

Effective and Positive Communication

Messages for Students, Parents, and School Staff

High-quality educational services for youth and adults with disabilities depend upon collaborative planning among team members who view themselves as equal partners. This can be achieved through continuous, effective communication between all parties whenever new information, or situations arise. The following are keys to effective and positive communication.

Practice Consistent Knowledge Sharing.

- A student's self-advocacy and self-determination skills should be practiced and discussed early and often.
- Frequently ask students about their personal goals and dreams for employment, education and training, and independent living.
- All team members, including students, should have access to information in multiple formats, especially those regarding legal rights.

Strive to Improve Communication.

- Practice positive communication.
- Communicate early and often in the manner preferred by both parties.
- Open the door to two-way conversation. Be an active listener.
- Paraphrase what you heard back to the speaker, to ensure mutual understanding.
- Continue to listen when the urge is to debate.
- Encourage and ask clarifying questions.
- Use problem-solving strategies.
- Be open to feedback.
- Avoid jargon.
- Follow through.

Promote Active Involvement of All Team Members.

- By at least age 14, students should be prepared to lead their IEP/transition IEP (Individual Education Program) meetings to the maximum extent possible.
- Students should consistently communicate their skills, talents, interests, and support needs to team members.
- The expertise and experiences of parents/caregivers should be honored and respected as part of the IEP/transition IEP process.

Invite the Experts.

- IEP team members may include team members beyond school staff, parents, and the student, such as a waiver case manager, their regular caregiver, or employer.
- As early as age 14, include agencies, such as VR (Vocational Rehabilitation), or community partners.
- Include supports to promote independent living, postsecondary education, and competitive, integrated employment.

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