

Communication Tips

For Families of Children with Disabilities



Looks like...



Sounds like...

Know Your Child



Providing school staff with information about your child's strengths, talents, interests, and gifts.



"We'd like to make you aware of the many good things about our child. We think it will be very important in planning for his/her academic, social, and emotional growth this year."

Clearly expressing your family's future dreams for your child.

"Jake just spent his first overnight with his grandparents last week and he helped my dad paint a boat. He's such a smart kid and we all believe he'll eventually be able to be an independent and happy adult. That's our goal for him."

Sharing what you know works best for your child.

"My child learns best when he is given extra time to process information and communicate his needs. He always responds to others when given choices."

Know Your Child's Right to an Inclusive Education



Sharing resources about inclusive education with your child's education team and school administrator.



"Have you considered contacting the Florida Inclusion Network (FIN) for free resources and school-based assistance? They have lots of information and ways to help teachers plan and implement responsible inclusion. Check out their website for more information: www.FloridaInclusionNetwork.com."

Voicing your concern for all children's needs, not just those of your child.

"We'd like to make inclusion a natural part of the school culture so that all children get the support they need, learn to the best of their ability, and value differences."

Gathering and sharing information on the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 2004 and the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB).

"We know that our child's educational needs are supported by IDEA and NCLB. Inclusion can help schools meet their improvement goals by using existing resources to support all kids."

Working and Communicating Positively with Your School Staff



Contacting your child's school as early as possible.



"I'd like to meet before next school year to plan for my child's transition to _____ grade and his/her support needs."

Asking to be part of the decisions that school staff make about your child. Make special appointments to talk about specific concerns or problems.

*"I'd like to join the team as they plan the lesson for the field trip next week. I think I can provide some ideas for my child."
"I'm concerned about some homework assignments my child is bringing home, what would be a good time to discuss this?"*

Participating in family-school activities and/or committees.

"I'm available to volunteer for your PTA, School Advisory Committee, Booster Club, Family Resource Room, etc."

Making an effort to understand the system's demands on the school staff.

"Can you tell me what kind of support you are getting for common planning time with the regular education teachers? What extra duties are you responsible for during the school day? How can I advocate for YOU?"



Working and Communicating Positively with Your School Staff

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Recognizing that teachers have unique learning needs too. They come with varied experiences that form their attitudes and beliefs.

Listening to others with an open mind and offering your ideas.

Recognizing the teacher's expertise.

Taking a step-by-step approach to problems and offering your ideas for solutions. Agree with others that things can change over time.

Sending positive notes to staff. Let them know you care about their efforts to educate your child and want to build a positive relationship between school and home. Agree upon a common system of communication.

Jotting down notes before, during, and after you meet with your child's education team members. Use concrete and specific examples when you share concerns.

Asking questions to understand both sides of an issue. Get a second opinion from another teacher or school administrator.

Reminding people of your child's strengths.

Keeping your child's behavior in perspective.



"What are some things that you think you'd like more information about? By sharing resources, I know we can learn more about how to support my son/daughter in an inclusive classroom."

"I agree that my child needs to improve his/her reading comprehension. Can we adjust his/her schedule so that he/she will receive intensive instruction during the regularly scheduled reading block?"

"I know you are a highly able teacher who has lots of things to juggle every day! Please let me know how I can help you."

"I'm not sure this strategy will work with my child, so let's talk about this again in _____ weeks. If this doesn't work, I have another idea that we could try."

*"We really think your extra efforts are paying off for my son/daughter. He/she has never enjoyed going to school until now!" "I'm thrilled with my child's progress this year, but would like to know how I can do more to help at home."
"What's the best way for us to regularly communicate throughout the year?"*

"I'd like to share some concerns from our last conversation. I think there may be some misunderstanding about my son's/daughter's communication support needs. He/she needs to have a special switch in order to communicate his/her choices. He/she uses this device at home to share his/her daily clothing preferences."

"I'm not sure I understand why my son/daughter has been placed in a different reading program. Can you please explain what you are basing this decision upon? I think I would also like to talk to the Reading Coach about my concerns."

Please remember that the disability is just a part of who my child is. He/she has many strengths and unique characteristics."

"Is what my child doing typical for kids his/her age or is this something to do with his/her disability?"

Believing That Your Voice and Your Child's Voice are Important!



Getting and staying involved in your child's educational experience.

Sharing what you know with others.

Publicly supporting inclusive education.

Remembering that, no matter how difficult things may get, the focus is always on your child. Use "The Empty Chair" activity to keep your child at the center of all discussions and decisions.



"I know that I have a lot to contribute to my child's educational process."

"I would like to join parent groups and help others understand how inclusion can work!"

"How can we share the benefits of our partnership with others in our community?"

"I know we got off to a rocky start this year, but I'd like to see if we can regroup to talk about our ideas for my child's future goals and dreams."