

G: Parent Advocacy Strategies for Effective Partnerships at School

Establishing positive working relationships with the members of your in-school team is essential to an effective transition to school for your child.

1. Communication is the key to successful partnerships. Include all those people who have valuable input and information about your child, therapies, and their progress:

- Speech-language pathologist
- Audiologist
- Early Interventionist
- Psychologist
- Occupational therapist
- Physiotherapist
- Neurologist
- Developmental pediatrician
- Babysitter
- Tutor
- Preschool teacher
- Family members

2. Share information about your child if it will help your child to be successful. This does not just apply to childcare or school settings. For example, if your child has low muscle tone around the mouth, and is taking swimming lessons, the child may be physically unable to blow bubbles, which is a requirement when taking swim lessons.

3. Work together with the school towards your common goal: setting up your child for success in school.

- Define clear, relevant goals for your child
- Establish roles for each team member; if you are not sure why someone is there, ask!
- Work together to problem-solve and set up the best solutions for the issues at hand
- Set timelines; how long will we try the new approach? When will we meet again?
- Assign responsibilities

4. Communication from school to home usually happens much more often than communication from home to school. To get the most from your school you need to take responsibility for changing this.

5. To develop a good relationship with benefits for all, communicate positive information with the teacher, rather than only getting in touch when there is a problem.

Here are some benefits of 2-way communication:

- Learn about your child's progress
- Learn about your child's difficulties
- Clear up misunderstandings
- Learn what you can do at home
- Learn about how your child is developing socially and emotionally
- Learn about how your child behaves in class and the discipline that is used
- Learn about what is expected of your child
- Learn about the teaching strategies used
- Get to know the teacher personally
- Share information about your child... interests, attitude towards school, likes and dislikes, talents, and abilities, etc.
- Help the teacher to understand how your child learns, and important assessment facts
- Give the teacher feedback on her positive impact on your child
- Develop plans together
- Resolve conflicts

4. Be informed about what you need to know. To help your child you need to know about your child, about the school system and about what your child needs to be successful.

- Your child's special needs – is there a diagnosis? Do you understand it? What are the functional and/or academic problems associated with this condition?
- What are your child's strengths – socially, personality, character, academic talents and abilities?
- What are your child's learning needs? What is his/her learning style? Which teaching strategies work best for your child to learn? What coping strategies does your child use? Does your child have special technologies that help him/her in the classroom environment? How are your child's social skills? Can your child ask for help?

5. Communication with the school can take many forms:

- Meetings
- Notes
- E-mails
- Voicemail messages

In all forms of communication, be sure to:

- State the purpose of your communication
- Set dates and times for meetings and follow-up
- Keep a record of the time and date of the communication and who was involved.

The Ministry of Education has a document called, **Shared Solutions, A Guide to Preventing and Resolving Conflicts Regarding Programs and Services for Students With Special Education Needs (2007)** that is available on their website at: <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/general/elemsec/speced/shared.pdf>. This resource guide is intended to help parents, educators and students work together to prevent conflicts and arrive at developing shared solutions for student success.