

Communicating about Services for your Child

Parents can bring someone else with them to most meetings. All participants are working together to benefit the child.

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. This includes involving the child in the meeting, if appropriate. It is a great example for a child to see parents and professionals working together for the child's benefit.