Improving Communication

TIPS FOR PARENTS

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Listen. Don't put up walls by assuming you won't like what you hear. Try to keep an open mind even if your views differ from those of the educators. The better you hear and understand their point of view, the better equipped you are to challenge it if you disagree.

Boil it down to the essentials and build from there. If you try to deal with too many issues, none get the attention they need, so prioritize. Focus on the most crucial points now and work your way down the list over time.

Put the really important stuff in writing. Taking the time to write a formal letter to make a request helps you organize your thoughts and evidence, creates a clear record, and lets educators know this is an issue you take very seriously.

Ask for clarification whenever you need it. Be persistent in asking questions and expecting good answers to them. It is very difficult to be comfortable in your own decisions or confident in the opinions of educators if you do not understand what they proposing for your child and why.

Expect and be open to full explanations of the reasons educators have for recommending a particular course of action for the child. If they have a well-developed plan for how they believe your child should be taught, they will be able to explain the plan to you in a way that makes it understandable to you.

Know your own emotional triggers. Do your best to think through situations that you know are upsetting to you and plan for how you can respond or calm yourself in the moment. Write down key points ahead of time so that if your emotional buttons get pushed you have something in mind to fall back on and help keep you focused.

Ask for time for careful consideration of the options when you feel you need it. Educators often complain that parents agree with them at meetings and then go home and change their minds. If you feel you need more time to make a decision, don't allow yourself to be pressured into instant action.

Give educators a chance. You will probably never get what you consider to be the perfect plan for your child, but recognize when it's time to give a reasonable plan a try. Just because you accept an offer, it doesn't mean you can't ask to make changes or try something else if it proves less than successful. Acknowledge their efforts.

Give things time to work. If you are frustrated by a child's lack of progress or have reservations about a proposed program, it's hard to wait to see improvement, but few techniques or strategies show dramatic change overnight. Most programs need time to test their effectiveness for an individual child. If the approach to learning is changed too often, your child may just become confused and you may not be able to identify what works and what doesn't.