

Talking to Your Child's Teachers

Communicating

- Stay calm, but be persistent (gentle harassment often gets results)
- Don't worry about being a "pain" to the teachers: your child has a right to education that meets his/her needs, and you are there to ensure that happens!
- Find out the teacher's preferred method of communication (e.g. telephone, email, hallway chat)
- Be quick and to the point (i.e., say what you/your child needs; don't tell your life story)
- If you get brushed off, schedule a meeting

Meetings

- Talk to your child before the meeting, so that his/her concerns are included (note: teens are sometimes included in meetings themselves/sometimes not depending on school policy)
- Be prepared: bring along professional reports about your child, most recent report card, etc.
- If bringing educational material specific to your child, keep it brief (i.e. a short book chapter on his/her condition rather than an entire book; a specific page on a website)
- Listen to the teacher's impressions of your child respectfully; indicate what aspects you agree with first and/or things you already like about what the teacher is doing, then discuss areas of disagreement or concern
- Ask questions about anything that is unclear, or seems like educational jargon (e.g., in Ontario, there is a big difference between an accommodation and a modification of the curriculum in relation to your child—find out what it is!; in high school, find out for which courses your child can earn credits towards his/her diploma—not all courses 'count'!)
- Tell what works well for your child at home, and ask what aspects would be feasible in the classroom, or could be implemented with minor adjustments
- Ask what you can do at home to support educational progress
- Where there are no clear solutions, problem-solve: be willing to entertain a number of possibilities to address the problem, but make sure the short-term and long-term effects are considered before deciding upon which option to choose
- Write down what you agree upon, and make sure you and the teacher each have a copy
- Before ending the meeting, set a follow-up time, or (in the case of ongoing issues) a schedule for communicating about what is happening

Following Up

- Even if he/she seems really sincere, assume that the teacher will NOT follow up: you will! (your child is your number one priority; to the teacher he/she is one of 30 or more)
- If you cannot get satisfactory results, go to the principal, and if the principal is not receptive go to the Board of Education—the squeaky wheel gets the grease!
- If school personnel seem to be "ganging up on you" (e.g., at IPRC meetings in Ontario), bring along one or more additional adults with experience dealing with educators who can help you advocate for your child (note: their professional discipline is less important than assertiveness)