### *Want to learn more?*

*Attend a Special Education PAC Meeting where Easthampton parents help one another navigate special education! We usually meet on the second Wednesday of the month in the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor conference room at 50 Payson Ave. Email us so we can let you know about future meetings and workshops!*

*For More Info: [www.easthamptonsepac.org](http://www.easthamptonsepac.org) or email [pac@epsd.us](mailto:pac@epsd.us)*



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