



# How can I communicate better with my child's IEP Team?

Effective communication is an art and a skill. You communicate well when you are confident in your information and are emotionally relaxed. During Individual Education Plan (IEP) meetings you may not always feel this way. You may not understand some of the information and you may feel emotional since you are discussing your child. However, there are things you can do to help you communicate more effectively.

Each of us has our own communication style. It is important to be yourself while also thinking about ways you might adjust your communication for the situation. Sometimes the best way to bring up a concern is to ask a question. This gives the other person an opportunity to problem-solve rather than putting them on the defensive. Here are some tips from other parents:

**Build agreements** – *We all agree that Sam's grades are poor partially due to incomplete homework. Since we know that Sam's ADHD makes it hard for him to focus at night, can we also agree that Sam needs strategies to use his directed studies time more wisely?* Look & listen for consensus.

**Use and ask for facts/data/references** – *Can anyone provide information on recommended reading programs for students who have Jennifer's particular difficulty? Who in the district could help us find an intervention that might be more effective?*

**Repeat/reflect to confirm** – *Do I hear you correctly that you think Sam is choosing not to do his work and that if he tried harder and we were stricter at home this would not be a problem?*

**Ask and/or name what is going on** – *Everyone is very quiet – is there something else that needs to be said? Or My sense is that not everyone agrees with this decision. Does anyone else have that feeling?*

**Acknowledge the positive and express appreciation** – *I really appreciate your efforts this year to help Sam stay on task and feel better about himself at school.*

**Take a break** – *I need to think about this and would like a short break.* If you feel overwhelmed or too emotional it is a good idea to step outside for a few minutes and gather your thoughts or speak with your support person.

In general, keep any communication, whether spoken or written, short and to the point. Use language that is respectful. Email can be a useful communication tool because it is quick and it can document your communication. However, using email has pitfalls: sending too many emails, emails that are too long, or writing and sending emails in a rush.

Your communication is the foundation of your relationship with the professionals who are working with your child in school. It is important to establish and maintain a positive relationship. You can be both assertive and considerate as you share concerns, suggestions and appreciation.



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