

# New Assessment: Early Childhood Resources

## Online Documents

Tuesday, June, 8, 2004

### When Parents and Professionals Communicate: Tips for Professionals

#### WHEN PARENTS AND PROFESSIONALS COMMUNICATE...

##### Tips For Professionals

1. Make sure that the meeting is being held at a time and in a place that is convenient for parents. That might mean after school, at night, in the family home. In arranging the meeting with parents, ask, "Where would you like to meet? When would it be best to meet?" A note that says, "There will be a meeting a 9:00am on January 23. Please be present," does not send a message of teamwork or cooperation. Be flexible. Think about the setting—a principal's office is intimidating.
2. Remember that you and the parents are part of a team. The atmosphere that you set is crucial and initial arrangements and remarks set a tone that will affect all future interactions. You have specific knowledge and expertise, but so do the parents. This meeting is a time to share you individual perspectives and insights on behalf of a child.
3. Let the parent speak. Give them time to talk about their child, to tell you what he does on Saturday mornings or with his grandfather. Let them explain how they are feeling about his progress and what they think a next step should include.
4. Be sensitive to family dynamics and traditions. If the family is Spanish-speaking and is most comfortable conversing in Spanish, make sure that the primary spokesperson for your team speaks Spanish (Keres or Navajo). Important documents and instructions should be written in the family's language or should be translated appropriately.
5. Make sure that enough time has been set aside for the message. If this is a first meeting, when a great deal of information will be shared, set-aside a half-hour or more. If you just need "a moment" to speak with a parent, make sure that she also has "a moment" to spare, and that a few minutes is all that it will take to absorb and respond to your concern.
6. Speak in ordinary English. Educators and health professionals tend to talk in a jargon that only their colleagues understand. Avoid acronyms (IEP, LE, and PT).
7. Have you made an assumption or reached a decision about the child already? If you have tell the parents immediately! Is the purpose of the meeting to bring the parents the same conclusion? Or is it to discuss the child and together reach a decision? Do not pressure the parents to make an immediate decision unless it is absolutely clear that everyone agrees of a course of action. Be prepared to arrange for a later meeting or discussion.
8. Talk about the child in positive terms. Everyone knows what she cannot do. She cannot walk or button her coat. But she can light up the room with her smile or clean the art table. If you cannot think of a positive thing to say about the child, you should not be working with her

9. Understand the child's like experiences. A child cannot speak will have a different way of dealing with things than a child who talks. A Child who can move only with an electric chair will have experienced social situations in a different way. Try to see things from the child's perspective.
10. Be cautious about making predictions. Someone, who says, "She will never read," must be absolutely certain of that knowledge or all future credibility will be lost. On the other hand, don't avoid a certainty—chances are the parents long ago reached the same conclusion.
11. Do not overwhelm the family with information and paperwork. When eyes start to glaze over or questions cease, stop the meeting and plan another one.
12. Thank the parents for their help and their commitment to their child

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