

G: Parent Advocacy Frequently Asked Questions about Sharing Information

Under provincial and federal legislation, service providers, schools and community agencies must protect personal information and maintain confidentiality about your child and your family. A copy of the privacy policy for the organizations can be requested. Information about children who attend publicly funded schools is maintained in the Ontario School Record (OSR), and there are strict limits on what information is included in the OSR and who can access the information.

Community agencies cannot share information with schools without your consent. Parents control the information they share about their child and who will have access to the information. There are, however, lots of good reasons to share information about your child. Detailed, relevant information will lead to better quality programming and supports for your child.

It is most important that parents understand the purpose of sharing information and who will have access to the information. The following frequently asked questions and answers are provided to help parents understand issues related to sharing information.

Who do parents need to share information with?

The *Principal* needs to know about your child, as principals are responsible for allocating resources at the school level, making referrals for additional services, developing an Individual Education Plan (IEP) and starting the Identification, Placement and Review Committee (IPRC) process.

The *Classroom teacher* needs to know about your child, as teachers are responsible for the daily program and they want to provide your child with an effective learning program. *Professional staff* at the school, such as Speech-Language Pathologists, may need assessment results and information about interventions in order to develop effective classroom programs.

Note: Classroom teachers can't share information about your child with the other children in the class or their parents. If you want information shared with other students or parents you will need to discuss the purpose and process with the teacher and the principal.

What information do parents need to share?

Information about a child's diagnosis or needs should be provided with information about how it will affect the child's health, behaviour or learning. In addition, information should be shared about how to help the child, including strategies for treatment and managing behaviour.

Information about your child's strengths, interests and home life will also help the school staff. The child's interests can be used to make the classroom activities more interesting for the child. Strengths such as a good memory or great drawing skills can be used to increase the child's success in the classroom.

The *About My Child* or *All About Me* booklets can be very helpful. Including a photograph of your child will help everyone to focus on the individual and not just the diagnosis.

How do parents need to share information?

Information should be shared in writing by completing forms or sharing reports. It may also be shared verbally at meetings or case conferences, during home visits or during individual appointments with school staff. Information can also be shared in a childcare setting or preschool program if the school staff is able to visit.

Why do parents need to share information about their child?

Professionals, community agencies and school staff need information about your child in order to assess the child's needs and develop plans to help and support your child. Professionals, such as Doctors, Speech-Language Pathologists and Physiotherapists need detailed health and behaviour information in order to assess or diagnose the child, and develop a treatment or intervention plan.

Staff at the child's day care or school need information to ensure your child is safe and able to learn. They also need to know about your child's treatments or interventions that they will need to follow on a regular basis.

When do parents need to share information?

School and child care staff prefer to have information before a child starts a new program to make sure that they have all the necessary supports and services in place from the first day. Some children will require a lot of services or supports, and the earlier the school staff have the information, the more likely they will be able to obtain extra resources. If school alterations need to be made to accommodate wheelchair access or a change table, planning will need to start many months in advance.

School staff involved in planning for transition to school would like to know about a child with special needs in the year before they start school. Parents should contact their neighborhood school in the late fall and early winter.

What about assessment reports and other documents prepared by professionals and community agencies?

Verbal and written reports can only be shared between agencies or with schools if you provide consent to the release of information. Each professional will ask you to sign a form that gives legal "consent to release information". The term "consent" acknowledges that as a parent or guardian, you have the authority to allow a professional to share information with another party on behalf of your child for a specific purpose. It is basically giving permission for professionals to share information with each other about your child.

The Consent for Release of Information should clearly indicate what information will be shared and with whom the information will be shared with.

Occasionally you may be asked to provide verbal consent for sharing of information. The request will usually be followed with a written document for you to sign confirming that you have provided consent.

Remember: *Information about your child will help the school to prepare for your child and make sure that supports and services are in place when your child starts school. Effective planning and preparation will lead to increased success for your child at school. Meeting and sharing information with the school on a regular basis will also make it easier to develop the programming that best meets your child's individual needs, and will establish positive and effective communication between yourself and the school.*