

Top 10 Tips: Ideas to Improve Parent-to-Professional Communication from PACER Parent Advocates

PACER's parent advocates often hear from parents when they encounter certain statements or situations at school meetings that they find uncomfortable or uncertain. These tips are suggestions and techniques from PACER advocates to help parents address some of those concerns, as well as improve communication with school staff.

You may already use some of these approaches while others may be new ideas to consider:

1. If school staff presents a new idea that you may be interested in, you may want to ask, "What will it take to make that happen?"
2. If a school IEP team member expresses something that you think may be an opinion, you may want to ask, "Is that an opinion or do you have data I can see to support it?"
3. If you are uncertain about something in your child's school day, you may want to ask, "What does this look like in Johnnie's day?"
4. If a school IEP team member says, "Your son refuses to ___," you may want to ask, "Is that something he *can't* or *doesn't know how* to do rather than *refuses* to do?"
5. If a school staff member says, "We don't have the money to do that," you may say, "I understand that the school district has financial concerns. However, we are here to talk about what my child needs for a free, appropriate public education." Or you might say, "Please put that in writing for me."
6. If you are trying something new, you may want to ask, "How will we know that it is working?" and "How will data on success be collected?"
7. If you want input from all team members, you may want to ask, "What is your professional opinion?"
8. If an important agreement, decision, or promise is made, ask to have it put into writing.
9. If you are bringing a problem to the

IEP team that needs solving, try to clearly present the problem and then brainstorm solutions with the team.

10. If a school staff member says, "We don't know (the answer to a particular question, concern, problem, or issue)" without offering a way to find the answer, you may want to ask, "Who can we invite to the meeting to help find the answer?"

BONUS Tips (We couldn't stop at 10!)

11. Ask a question once and then listen for the answer.
12. Keep the main thing the main thing. Too many details may only distract from your priorities.
13. When action is required, always ask who will be responsible for seeing that it is done.
14. Thank the members of the IEP team or specific teachers whenever possible and appropriate.