

Communication

COMMUNICATION

“*Communicate regularly with your child’s teacher. Network with other parents, social workers, and so on.*”

As a parent of a child with special needs, you will have to make a variety of decisions throughout your child’s education. The issues that may affect your child are as many and diverse as there are children.

Research tells us that both parents and teachers feel ongoing communication is vital to the success of a child’s education. While no one would question the need for parent involvement, almost everyone would have a different definition of the nature of this involvement. Clearly, a strong parent-teacher relationship needs trust, mutual respect, open communication, active listening, flexibility, and shared responsibility.

Asking Questions

During your child’s years in school, issues may arise regarding your child’s education or programming plan, learning needs or styles, assessment, learning supports, school attendance, social or behavioural expectations, and so on. Whether you are planning to meet with your child’s classroom teacher, the school team, or others working with your child, it is important to prepare for the meeting. The following questions are examples of what you may wish to ask when discussing your child’s progress or other issues of concern.

“*Check out the policies and practices in your school and school division. Ask what the policy is regarding school hours, school days, and end-of-June exam time.*”

Questions to Ask

1. Is my child working at or meeting the grade level outcomes? If not, why not? What would be the best way to proceed?
2. Is my child meeting the outcomes outlined in his or her individual education plan (IEP)? If not, why not? What would support my child’s learning?
3. What do the scores or marks mean?
4. Is my child receiving adaptations or modifications to his or her work?
5. Does my child have major strengths or weaknesses in specific subject areas that I don’t know about?
6. How would you describe my child’s learning style?
7. What supports does my child need to learn? What strategies have worked well for my child?
8. Is it necessary for my child to go out of the classroom for resource help for periods of time? Why?
9. Has my child completed class assignments?
10. Has my child been attending classes regularly?
11. Are there any potential social issues with peers that I need to be aware of?
12. Does my child need a referral to the school resource teacher, speech-language pathologist, psychologist, reading clinician, or guidance counsellor? What would be involved with the referral and how would that affect my child’s programming?
13. What is the educational assistant’s role with my child? How do I communicate with the educational assistant?
14. What can I/we do at home to support my/our child’s learning?

Resolving Differences

“ *When strong emotions are aroused, it is easy for misunderstandings to occur.*

Don't be afraid to ask questions.

Be open and honest.

Use humour—it helps.

Challenge respectfully.

”

When you have questions or concerns about your child's programming, it is important that you address the issues with those who are involved. Try to resolve issues at the local school level:

- Contact your child's classroom teacher first. Share your concerns with the teacher or ask questions to find out more about the issues.
- Include the important members of the school team.
 - Speak to the school guidance counsellor or resource teacher about issues that may include them.
 - Bring issues to the attention of the school principal, as required.

If the issues cannot be resolved at school, you may wish to contact the student services administrator or superintendent at the school division office.

Disagreement or misunderstanding between families and schools is a natural and inevitable part of a system that strives to be inclusive. The existence of issues between parents and schools is neither good nor bad. When solutions are sought in a fair and respectful way, it is often possible to resolve disagreements in a positive manner.

There are, however, many possible approaches to resolving disagreements. Everyone benefits when issues are resolved locally. Children with special needs benefit from an education that addresses their learning needs. Parents and educators benefit from a strengthened working relationship and a better understanding of others' interests and needs.

For More Information...

See “Suggested Communication Contact List” in the Additional Information section of this handbook.