Effective Communication and Active Listening

Agenda

You will learn:

I.  Why effective communication is important

II.  How to improve your communication skills to be successful at interacting with others

III.  Tips for good communication at a school meeting

IV.  Strategies for using written communication

V.  How to address disagreements between parents, and agencies or service providers
Components of Communication

A. Verbal Messages ~ The words we choose

B. Paraverbal Messages ~ How we say the words

C. Nonverbal Messages ~ Our body language
Why is Effective Communication Important?

- The way you talk to others has a direct relationship to how they interact with you.

- It can make a positive difference when you are advocating for your child and perhaps what services your child will receive.
Effective Communication

Involves...

✓ Active Listening
✓ Direct Expression
✓ Body Language and Non-Verbal communication
✓ Managing Emotions
✓ Positive Dialogue
Active Listening

- **Nonverbal**
  - Full physical attention to the speaker (eye contact, head nodding)
  - Awareness of the speaker's nonverbal messages

- **Verbal**
  - Paying attention to the words and feelings that are being expressed
  - Using reflective listening tools such as paraphrasing, reflecting, summarizing, and questioning to increase your understanding
Direct Expression

- Speak clearly when expressing what you think, feel, or want for your child in a clear and non-defensive way.

- Use “I” statements to express what you think or feel without inadvertently placing blame on others.

- For example:

  Instead of: “You’re not listening to me.

  You say: “I don’t feel like I’m being heard.”
Direct Expression

- When requesting a specific service for your child, describe **WHY** or **HOW** that particular service will help.

- Don’t criticize
  - With each criticism defensiveness ↑ (increases) and listening ↓ (decreases).

- Give positive feedback and as often as possible.

- Turn negatives into positives!
Body Language

- Do not underestimate the power of non-verbal communication!
  - It is the primary way we communicate our emotions. Be aware of your body language and what it might communicate to others

A. Facial Expression (e.g., eye rolling)
B. Postures and Gestures (e.g., finger pointing)
C. Stance or movements of arms, hands and legs (e.g., crossed, uncrossed)
Effective Communication

93% of what people take from our communication is NON-VERBAL

Source: Think...Training and Development (www.thinktd.co.uk)
Managing Emotions

- When advocating for appropriate services for your child, you are likely to experience feelings of frustration that can be expressed as anger.

- Remember, if you behave with anger, others will likely only remember that you were angry, not that you had good points or valid requests to improve your child’s education.
Developing Positive Dialogue

- Dialogue is a discussion or conversation, thoughtful exchange about a particular subject matter between two or more people.

- Skills to promote positive dialogue include:
  - Allowing others to finish their thoughts.
  - Respecting others’ thoughts, feelings, views and realities, even when they differ from your own.
  - Listen deeply without needing to argue or resist.
Effective Communication

Tips for Good Communication at a School Meeting

- Focus on your goal
- Show respect and expect it from others
- Manage your emotions
- Ask questions
- Rephrase for clarification
- Say “Thanks”
Effective Communication

Resolving Disagreements

- Disagree without being disagreeable
- Apologize if needed
- Separate the person from the problem
- Realize NO ONE PERSON has all the answers
- Make sure your facts are accurate
- Choose your battles!
- Problem solve together to find solutions
- Focus on the needs of the CHILD
Written Communication

- Always – PUT IT IN WRITING!

“If it’s not in writing, it doesn’t exist”
Written Communication

Letters or emails should:

- Be sent to person who can make a change
- Be dated and signed
- Focus on one or two issues
- Be no longer than one page
- Set a deadline if you’re requesting a reply
- Give your current contact information

✓ VERY IMPORTANT to keep a copy for your records
Written Communication

Written Communication can be used when:

- Making a request (educational records, meeting, etc)
- Asking for clarification from school officials
- Asking for a decision
- Saying thank you
- Documenting a verbal discussion
- Documenting meeting minutes
In Summary

Effective Communication....

- Is a shared and even exchange of dialogue
- Involves active listening
- Is verbal and non-verbal
- Promotes feedback
- Should be clear and concise
- Is IMPORTANT when advocating for your child’s education!
“When you doubt your power, you give power to your doubt”

~Honore De Balzac
For More Information

Call or Visit AJE!

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