

Overcoming Communication Barriers

Parents need to develop specific strategies to improve their ability to work beyond barriers to parent/professional communication.

As parents, you need to be able to feel comfortable utilizing the skills necessary to communicate and work cooperatively.

Another important thing to recognize is that even when you have a positive relationship with a professional, there may be times when communications may break down. If you have made attempts at communication and still have not made progress or don't feel comfortable, be aware that you can seek out other professionals who may be more sensitive. Remember, being assertive, not aggressive, is an important part of communication and case management. There are three steps to bridging gaps in communication:

1. Acknowledging the problem - bring it out in the open between parent and professional.
2. Keep the focus child-centered -relate the problem to how it impacts your child and family (your case management role.)
3. Use connecting/positive language - use language that moves toward communication.

Here are some examples using the methods described above.

Sometimes professionals use jargon (unfamiliar language) when dealing with parents. Parents often do not confront this issue and just remain silent. Dealing with this in an assertive, communicative manner, a parent might say:

Acknowledge the problem When you use professional jargon...

Keep the focus child-centered ...It is difficult for me to understand
what my child's problems are.

Use connecting/positive language Can you use language that is understandable so we
can work more closely together?

Avoid aggressive statements or ways of dealing with the problem. An aggressive statement may sound something like this:

"You professionals are all alike! Do you deliberately use language like that so I can't understand what's going on?"



Children will often know when there is tension or poor communication between parents and professionals. Children may use this gap in communication to get attention and distract from what they should be doing. Dealing with this in an assertive, communicative manner, a parent might say to the professional:

Acknowledge the problem

My child has been coming home lately with some interesting stories about what is going on in the classroom.

Keep the focus child-centered

I get the feeling he/she may be trying to get some attention.

-or

Use connecting/positive language

How can we work together to stay in communication on a daily basis?

Sometimes, even people in your heart network may disappoint or anger you. It is important to be up-front about these feelings too. Don't hold grudges. A parent might say this:

Acknowledge the problem

When you did not tell me about the IEP meeting until the day before...

Keep the focus child centered

...I felt frustrated because I wanted to stay involved...

Use connecting /positive language

...and it's important to me to maintain the trust we've built together.

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