

Introductions Building Bridges

How to Make and Sustain Meaningful and Productive Relationships between Parents and Educators

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Purpose of Presentation

- Offer a fresh perspective on the critical and dynamic relationship between the parent of disabled child and the teacher (both regular and special education)
- Provide ideas for developing a meaningful and purposeful relationship
- Offer ideas for sustaining the relationship along with suggested communication tools

“Welcome to Holland”

A poem by Emily Pearl Kingsley

- Understanding the parent’s perspective
- Understanding perspective of service provider

The Goal: An Optimum Relationship

The optimum relationship between parents and educators is one based on mutual respect and collaboration. It involves a commitment and willingness to share information and ideas, to “think outside the box,” and to challenge ourselves to look at children with disabilities in a new way.

How can we make and sustain relationships?

Need to develop understanding of and respect for one another

- Each member of the team has a unique perspective
- Respect each other’s position and expertise
- How does any relationship begin? Introductions; make no assumptions, ask questions
- Explore commonalities
 - Personal
 - Professional
 - Ultimately, both are committed to the educational and social well-being of the child
- You don’t have to like someone to be able to work effectively with them
- Do not be judgmental
 - Often parents of children with disabilities feel that the whole world judges them; you don’t have the experience of living with the child 24/7
 - Recognize the parent’s frustration and the need for support
- Understand that the parent is the expert on their child; they can provide you with a wealth of information if they trust you and believe you to be working in the best interests of their child

Determine what you want and need from each other

- Communication-who, what, when, and how
 - What are your preferences?
 - What are the parent's preferences?
 - How can you get hold of one another in an emergency?
 - What should and should not be shared?
 - Parents should share information concerning changes in medication, diet and sleep habits; information on and from outside providers (including allowing teachers to speak and communicate directly with them); and any events that occur at home or in the community.
 - Teachers need to be poised to share events and observations from school that directly or indirectly affect the student and their IEP goals. Sometimes this may mean bringing attention to something that has not been discussed but could pose a problem for the student (eg. collecting data on inattention may indicate the need for outside testing or consultation).
 - Teachers provide information that is meaningful and easily understood; provide data. Develop a recording or communication tool for the parents that will give you what you want.
- Tools of the trade
 - Notebook
 - Daily/Weekly email
 - Written reports/forms or print-outs
 - Daily log (see example)
 - Phone calls
 - Conferences/team meetings

Where do problems occur?

- Breakdown in Communication
 - Ineffective communication tool
 - Too much or not enough
 - Disrespectfulness from either party
- Loss of focus on IEP goals
- Hidden Agendas

What to do when the process breaks down?

- Try and talk it through, often a simple misunderstanding can be rectified though left unaddressed the situation can fester and get a lot worse
- If possible, WAIT! Think about what needs to be done and what you need to say and sit on it for awhile
- Don't take it personally
- Bring in outside help to mediate (school principal, guidance counselor, or school psychologist)
- Remember: mending fences is easier and less costly than repairing a bridge

The Bottom Line

Both parents and teachers want what is best for the child. Embrace it and recognize that we are all on the same team! Respect one another, including differences in opinions and approaches. Be a resource and a source of support for one another.