

Family Members Working with Other Team Members

As a member of your child's team, you and the other members will have many opportunities to communicate. Sometimes this might be in writing using emails, text messages, or written reports. Other times, this will happen face-to-face during a home visit or during an IFSP/IEP annual review. When you communicate with another team member, you want to be sure your message is understood. You want to express what you mean as clearly as possible. This helps team members understand one another and move forward together. This practice guide includes suggestions and ideas for effective face-to-face verbal communication.

[Watch a video of this guide](#)

Developing and Using Quality Communication Skills

- When sitting down to talk to any of your child's team members, it often helps to find a place that is comfortable for all of you. At home this might be at the kitchen table. In a classroom it might be comfortable to sit in adult-size chairs around or on the same side of a table or desk. Feeling relaxed will encourage the give and take of a conversation.
- Allow enough time for each of you to talk and really listen to one another. It is best not to just "grab" a person on their way in or out of the classroom. Ask to schedule a time to talk that is convenient for you both.
- When possible, take the time to think about what you want to say before talking with another team member. You don't have to rehearse what you want to say but think about using words that are clear and will be understood by other team members. Even if you are feeling uncomfortable, take a deep breath and focus on the points you want to make, as objectively as possible.
- It helps to start a conversation by explaining the purpose of what you want to talk about. It will also help if you are clear about what you hope will happen as a result of the discussion. This sets the stage for everyone to be on the same page about what you want the conversation to accomplish.
- Conversations and discussions are about taking turns between listening and talking. One person talks while the other listens. Asking questions or making a statement to clarify what the listener thinks the speaker is saying helps to make sure you are headed in the same direction. Summarizing any actions that will be taken ensures good follow-through.



A Quick Peek

Sondra found a note in Lenny's backpack that his preschool teacher wanted to meet with her about Lenny's hitting other children. Remembering some of the ideas she learned in a parent-teacher workshop about communication, Sondra drove to the meeting focusing on Lenny rather than who might be at fault. As she arrived, Mr. Smith greeted her warmly and thanked her for coming. He gestured to two chairs away from his desk and suggested they sit there.

Sondra noticed he turned off his cell phone and left it on his desk. Mr. Smith began the conversation by telling her how much he enjoyed Lenny's humor and energy and then shared some of the day's work that Lenny had completed. She looked at Lenny's work and was glad the conversation had begun pleasantly. Then in a voice she hoped sounded polite, she said she wanted to know what had been happening in the class prior to the "hitting" instances. She said it was unusual for Lenny to hit and she wanted to figure out what might have caused him to behave that way. Mr. Smith said he agreed with her and he shared his observations of events leading up to the behavior. Sondra focused on listening to him, and he listened to her views and ideas. Together they shared information about both home and the classroom and came up with several ideas that they each could use.

You'll know the practice is working when...

- Both you and the other team members feel "heard" and understood
- Conversations are calm and focused on solutions
- Both you and the other team member know the next steps you will take

This practice guide is based upon the following *DEC Recommended Practices*: Teaming & Collaboration 1, 2, 3, 4, 5

The DEC Recommended Practices are available at <http://dec-sped.org/recommendedpractices>

Access this practice guide and other products at <http://ectacenter.org/decrp>

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