



Advocates for Justice and Education, Inc.

The Parent Training and Information Center for the District of Columbia

What to Say When.....

AJE's Communication Techniques and Strategies
to promote Understanding, Transparency and Accountability at IEP/504 meetings

If school staff presents a new idea that you may be interested in,
You may want to ask - *"What will it take to make that happen?"*

If a school IEP team member expresses something that you think may be an opinion,
You may want to ask, *"Is that an opinion or do you have data I can see to support it?"*

If a school IEP team member expresses a conclusion (like "Tommy needs a More Restrictive Setting to make progress" or "Suzy is making great progress") and you don't understand the reason for that conclusion,

You may want to ask, *"Do you have data I can see to support that?"* or
"How do you know that? What evidence are you looking at?"

If you are uncertain about something in your child's school day,
You may want to ask, *"What does this look like in Jamal's day?"* or
"How will I know this is happening or working?" or
Please describe an average day (or A day – if the school alternates schedules) for Jamal.

You may also want to request a written copy of your child's weekly schedule, including: when academic courses are taught, when/if your child is pulled out for specialized instruction and related services, lunch, recess, specials/electives, morning meeting, etc....

If a school IEP team member says, "Your child refuses to __,"
You may want to ask, *"Is that something he can't or doesn't know how to do rather than refuses to do?"* or *"What barriers are there preventing him from doing that?"* or
"What skills does he need to be able to do that?"

If a school staff member says, "We don't have the money/capacity to do that," or "That isn't our model."

You can say *"I understand that the school district has financial concerns/capacity limitations/a model. However, we are here to talk about what my child needs for a free, appropriate public education."* or you might say, *"Please put that in writing for me and include that I believe my child requires this service."*

If the school says "We have a policy against that" or "We are not allowed to do that."
You can say *"I would like a copy of the policy, rule or law that applies to this situation"* or you might say, *"Please put that in writing for me."*

If you are trying something new,

You may want to ask, *“How will we know that it is working?”* and *“How will data on success be collected?”* and *“When/how often will I receive a copy of this data?”*

If you want input from all team members about a decision or question,

You may want to ask each team member, *“What is your professional opinion?”*

If a school staff member says, “We don’t know (the answer to a particular question, concern, problem, or issue)” without offering a way to find the answer,

You may want to ask, *“Who can we invite to the meeting to help find the answer?”* and/or *“When can you email me this answer?”*

Other Communication Strategies Parents and Caregivers can use

Memorializing any conversations you have with the school in writing, usually this will look like a follow up email confirming your understanding of the conversation is correct.

If an important agreement, decision, or promise is made, ask to have it put into writing. You can often ask for it in a Prior Written Notice (“PWN”) or make sure it is in the meeting notes, or present levels of performance.

Ask a question once and then listen for the answer. Repeat the answer back to confirm your understanding. For example, if you asked about increasing speech services, you might say something like this *“I hear your saying that you think Alayah should have more time in speech, because she is struggling to meet her goals. Is that correct?”*

Confirm you understand what is being said by summarizing what others say and reflecting it back. For example, you might say something like this *“I hear your saying that Shannon will not graduate unless he goes to credit recovery and passes all his class this year, am I understanding you correctly?”*

Use “I statements” whenever possible....and avoid telling others what they think/feel, instead talk about what you specifically see/hear/feel.

Make sure you are listening, and not just preparing to respond.

Keep the main thing the main thing. Too many details may only distract from your priorities.

When action is required, always ask who will be responsible for seeing that it is done and set a date for completion.

Thank the members of the IEP team or specific teachers whenever possible and appropriate.

Need Additional Help?

If you have questions or would like to request our assistance, call us at (202) 678-8060, email us at information@aje-dc.org or visit us at www.aje-dc.org.